



An Analysis of Washington Role in South Asian Balance of Power

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Abstract

United States' long-term strategic interest in South Asia has made it a dynamic area for its foreign policy priorities. The cold war, the 9/11 incident, and the rise of China as a global power are the main factors responsible for U.S. involvement in the region. Over decades, the U.S. has undergone ups and downs in its relations with Pakistan and India to accomplish its strategic objectives. Against this backdrop, the paper examines the U.S. changing interests in South Asia, its attempts to fulfill its strategic objectives, its ties with India and Pakistan, and its role in the balance of power between Pakistan and India. While doing so, a descriptive-analytical method has been used to study and present facts with the optimum level of objectivity. The study's findings concluded that U.S. changing policy towards South Asia and its quest for containing the rising Chinese influence in Euro-Asia is playing a significant role in the balance of power between Pakistan and India.

Key Words: U.S., Pakistan, India, Foreign Policy, Cold War, 9/11, Chinese Growing Domination, Balance of Power

Introduction

Initially, the United States ignored South Asia. During Cold War, it realized its strategic importance in playing a significant role in the containment of the Soviet Union. However, despite its strategic importance, the United States considered it minimal significance, only for checking and containing the communist expansion in the region (Gojree, 2015). However, following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the engagement of the United States in South Asia, particularly with India, increased. India has always been important for great powers because of its leading position in the region. The treatment of the United States with both Pakistan and India has always been biased, which can be judged from the importance of India in its New World Order.

Changing situations and circumstances are modifying United States interests and objectives in the South Asian region. Any change in United States' policy towards South Asia can affect the region's stability (Javaid, 2010).

The emergence of South Asia's vitality to the United States has increased threats to its stability, and both internal challenges and external pressures are fuelling the threats to its stability. Internally, the aggressive competition between Pakistan and India is causing instability, while externally, the United States influences and pressures are affecting regional stability, indirectly fuelling Indo-Pakistan rivalry (Gojree, 2015).

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In a more modern context, the significance of the region is expanding by recent changing dynamics of world power structure ([Mustafa, 2016](#)).

The U.S. Interest in South Asia

Initially, the United States did not consider South Asia as an area of strategic importance, as it was following a policy of isolationism. Its interests in the region were minimal, confined only to the commercial field. Trade was taking place between the American Tobacco Company and South Asia. As a whole, both share certain educational, cultural, and religious links. However, the end of World War two and the emergence of the Cold War compelled the U.S. to drop its policy of "isolationism". Thus, the United States joined world affairs to check and contain the expansion of Soviet communism in the world. Hence, the USSR's political, military, and ideological competition has caused its engagement in the South Asian region ([Basrur, 2009](#)).

The geostrategic location of South Asia in the proximity of significant powers, i.e., China and the Soviet Union, has shaped United States interests in the region. The South Asian links with the vital sea lanes in the Indian Ocean. It is connected with the two politically volatile and economically critical regions of Asia, i.e., the Gulf and southeast Asia, which also shaped United States engagement in the region. Thus, instead of being direct and economically motivated, the United States' interest in the region revolved around its strategic competition with the Soviet Union and its quest to lead the world ([Hussain, 2016](#)).

Although the United States regarded South Asia as an area of average strategic importance confined only to check the expansion of communism during the Cold War period, the changing orientation in the Post Cold War period has made South Asia more significant. Notably, the relationship pattern between South Asia and the United States has been changed by the 9/11 incident and growing Indo-US strategic cooperation. Moreover, the region's strategic significance is expanded more by concerns about the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the fight against terrorism, the present involvement of the U.S. in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Indo-Pak rivalry, and

the growing influence of China in the region. Thus, it can be assumed that in the modern context, not a single set of issues but rather a set of core issues, i.e., counter-terrorism Afghanistan factor, India factor, Pakistan factor, and the broader "rebalancing" towards Asia, have shaped United States policy interests in the region ([Gojree, 2015](#)).

