

## **Korean War: A Turning Point in Pak-US Relations**

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### **Abstract**

*The episode of the partition of 1947 left Pakistani leadership confused in case of making alliances to protect its territorial integrity in the region as the Indians were trying their best to undo the partition. Meanwhile, the world was undergoing the Cold War (1945-89) between the communists and the capitalists. Here, Pakistan got a chance to be sided either with Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR), sponsor of communism or United States (US), the supporter of capitalism. Though, in early days, Pakistani leaders received invitations from the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin but met with a rejection. However, the chapter of Korean War (1950-53) cleared the intentions of Pakistan and attracted it to be aligned with capitalists. This research has examined that the alliance proved a turning point in Pak-US relations as it worked on long-term basis to achieve particular goals regarding mutual defense and security against the Soviets and China to minimize the spreading of communism and against India to maintain the balance of power in South Asian region. The war directly gave a boost to the economy of Pakistan and it received a bulk of military assistance from US to counter the Indian threat backed by the Soviets. In later years, the coalition of this war made Pakistan and US able to sign a couple of defense agreements such as Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) in 1954 and 1955 respectively. The purpose behind*

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*these pacts was to counter the Soviet influence in the region and to promote capitalism. The research is informative for the readers, researchers and students who are interested in exploring Pak-US relations especially with reference to Korean War.*

**Keywords:** Korean War, Pak-US Relations, Military Assistance, Security, Region.

### **Pre-War State of Pak-US Relations**

History tells that formation of Pak-US relations involved internal as well as the external factors. But, external ones were more responsible that had threatened Pakistan's sovereignty to a greater extent and the Indian factor was severer one in this context. Briefly, India and Pakistan had not enjoyed cordial relations in the past due to mutual distrust and differences in their perspectives on international and regional issues. The roots of these differences can be traced back to the pre-independence period when Muslim League (ML) and Indian National Congress (INC) had been working for the tenets of the Muslims and the Hindus separately. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the constitutionalist, who had been awarded with the title of the "Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity", viewed to maintain regional peace even after partition. As reflected by his statements, he was a promoter of peace and used to encourage the Pakistani leaders to enjoy good relations with neighbors. On one occasion, he stated that:

"Our object should be peace within and peace without. We want to live peacefully and want to maintain cordial relations with our immediate neighbours and with the world at large...We stand by the United Nations Charter and will gladly make our contribution to the peace and prosperity of the world" (Sattar, 2016, p. 14).

Unfortunately, Jinnah's approach could not be followed by the regional powers, India in particular as it had caused a colossal damage to the regional balance of power. The legacy of distrust and antagonism carried over to the post-independence that took the shape of hostility between India and Pakistan. Various

disputes in early years of independence reinforced this enmity at the time when Pakistan was struggling for building the administrative structure for the new state. India's seizure of Hyderabad and Junagarh and Indo-Pakistan war in Kashmir (1947-48) were perceived by the Pakistanis as a major threat to the territorial integrity of Pakistan. Later on, the subsequent developments like Indo-Pak wars of 1965 and 1971 intensified the syndrome (Hussain, 1988, p. 4).

Therefore, since independence, Pakistan's foreign policy had been seeking the objectives through which it could defend itself particularly against India. The development of distrust and acrimony between Pakistan and India created a series of threats for Pakistan. The major one was that it had feared Pakistan's territorial integrity. Indian policies reflected that it would reduce Pakistan to the status of a vessel state through using its size, resources, technological advancements and military superiority, if not got succeed in eliminating it from the comity of nations (Rizvi, 1993, p. 9). No doubt, India was larger, richer and better militarily equipped neighbor and rival of Pakistan at that time and Pakistan needed a huge budgetary expenditure for its defense against it. Jinnah had no real opportunity to put his stamp on foreign affairs and Liaquat Ali Khan believed in the policy of non-alignment as he kept the nation neutral during Cold War. Joseph Stalin invited Liaquat Ali in 1949 to visit Moscow but he declined. However, next year Liaquat called on US president Truman, visited Washington and portrayed Pakistan as a democracy pursuing an independent foreign policy (Wynbrandt, 2009, p. 171).

