

# The US-Pakistan Standoff: Trump's "Anti-Pakistan Strategy" is Directed against China and Russia

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*The US has warned Pakistan very often, but none of them were so stern. Then China popped up to hit back at Washington which was an eye-opening backlash. Only China and Russia's standing against Trump's Pakistan speech is enough to suggest the US was serious this time.*

Beijing showed support to Pakistan right after Trump's Afghanistan speech saying the country has made great sacrifices in the fight against terrorism. China's foreign minister who was already in Pakistan on a visit agreed with Pakistani officials to maintain high level military, security and economic cooperation.

China's "One Belt, One Road" project pumping US\$ 55 billion into neighbor is alone a magnet to Pakistan's Government. The US is opposed to China almost equally to Russia for disputed Islands in the South China Sea as well as its claims of standing by North Korea in the event of war with the US.

On the part of Russia, Moscow's special envoy for South Asia Zemir Kabulov asserted China's stance saying putting pressure on Pakistan may seriously destabilize regional security situation and result in costly consequences for Afghanistan. He reacted to the US's Strategy on Pakistan that without Pakistan's role, no solution lays for Afghan cul-de-sac. These remarks exploded extensively in Pakistan's media. He suggested that unnecessary pressure on Pakistan may lead to further disarray and mess in Afghanistan.

Trump's declaration of anti-Pakistani strategy caused a panic among Pakistani officials. In the wake of this speech, Pakistan's foreign minister announced it would go on official visits to China, Russia and Turkey a week later. The purpose of trip, the ministry revealed, was a regional assembly in relation to peace-making in Afghanistan. He, however, also suggested that Pakistan [in a show of force] is conveying to the US that it possesses enough regional support and is not submitting to others' enforced impulses.

The US-Pakistan's tensions became so heated that the US denied Turkey's request about training of its pilots by Pakistan. According to a Turkish daily, Turkey and Pakistan had already advanced to conclude the deal, but Washington stepped in and ceased the cooperation. According to F-16 fighter jet purchasing deal, Turkey is subject to the US's permission about training of its pilots by Pakistan.

Also immediately after Trump's remarks, a scheduled meeting between acting Assistant Secretary of State Alice Wells and Pakistani officials in Islamabad was canceled at the request of the Government of Pakistan. Experts noted that the postponement of meeting

with the US representative is interconnected with the meeting of Pakistani officials with Chinese envoy.

China and Russia who swept to Pakistan's defense over Trump's accusation of it being a sanctuary to terrorists have a glaring view and knowledge of where regional terrorism takes roots. Sometimes, self-interest is placed ahead of ground reality. Russia is well conscious of training and arming hub of Mujahideens who fought and expelled them from Afghanistan in 1989, yet it startled into the same country's help. China, on the other hand, realizes that the very country it defended against the US recently is a great cause of Afghan conflict which holds it from running lucrative mining and industrial projects in Afghanistan, though it meddled in Pakistan's favor in the latest Washington-Islamabad standoff.

Indeed, Russia and China, by their interventionist policy, attempt to wrest Pakistan from the embrace of Washington, which sounds less likely because both inveterate allies [US-Pak] have plentiful things in common.

The US is not really after what it spelled out from the language of Trump, "the uprooting of terrorism" as this will spoil its entire efforts attained thus far in Afghanistan. China is exploiting Pakistan's quandary over maintaining current ties with Washington or in other words, draw Pakistan's heart in the event of rifts with Washington to reshape regional trends and situation in its benefit.

Whenever Washington blast at Islamabad over any reason, Pakistan's fearless response saying "it shouldn't scapegoat Islamabad for its own failure in Afghanistan" denotes that all the game in play in Afghanistan is at your behest and that's not what I intend. There is a gulf in relation between Washington and Islamabad that other regional opportunists could use in sensitive times as such to blow up.

Pakistan's infamy brought about by endless insurgency emanating from its soil is bearing irritating consequences for it as BRICS nations released a statement on Monday condemning Pakistan-based terrorist groups like Lashkar-e Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed and the Haqqani network in strong words. It was an upswing for India's media war on terrorism directed at Pakistan.

A string of reactionary events to Trump's speech in Pakistan underscores the nation's wrath. Pakistanis in their thousands gathered in Western province of Baluchistan in protest of Trump's accusation of Pakistan of harboring of Jihadist elements. President Trump said in his speech that the US will change the approach on how to deal with Pakistan. The rally rejected the US's Pakistani policy.

In a separate episode, the Trump's tough strategy announcement culminated in postponement of USD 255 million in military aid to Pakistan. It evoked backlash from Pakistan's foreign affairs ministry that, in return, called for cut-off of ground and air relations with Washington. Minister of foreign affairs, Khwaja Asif urged the Pakistani government to defer visits with American officials and break off ground and air ties.

The US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson suggested following Trump's Afghan speech that Washington's relations with Islamabad will downgrade. He went further that its position as non-NATO ally would be hurt and the military aid would be cut in full or part. In a barrage of rebuking words from Washington, Tillerson noted that the US would resume drone strikes in Pakistan.

According to the White House officials, the US has reserved the title of “State Sponsor of Terrorism” for Pakistan for later years of Trump if it overstepped or counteracted.

The West knows the weaknesses of Pakistan. While delivering his speech, Trump endorsed India’s role in Afghanistan and asked its help, much because of infuriation of Pakistan than a true leaning on India.

Earlier this week, Pakistani foreign minister reached out to Kabul and declared renewal of peace talk drive with the West and extremists. Kabul is a paramount beacon of hope for Pakistan when it bids to mend soured ties with Washington. The initiative on the part of Pakistan seems pointed at unblocking of military aid package of USD 255 million.

Pakistan’s Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi said in an interview with Bloomberg that Washington’s new military solution will not pay off. He [and most of the country’s war experts] are of opinion that the military strategy in Afghanistan has not worked and will not yield any result and emphasizes that there has to be a political settlement.

Assassination of Osama Bin Laden near Islamabad and later Mullah Mansoor and so others within Pakistan’s jurisdiction ruined the country’s image in the eyes of world as a state fighting terrorism. These single-handed military interventions into Pakistan’s airspace and the resulted disgracing turned Pakistan hostile to the US policies.

Anti-American sentiments have grown strongly in Pakistan. According to a poll conducted by the Gallup Institute in 2015, from 135 countries, Pakistan is one of the top 10 states that have the worst attitude towards the US, that is to say 65 percent of Pakistanis do not approve of Washington’s actions.

But Islamabad is still wary about determining between the US and the opposite bloc [China, Russia], because friction with the US could cost it as dangerously as North Korea is facing with now.

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