U.S. Role in Indo-Pakistan Rivalry

The United States has played a crucial role in Indo-Pak rivalry from the very beginning. Its aim of containing the expansion of communism during the Cold War was its initial step in conducting relations with both India and Pakistan. Its relation with one player has shaped its relation with others and fuelled both players' rivalry ([Kronstadt, 2011](#)). In the post-Cold War era and particularly after September 11 incident, it adopted a balanced and neutral policy towards both Pakistan and India by making Pakistan its ally to fight a war against terrorism. It developed a strategic partnership with India to contain the increasing influence of China. However, its alignment with Pakistan was short-lived as it always followed a policy of retraction, restrictions, and pressures against Pakistan while its relation with India is long-lasting, as can be judged by its struggle for making India regional power ([Mustafa, 2016](#)).

U.S. Relations with Pakistan

The relationship between USA and Pakistan has always been full of ups and downs. During Cold War, Pakistan adopted a policy of alignment by being its essential ally in containing communism in the South Asian region. Despite the alignment with the United States, the United States has always ignored Pakistan in times of crisis and always remained more inclined towards its rival India. However, the United States has permanently moved back towards Pakistan by giving Pakistan the status of frontline state with a bundle of the aid package, which can be seen in its relation during the 1979 Soviet Union invasion of Afghanistan. During that period, there was an improvement in bilateral relations of both Pakistan and the United States. However, in 1990, a drift took place in their relations as aid

was suspended by Bush Sr. by emphasizing that nuclearisation has been the motivating factor behind this decision, but the fact was that it no more needed Pakistan after the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan ([Subtain Hussain, Farooq, & Khan, 2016](#)).

Pakistan also faced criticism by the United States regardless of its role as an ally of the United States during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The United States imposed sanctions on Pakistan following its nuclear explosions in 1998. However, again, improvements arose in their relations when September 11 incident took place. The United States viewed Pakistan as its frontline state in its global war on terrorism. It was Pakistan's geostrategic location that brought it to the center of world power politics ([Coolben, 2012](#)).

Pakistan again started receiving aid from the United States as it played a vital role in terror. The United States granted Pakistan the status of "Non-NATO Ally". In this context, it can be rightly said that "The history of Pakistan's relations with the U.S. has been a chequered one. American connection has been a fundamental factor in Pakistan's foreign policy for the greater part of its existence" ([Ijavaid, 2010](#)).

However, their relation again fell under stress by the growing ties of India and the United States, particularly the Indo-US civilian nuclear deal. Such changing circumstances have created distrust in their relation. In Pakistan's perspective, "the United States has always used Pakistan and get aligned with it whenever Pakistan suited it, however after attaining its objective, it always left Pakistan alone".

However, from the United States perspective, Pakistan is proliferating nuclear weapons and eroding the United States security goals in Afghanistan by supporting non-state militant groups in Afghanistan and Kashmir. The fact is that United States policymakers are confused regarding relation with Pakistan as Nicholas Burns stated: "there is minimal trust on both sides of the U.S.-Pakistan relationship, and that is a dangerous thing." However South Asia specialist Alan Kronstadt concludes: "U.S.-Pakistan relations

are fluid at present but running a negative course."

Such lack of trust is responsible for the barbaric image of the United States in Pakistani public opinion as a 2012 Pew Global Attitudes Survey found that only 12 percent of respondents opinions are "very favorable" or "somewhat favorable" regarding the United States, which is significantly less as compared to India where 41 percent of respondents opinion are "very favorable" or "somewhat favorable" regarding United States ([Evans, 2012](#)).

U.S. Relations with India

India has always been a favorite country of the United States despite being an ally of the Soviet Union (an indirect ally under the cart of non-alignment) during the Cold War. It is mainly because of its vast geographical size, developed economy, and market potential to counterweight rising China. In this regard, it can be pointed out: "The India factor has always played a decisive and crucial role in the formulation of U.S. policy in this region". The two largest economies both India and the United States, share ideology and objectives ([Ijavaid, 2010](#)).