At this stage, America's noble cause to promote democracy was conditioned with its commitment to anti-communism. That is why, it was searching for strong anti-communist allies and Pakistan became one of the earlier. Like Pakistan and India, there were many countries from Third World where the governments came in the form of dictators, civil or military that was all very well with their sponsors. Broadly speaking, the other aspect of joining the US was to ensure Truman's assistance in resolving the Kashmir issue, without success. This potent factor increased

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the demand of funds from the side of Pakistan army that made it a competitive contender of US aid. In this way, Pakistan army became the major recipient of US financial assistance that strengthened Pakistani defense against India on one hand and made the army even stronger institution in Pakistan on the other (Abbas, 2005, p. 9).

One month after Khan's visit Korean War broke out that helped in shaping the Pak-US relations in true form. Pakistan endorsed (Rose and Matinuddin, 1989, p. 305) the UN sponsored and the American backed military action against North Korea which was a friend and military ally of Moscow. There could be seen a permanent end to Pak-Soviet relations in 1951 when Communist Party of Pakistan was implicated by Liaquat Ali Khan in the famous Rawalpindi conspiracy against his government. The allegedly Soviet-backed conspiracy involved the Chief of General Staff Major General Akbar Khan and some other senior military officers. Interestingly, the conspiracy was uncovered barely two months after the appointment of General Ayub Khan as Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) of the armed forces of Pakistan. Ayub was believed to be "pro-America" and "seemed reassured" by his elevation to this important and coveted post. After his appointment, the government imposed restrictions on the movement and activities of the Soviet-influenced political party in Pakistan (Rose and Matinuddin, 1989). The relationship, further, got strengthened during Korean War that created a number of geostrategic and security threats for the Americans and Pakistan got a chance to be involved in getting rid of these threats in 1950s that drew a constant line of Pak-US relations. Comparatively, Ayub favored the American policies which were, later, opposed by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Again, Zia his successors have been found tilted towards the US significantly during the days of war against the extremists initiated by G. W. Bush after 9/11 attacks.

### **The War and the Concerns of Pakistan**

Japan had annexed Korea in 1910. With the surrender of Japan in World War II, Korea was also divided into southern and northern parts. The division line between these parts at latitude

38° N was known as “38<sup>th</sup> parallel”. Soviet forces occupied north of this land and the US held the south. In 1949, both Soviet Union and U.S withdrew their forces for the revival of the unified government that could bring peace and prosperity for the state (Parker, 2010, p. 394). According to another source, in August, 1945 the Soviet Union and the US agreed to divide Korea into two separate occupation zones at the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. They had a plan to reunify Korea under an independent government and decided to hold national elections to restore peace. Unfortunately, Soviet-US relations deteriorated soon and they could not manage the things accordingly. Resultantly, two separate governments emerged in Korea one in South backed by the Capitalists and other in North originally supported by the Communists. The dividing line raised too many tensions that brought North Korea in a position to invade Southern part with an apparent approval of Joseph Stalin on June 25, 1950 (Duiker, 2005, p. 147).

Truman administration responded quickly and assured its air and naval support for South Korea. United Nations Security Council passed a resolution calling on all the member countries for resisting the invasion jointly. By September, the UN forces, under the command of US General Douglas MacArthur, reached northward across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel with a motive of unifying Korea under a single non-Communist government (Duiker, 2005). Meanwhile, Pakistan, a US ally, availed a chance to get itself economically prosperous. During Korean War, Pakistan experienced a sharp but short-term increase in the ratio of exports. Jute, cotton, leather and wool were the major components of these exports which were driven by the war. In 1950, total exports from Pakistan reached \$ 135 m that was 2.5 times more than the previous year. A huge amount of foreign exchange reached Pakistan that affected the national treasury in a positive manner. Enormous profits were earned through expanding the banking sector as financial savings. Traders in Pakistan did make the right use of their profits and started importing machinery, especially for promoting textile that motivated industrialization in early 1950s by changing interests among merchant capital (McCartney, 2011, p. 94).