India has always played a leading and significant role in South Asia and global politics, and the United States has always viewed India as more significant as a rising economic and political power. Though both were sharing an average relation during Cold War, since the 1990s, improvements took place in their relations, as seen in their growing commercial ties following Indian economic liberalization in the 1990s. Similarly, the George W. Bush administration made India a dominant factor of foreign policy in the eyes of Washington policymakers, resulting in the signature of the U.S.-India civil nuclear deal in 2005. Moreover, in November 2010, the United States supported the Indian quest for its permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), which further boosted their relation ([Evans, 2012](#)).

India intends to successfully convince the United States that Pakistan must be pressurized to stop cross border infiltration in Indian held Kashmir because the United States is taking substantial steps in intensifying its

relations with India. There is also an agreement between both over the global issue of terrorism. Convergence of views regarding China's rising power is yet another factor that enhances their relations as both want to contain the growing influence of China ([Javaid, 2010](#)).

Historical Analysis of U.S. Policy towards South Asia

As far as United States foreign policy towards South Asia is concerned; it is a combination of periods of engagement and disengagement, which means that it undergoes rapid changes depending upon United States interests so that it can be termed as a series of ups and downs. Initially, the United States was more interested in the Persian Gulf, the Caribbean, and East Asia because of its oil, geographic proximity, and massive trade. South Asia was not significant for the United States because of its resources and market potential deficiency. In the Cold War, the region was necessary only to the extent of its geographical location as it was able to pursue the geopolitical and strategic goals of the United States. Thus its geopolitical position became a vital determinant of United States foreign policy towards South Asia during the Cold War ([Lepoer, 1998](#)).

Because of this geostrategic significance of South Asia, the interference of the United States started in the region as the United States' objective was to prevent the area from falling into communist orbit. In this context, the United States viewed Pakistan as a frontline state in dealing with this problem as Pakistan had close affinity and proximity with the Middle Eastern Muslim countries and the oil-rich Persian Gulf. Moreover, the communist adversaries, i.e., the Soviet Union and China, also had a geographical closeness with Pakistan. Hence, India's position in the eyes of policymakers of the United States could not safeguard the region from communist expansion. Thereupon, India viewed the United States military alliance with Pakistan as antagonistic to India by perceiving it as a step of friendship towards Pakistan. Though India had started moving towards the Soviet Union, its military aid to Pakistan further isolated it from the United States ([Hussain M., 2017](#)).

However, in the late 1960s, a drift occurred in United States policy towards South Asia due to global changes and developments within the region. Thus the United States remained neutral towards Pakistan and India during Indo-Pak Wars in 1965 and 1971. This was the period of transformation of United States engagement to disengagement in the region. This gave rise to Greater challenges faced by the United States because the Soviet-India Partnership and the Treaty of 1971 took place, neutralizing the Sino-U.S. rapprochement ([Singh, 1970](#)).

There are three categories of arguments regarding factors that caused the United States to transform engagement to disengagement in the region, which are as follows:

- The argument on the political ground was that as primary responsibility for India's security was assumed by the Soviet Union, this may cause problems for Sino-Soviet relations as it would be helpful for India containing Chinese pressure. This whole situation was good for the United States as it indirectly served the United States interests.
- As far as the argument on the economic ground is concerned, the region of South Asia was minimal important from a commercial point of view as it was less developed in trade and investments, making Americans concerned not to waste time on such a less developed region.
- The argument on the military ground stated that instead of checking and containing the communist expansionism in the region, the countries used aid and arms against each other in their rivalry.

However, again this process of disengagement was transformed into engagement when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. Once again, due to its geostrategic position, Pakistan appeared as a frontline state in the eyes of United States policymakers, able to overthrow the communists out of Afghanistan. The United States again inclined towards Pakistan to withdraw the Soviets from Afghanistan. In this regard, it can rightly be assumed that instead of having a long-term and calculated policy, the United States policy

was inconsistent, confused, and reactive during the whole period of the Cold War ([Javaid, 2010](#)).

However, following the end of the Afghan war in 1989 and the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States started to modify its global, regional, and bilateral relations with the whole world, including South Asia. In fact, in the post-Cold War period, a shift occurred in the pattern of relations of all nations regarding international politics. Two factors compelled the United States to alter its policy towards South Asia: ([Gojree, 2015](#)).

- The collapse of the Soviet Union, as the Soviet Union was no longer a superpower and no longer a dominant factor to consider by United States policymakers.
- Rather than external communists, internal regional instability was a threat to United States' interests in the region.

Hence, in the post-Cold war, the vital goals of U.S. policy in the region were non-proliferation, economic liberalization, and promotion of democratic values, which altered the United States interest, for then, the detectable interests of United States in South Asia were:

- i. To develop a solid economic and strategic relationship with India.
- ii. To preserve the probity of Pakistan.
- iii. To restrict Islamic extremism.
- iv. To curb the terrorist activities in Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- v. To avert a potentially hazardous arms race in the Sub-Continent.
- vi. To foster peace talks between India and Pakistan regarding the Kashmir issue.

Thus, the post-Cold War period increased the significance of South Asia for the United States. Since 1994, the United States tended to readjust its policy towards South Asia and was more interested in enhancing India's economic and military relations as judged by the Clinton administration. He took various steps to improve relations with India. The reasons the Clinton administration opted for ameliorating relations with India are categorized as follows: ([Javaid, 2010](#)).

- i. India could no longer be used by Moscow as a counterweight to Washington as the Indian foreign policy and defense foundation has been debilitated following the collapse of the Soviet Union.
- ii. India being a supreme power in South Asia, became more critical for the United States in maintaining regional peace and stability while the worth of Pakistan diminished in the eyes of the United States following the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan.
- iii. The United States also had a closer affinity with India than Pakistan regarding shared values.
- iv. United States predicted India's vast future market for the U.S. goods, capital, and technology as India was experiencing economic reforms during the 1990s, and her economy was transformed from central planning to market economy.
- v. Finally, the China factor made India significant as Americans considered India a counterweight to China.

However, halting the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) was also a vital objective of the United States in South Asia, but when India conducted nuclear tests on May 11, 1998, followed by Pakistan's nuclear tests on May 28, military and economic sanctions have been imposed by the United States under Clinton administration on both Pakistan and India. However, such sanctions had no impact on the mindset of both Pakistan and India to modify their nuclear policy, and they continued their nuclear program. Thus, it can be asserted that the United States policy towards South Asia during the Clinton administration was ineffective as it could not check further Nuclear Tests by India and Pakistan in the future ([Gojree, 2015](#)).

However, a new chapter of engagement started between the U.S. and India after the 1999 Kargil conflict. Moreover, Bill Clinton's visit to India in 2000 further improved their relations, as a joint Vision statement was signed between both States. Further, the United States also deputed India as a significant emerging market. Overall, the

United States did not consider South Asian issues but always engaged in its strategic objectives. Thus, United States engagement and disengagement in the South Asian region continued ([Mustafa, 2016](#)).

Like his predecessor Bill Clinton, G.W. Bush, when elected as the U.S. president in late 2000, also took an "India First" policy. The reason behind this was the emergence of India as a rising regional power having the potential to emerge as a global market. However, China was also an essential factor in Bush's South Asia policy. Unlike the Clinton administration, who favored cordial relations with China, Bush viewed China as a strategic rival, as he perceived China to be the future challenger of the United States in the Indo-Pacific region. There are still border issues between China and India on which they have already fought a war in 1962, so India emerged as a frontline state for the United States to counterweight China. In order to strengthen strategic relations with India, the Bush administration lifted the sanctions which Clinton administration had imposed in 1998—since then, the period of the close affinity of the United States with India started ([Kuchins, 2014](#)).

9/11 Incident

The most tragic incident that occurred on September 11, 2001, severely modified the regional security dynamic in South Asia. When terrorists made a series of coordinated attacks in America ([Naqvi, 2010](#)).

9/11 incident is the vital factor that changed the United States global strategy in post 9/11 period. Soon after 9/11, the American administration prioritized the global war on terrorism, keeping aside all other objectives, including containment of China's rising power ([Kuchins, 2014](#)).