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Accordingly, with the onset of Korean War, Truman administration began to show more interests in increasing the economic and military assistance for Pakistan. Actually, the Americans were expecting that Pakistan would fight in Korea accompanied by the UN forces. But, almost, with a confused state of mind, political elite of Pakistan declined (Riedel, 2011, p. 12). At the same time, the US was making alliances with many regional powers that could support them in containing communist spread. Such an atmosphere paved the way for different Pakistani communities to get themselves benefitted economically. Bureaucracy was a prominent community in this relation which kept itself closer to the US government to achieve the economic goals. This fact has been recognized by Ashok Kapur in a way that in the course of the boom of Korean War, the relations started building between US government and Pakistan's bureaucracy (civil and military) and business community (Kapur, 1991, p. 51).

Korean War and the strategies of the US to counter the communists gave a chance to its allies to enjoy good economic conditions that could lead to improve the standards of living of the public in the South Asian region specifically. They could go through better educational and health facilities and could overcome their social, economic and political problems quiet easily. Pakistan got significance in this regard who enjoyed the economic uplift as well as stuck to the hard work to address the US interests in the region. Loius D. Hayes notes that:

“One of the unintended consequences of American military activities over the years has been to bring substantial economic benefit to a number of countries including Pakistan. The Korean War especially proved to be a boon further strengthening the government's resolve to cozy up to the United States” (Hayes, 2014, p. 122).

Overall, the war not only caused uplift in Pakistan's economy but also paved the way for the political elite to resolve many issues which had emerged due to restrained economic activities. In return, the US had found a reliable ally in South Asian region

to counter the spreading of communism that could cover the major areas of South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Middle East. Anyhow, these initiatives of Pakistan, regarding the improvements in economic sphere, proved helpful for it in later years. The process of industrialization that occurred in Pakistan in the mid and the late 1950s was ably nursed by the bureaucrats, which assumed maybe the key job in setting up industrial units in the country. State owned institutions like Pakistan Industrial Development Corporation (PIDC-1952) and Pakistan Industrial Credit Investment Corporation (PICIC-1957) were fundamental in empowering the improvement of industry in key areas. In addition, a trade policy, that affected industry, was additionally effectively devised so that a particular type of industrialization process could take roots (Zaidi, 2005, p. 500).

### **Major Security Threats to US and its Tilt towards Pakistan**

Paul Kennedy argues that the hardening of Washington's position in 1950s was the result of two factors. First was the internal one in shape of criticism on the flexible containment policies of Truman and Acheson. The cluster of the critics included the Republicans, fast-rising "red baiter" Joe McCarthy as well as the newer diehards within the administration itself like Louis Johnson, John Foster Dulles, Dean Rusk and Paul Nitze. They all were compelling Truman to protect his domestic political flank through an assertive act. The second factor was severer in nature being an external one. The US was under a threat of losing Asia when North Korea attacked 38<sup>th</sup> parallel in June, 1950. The US interpreted the attack as an aggressive master plan orchestrated by Moscow. These two factors gave the upper hand to those forces which were demanding more active and belligerent policies to stop the rot. In addition to that, these circumstances threatened the US hegemony on Asia. Stewart Alosk, an influential journalist wrote, "we are losing Asia fast" (Kennedy, 1988, p. 382). Alosk, further, observed that:

"The head pin was China. It is down already. The two pins in the second row are Burma and Indochina. If they go, the three pins in the next row, Siam,

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Malaya and Indonesia are pretty sure to topple in their turn. And if all the rest of Asia goes, the resulting psychological, political and economic magnetism will almost certainly drag down the four pins of the fourth row, India, Pakistan, Japan and the Philippines” (Kennedy, 1988, p. 382).

As far as China is concerned, it intervened from the side of North Korea and drove the UN forces southward. The intervention was a clear signal that China wanted to promote communism throughout Asia. Mao Zedong convinced his colleagues that there was a rising wave of revolution in Asia and China’s entry into the Korean War could infuriate the Americans even to a level of immense aggression. He feared that US could attack Chinese borders. These fears were intensified by MacArthur who called for air strikes on Manchurian cities from where they could attack China quiet easily. Additionally, Truman dispatched US seventh fleet to the Taiwan Strait to prevent possible Chinese invasion of Taiwan (Duiker, 2005, p. 148). The US did not want to lose Taiwan at any cost as it could lead the Soviets to invade the states in Southeast Asia which could play an important role in staging a set for restraining communism through effective air and land operations. The Americans got successful in this regard after assuring the support of their well-grounded allies like Pakistan.