According to Teresita Schaffer, *"The attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon turned U.S. South Asia policy temporarily upside down, bringing Pakistan to center stage and putting parts of the US-India agenda on hold"* ([Naqvi, 2010](#)). Hence, the geostrategic significance of Pakistan gained momentum predominantly because of three factors:

- i. The close geographical affinity of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

- ii. The diplomatic relations of Pakistan with the Taliban government.
- iii. According to the United States perspective, Pakistan's proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and its links with terrorist activities ([Kuchins, 2014](#)).

Thus the United States and Pakistan entered into a period of cooperation by which the United States supported and strengthened Pakistan's law enforcement agencies, countered terrorist capabilities, coordinated intelligence agencies in order to make it capable to trace out al Qaeda members and other terrorists within Pakistan and also assisted military and law enforcement agencies across the borders of Afghanistan. Thus the Bush administration restored Pakistan's status of frontline state regarding its War against Terrorism in Afghanistan against Al-Qaeda. This was a challenge to Clinton's Policy towards Pakistan as he considered Pakistan a failing state by being inclined towards India by viewing her as the hegemonic state in the region ([Gojree, 2015](#)).

Though the United States' cooperation with Pakistan cooled down the United States' relations with India, it did not affect the long-term convergence of Indo-US policies regarding security cooperation, trade and commercial interests, and democratic values ([Kuchins, 2014](#)).

The United States removed sanctions from Pakistan that were imposed after its nuclear tests in 1998, following Pakistan's support for the United States in the war on terror ([Naqvi, 2010](#)).

U.S. Role as a Balancer Since 9/11

Following September 11, the United States National Security Strategy prioritized counter-terrorism. For this purpose, the United States extended its aid towards Pakistan, including USD 600 million emergent cash transfers. Thus, on October 7, 2001, the U.S. and its allies initiated military actions against Al-Qaeda. When Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf visited the United States in 2003, President George W. Bush granted USD 3 billion aid package to Pakistan. Moreover, in 2002, Pakistan was able to renovate its American-

made F-16 fighter aircraft, and in 2005, the U.S. recommenced new F-16 fighter aircraft's sale to it after a 16-year interval ([Gojree, 2015](#)).

Pakistan was also nominated a "Major Non-NATO Ally" by the United States in 2004. According to a Pentagon report, from 2002-2003, Pakistan's total foreign military sales were USD 5.4 billion. Moreover, according to a CRS Report for Congress, Pakistan received USD 3.6 billion from U.S. Congress since 2001, and Pakistan used these funds to purchase U.S. military pieces of equipment.

Though the United States offered aid to Pakistan, her relationship with India did not cool down. The U.S. military assistance to India has enlarged their security cooperation as, since early 2002, many meaningful joint exercises have been held by India and United States. It includes military, political and economic services. The most important deals are their Civilian Nuclear Deal of 2005, signed as a ten-year defense pact. This gave rise to two-way defense trade, cooperation in multilateral operations and missile defense, growing opportunities for technology transfers, and establishing a bilateral Defence Procurement and Production Group. Moreover, in 2006, a "Maritime Security Cooperation Agreement" was signed to ensure the cooperation of both countries to protect the free flow of commerce and counter broad series of threats to navy security.

On economic grounds, about 7.5 percent of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has been estimated by the Indian Ministry of Commerce and Industry as a grant by the United States to India since 2002. Moreover, the United States also invested billions of dollars in India via technical companies like Microsoft, Dell, Oracle, and IBM ([Jia, 2017](#)).

In a nutshell, the following improvements occurred in Indo-US relations during post 9/11 period:

- The inception of Next Step in Strategic Partnership (NSSP) in January 2004 collaborated in civilian nuclear activities, the civilian space program, and high technology trade.
- The signing of the New Framework by the U.S. and India on June 28, 2005, to

establish Indo-US Defence Relationship for the next ten years.

- The establishment of the India-US deal in July 2005 flourished Indian nuclear trade with the United States and the rest of the world.
- The elevation of Indo-US "Strategic Dialogue" to Indo-US "Strategic and Commercial Dialogue" in 2015 following five rounds of the dialogues, initiated in 2006.
- The selling of the USS Trenton (for USD44 million) by the United States to India in January 2007 became the second-largest ship in the Indian navy.
- The signing of the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) in 2012 ensures bilateral defense trade.
- The signing of Joint Principles for Defence Cooperation by the U.S. and India in 2013.
- Re-evaluation of New Framework by India and the United States on June 3, 2015, to encourage US-India Defence Relationship for the next ten years.
- The introduction of the Indo-US Defence Technology and Partnership Act to the U.S. Congress by the U.S. administration on March 22, 2016, will amend the U.S. Arms Export Control Act and give India privileged status like her other allies and closest partners.

In September 2014, during the Modi-Obama Summit in Washington, India tried to restrain the

U.S. role in India-Pakistan relations, including the Kashmir issue. Moreover, India reinforced its bond with the U.S. in the Indian Ocean region to contain the growing Chinese presence ([Kuchins, 2014](#)).

India has increased the defense budget since 2004-2015; thus, the dominance of the Indian military has been made possible by the U.S. defense cooperation. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) estimated it as the number 6 biggest defense spenders globally in 2015. However, it is increasing conventional asymmetry vis-à-vis Pakistan by threatening regional peace and strategic stability ([Mustafa, 2016](#)).

India emerged as a significant market for military equipment of the U.S., previously being market for Russia. It has been estimated by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) that around USD 2,771 million worth of military pieces of equipment has been received by India from the U.S from 2011 to 2015; however, Pakistan received only USD 893 million worth of military equipment from the U.S during the same time frame ([Mustafa, 2016](#)).

India emerged as an organized nuclear power following the Indo-US nuclear deal as it recognized the Indian nuclear position as dominant in the whole region. As the deal engaged India with the United States, it ended its isolation from international nuclear trade.

The United States supported India by excluding the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), which breached its non-proliferation laws. India also is in the full struggle to adopt all means, whether positive or negative, to strengthen its nuclear technology and modernize its nuclear weapons complex. Though India's accreditation regarding non-proliferation, nuclear safety, and security is pessimistic, the United States left no stone unturned in making India a recipient of its nuclear power reactors. Moreover, the United States also encouraged India's Look East Policy to rebalance Asia and the Pacific. However, the United States policy towards Pakistan has been strict and pressure-oriented. When Pakistan became aligned with the United States regarding U.S. War on Terror, the United States pressurized her to involve those strategic assets that they once used to contain the expansion of communism. For this, the United States described Pakistan as "a safe haven for terrorist and extremist groups" and the "world's most rapid proliferator of nuclear weapons technology".

In 2003 the United States initially tried to make Pakistan a cooperative partner by providing a USD3 billion aid package. Later in 2004, a non-NATO Ally status was granted to Pakistan by the United States. In this way, the United States exploits Pakistan by attacking the hiding militant in Pakistan through drone strikes, giving rise to massive damage in Pakistan. Thus in return, the United States established a strategic partnership with

Pakistan in 2006. However, during the same year, the relations of the United States and Pakistan cooled down following the killing of around 11 soldiers of the Frontier corps by the United States. Then, the United States, under the 2009 Kerry-Lugar Bill, again started to placate Pakistan by granting USD7.5 billion in non-military aid, thereby placating it again ([Kuchins, 2014](#)).

Again, a drift occurs in Pak-US relations, specifically by Raymond Davis issue, the 2011 Abbottabad operation for killing Osama Bin Laden, and the 2011 Salala incident when the U.S. Army airstrike has killed 24 Pakistani soldiers. Thus, agitation was raised in Pakistan regarding U.S. drone strikes, as can be judged from Pakistan's claim to the United States for vacating its Shamsi Air Base and halting NATO supplies. This gave rise to the U.S. perception of Pakistan as an ineffective and incapable partner and raised its demand to "do more". There is also a difference in the claims of both the United States and Pakistan regarding the U.S. aid to Pakistan as according to the United States, in the past 15 years, around USD 32 billion has been received by Pakistan in economic, security, and Coalition Support Fund (CSF) reimbursements. However, Pakistan claimed that such aid had been used in its war on terrorism. It is nothing compared to Pakistan's economic damage in the last 15 years through the war on terror, more than \$100 billion ([Javaid, 2010](#)).