### **Pak-US Coalition to Counter the Threats**

The establishment of Pak-US coalition during Cold War was based on the ‘periodic convergence’ of strategic interests. United States had launched a global campaign to contain communism and Pakistan was searching for the protection of its sovereignty, threatened by India, in the region. Pakistan’s strategic location attracted the Americans who could intensify their efforts to approach the target easily. Pakistan had a ‘near contiguous’ border with the Soviet Union and direct land connections with China that could facilitate the US bases to operate effectively. Proximity of its western wing to Persian Gulf could prove a substantial defender of the oil resources in the Middle East and Indian Ocean. Eastern wing could work like a link between



Southeast Asia and the Middle East. With these strategic interests, the Americans were also eyeing on the British-trained Pakistani soldiers who could, perhaps, secure the region if properly equipped (Farooq, 2016, p. 8).

The American defense analysts began to recognize the geostrategic location of Pakistan as early as March, 1949, when US Joint Chiefs of Staff preferred Karachi-Lahore area for launching air operations against the Soviets and for building a defense for the protection of oil reserves in the Middle East. Some argued that Pakistan, the largest Muslim state with the best army in the world, would be the suitable option. Therefore, US should not be thinking to address the Indian interests in the region without taking into account Pakistan's legitimate interests (Sattar, 2016, p. 46). The post-Korean War era is marked with the US intentions to crystallize into the search for a new policy. They wanted to take the lead in this connection even before the Presidential elections. But, it could not be possible on an urgent basis and this major initiative fell to the President Dwight D. Eisenhower who took the office in 1953 accompanied by his secretary of state John Foster Dulles (Sattar, 2016, p. 48).

Now, the US had found two right and suitable men to compete the Soviets in South Asia. First, Eisenhower believed in having an armed relationship with Pakistan. He thought that even 'an alliance' would be beneficial for the US to cope with the Soviet threat. Therefore, he moved forward with arms aid and encouraged his administration to build a relationship between Pakistan and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) that would endure for a long time (Riedel, 2011, p. 12). Second, John Foster Dulles visited Pakistan and it was the first ever visit by any Secretary of State for America to South Asia. Dulles had a connection with South Asia as his grandfather John Welsh Dulles has been a Presbyterian Missionary in British India. Welsh had written a book titled *The Life in India* in which he had praised the British for its colonial rule. But, it was Foster Dulles's fierce anti-communism that drew a cold reception on a visit in May, 1953. New Delhi opposed the visit and policies of Dulles for setting up regional alliances in South Asia and the

Middle East. On the contrary, Pakistan welcomed Dulles and appreciated his policies with a motive of strengthening its hand against India after receiving military aid from the US (Riedel, 2011).

When United States entered into security arrangements for the containment of communism during the first phase of Cold War, it also provided the financial aid and military assistance, particularly, to the Western Europe, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and many other states in Asia who had become part of the strategy. On the contrary, the Soviets consolidated their hold on the Eastern Europe and cultivated links with the states in Asia and Africa to counter-balance US policies (Rizvi, 1993, p. 2). The occurrence of Korean War, further, directed the Americans to form the alliances with different regional powers, particularly in South Asia and Southeast Asia to deter communism. The importance of Pakistan could not be denied in this respect as noted by Aqil Shah:

“US concerns about maintaining Asian security in the aftermath of the Korean War greatly enhanced the alliance value of geographically important states like Pakistan for America’s containment policy” (Shah, 2014, p. 70).

Akin to that, given Pakistan’s proximity to the Soviet Union and the Persian Gulf, military leadership in US considered Pakistan as an important supplier of the strategic basis during the days of Korean War. Later, it could be supportive for staging intelligence operations against USSR. For the moment, non-aligned India was unavailable and US co-opted Pakistan into the Cold War containment alliances in the Middle East and Southeast Asia (Shah, 2014). Undoubtedly, Truman was more cautious in his approach to deal with the soaring influence of the communism. However, for Eisenhower, the Soviet threat was more prevalent and looming on the horizon. Therefore, he paid a special focus towards the South Asian and Southeast Asian states, especially after the Korean War that brought the Cold War to South Asia. Eisenhower started forming alliances with various states across the globe. The formation of North Atlantic Treaty

Organization (NATO) in 1949 under Truman administration had already rang alarm bells in Eastern Europe to prevent possible Soviet threat (Ali, 2019, p. 31).