Currently, growing Chinese influence in Pakistan, mainly the "China Pakistan Economic Corridor" (CPEC), has been a matter of concern for the United States. So it is critically reconsidering the future sale of military pieces of equipment to Pakistan. Moreover, it is also reducing its financial aid to Pakistan ([Kuchins, 2014](#)).

As far as the role of the United States in the balance of power is concerned, it has never assisted Pakistan in countering India as the weapons system which the United States provided were only meant to fight the war against terrorism, and such weapons were not capable of fighting a war with India. On defense, a ten-year defense cooperation agreement has not been signed by the United States, with Pakistan assigned with India ([Mustafa, 2016](#)).

The United States always discouraged and criticized Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme by imposing sanctions, cutting off aids at different intervals on the nuclear front. The United States never understands the motivating factor behind its nuclear weapons development as India has developed nuclear weapons programs, always compelled Pakistan to adopt the same steps. The 9/11 incident made the international community worried about nuclear weapons proliferation to other countries, and there were also threats to the security of Pakistan's nuclear assets. However, Pakistan left no stone unturned in addressing worries of the International Community, notably the United States, regarding security. In this way, Pakistan established Pakistan had made its National Command Authority (NCA) and exports control laws in collaboration with other multilateral export control governance. Hence, Pakistan has been regarded as the 'most improved' country among nine nuclear-armed states and a state better than India as being successful in protecting its nuclear pieces of equipment, according to the 2014 Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) report. Even President Obama praised the safety and security of Pakistan's nuclear pieces of equipment as an example for the world to follow ([Javaid, 2010](#)).

Vincet Stewart, the U.S. Defence Intelligence Agency Director in February 2015, stated that that *"Pakistan continues to take steps to improve the security of its nuclear arsenal."* Similarly, Richard Olsen, US Ambassador to Pakistan in December 2016, stated that *"Pakistan has made considerable progress in its non-proliferation efforts and expressed confidence in nuclear security"*. Though the international community has recognized Pakistan as a responsible state of its nuclear weapons, the United States still consider it a threat to global security as they perceive terrorists being emerged and hiding there ([Javaid, 2010](#)).

Thus, the broader geopolitical interests of the United States are shaping its engagement in the region. The United States has paid only verbal support in ensuring strategic stability in

the region since 9/11. The U.S. was always concerned about the possibility of two nuclear powers of the region (India and Pakistan). However, it never showed any interest in overcoming India and Pakistan's conflict. Its engagement with either but more prominently with India has always affected the dynamics of the regional strategic stability as it even breaches its laws to establish cooperation with India ([Mustafa, 2016](#)).

Therefore, it can be summarised that the U.S. policy towards South Asia (mainly Pakistan and India) has changed several times since the end of the Second World War. This is mainly due to the global power shifts as the U.S being the superpower, has always been concerned about its dominancy in the region ([Jia, 2017](#)).

Conclusion

To sum up, the U.S. role in South Asia has always been a dynamic process shaped by its relations with both India and Pakistan at different intervals. From the very beginning, it considered it an area of minimal significance, but during the cold war, it started to establish balanced ties with both Pakistan and India to contain Soviet Union expansionism and was successful in doing so. Adrift occurred in U.S. engagement in South Asia after the Cold War, but it did not divert its attention from the region. Following the 9/11 incident, U.S. engagement in the region gained momentum, and Pakistan became an ally in the war on terror. Although the U.S. has always been inclined more towards India, it also needs Pakistan for its strategic purposes. In the current scenario, the rise of China as a global power is contributing to U.S. engagement in the South Asian region. The primary factor shaping U.S. foreign policy towards South Asia is its strategic objectives, indirectly playing a significant role in the balance of power between Pakistan and India. The U.S. inclination towards India has caused a drift in Pak-US relations. The U.S. needs to establish a balanced approach towards both Pakistan and India to fulfill its strategic objectives.

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