Eisenhower tried to capitalize it while making the sensible use of the mentioned states. Like many other states, he took the Pakistani leadership into confidence and signed the Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement (MDA) in May 1954. In the same year, Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was formed, being Pakistan its significant member to foil the communism threat in the region. Pakistan played a critical role and justified SEATO membership in return of substantial military assistance under Mutual Defense Assistance Act (MDA) of 1949 and Mutual Security Act (MSA) of 1951. Pakistan also raised the Kashmir issue regardless of the fear that its eastern wing was not going to fall victim to the Soviet expansionist design (Farooq, 2016, p. 11). In 1955, the US sponsored, Bagdad Pact (named as CENTO in 1958) was signed comprising Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan and Britain. At that time, Pakistan was the only state in South Asia which was member of both the defense pacts i. e. SEATO and CENTO (Ali, 2019, p. 32). After the deep observation of the performance of Pakistan under these defense pacts Ayub Khan (r. 1958-69) emitted that Pakistan had emerged as “America’s most allied ally in Asia”. The Americans viewed the pacts as “coordinated forces” as they had connected NATO in the West and SEATO in the East for completing the strategic perimeter (Farooq, 2016, p. 11).

With a mutual consent of Pakistan’s Prime Minister Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy and Commander-in-Chief General Muhammad Ayub Khan, a secret US base was established in 1957 in North West Frontier Province (NWFP, now-a-days KPK) while granting the US with extra-territorial rights. The base was used to conduct intelligence operations to curb the Soviet and Chinese policies of promoting communism in the region. Meanwhile, the Peshawar airport was used for U2 flight operations for aerial spying. The agreement to establish the base was termed as “Communications Centre” and was formalized later in 1959. The base not only increased the amount of US

military and economic aid to Pakistan but also prevented the US arms sales to India (Farooq, 2016, p. 12). The situation of the alliance can be analyzed in such a way that Pakistan granted extra-territorial rights to one country to protect its sovereignty from the other. Means, all the stage was decorated by Pakistan due to its India-centric regional security goals. In a nutshell, Pakistan's geostrategic significance and its willingness to support the US cause made it a logical ally in the Cold War era. Though, this alliance got disturbed during Bhutto regime, yet it was restored to fight against the Soviets in 1980s. General Ziaul Haq endorsed the US policies to inflict a defeat on the Soviets in Afghanistan and same endorsement can be seen from General Pervez Musharraf to fight against the militants in the region.

### **Conclusion**

The Korean War led Pakistan and US to build and enjoy long-term cordial relations. It guided Pakistan to stick to the permanent ally i. e. US to nourish a defense against India as it had posed a major threat to the territorial integrity of Pakistan in early years of inception. It provided the Pakistani commodities with a chance to approach international markets that brought huge amount of foreign capital which proved a support to the national treasury. It helped Pakistani leadership out in forming the relations with US government and manipulating many socio-economic and political problems. Undoubtedly, military and economic aid from the US laid the foundation of strong institution of bureaucracy, especially the military bureaucracy, which, later on caused an irreversible loss to the democratic norms in Pakistan. But, at the same time, the economic prosperity could be fruitful for making the lifestyle of the public according to the latest trends of the world. There could be seen a promotion in the spheres of health, development, agriculture and education during the hot episode of Cold War with a special reference to the Korean War. As far as the US is concerned, Korean War gave it an allied ally in the form of Pakistan to complete the mission of restraining the communist influence in South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Middle East. Pakistan's defense pacts with America and its allies like SEATO and CENTO and its steps to award the Americans with the extra-

territorial rights to conduct intelligence and land operations against the Soviets are a proof of its sincerity to fulfil the requirements of a reliable alliance. In response, the US, too, remained tilted towards Pakistan for assuring the protection for its strategic interests in the region while ignoring the same interests of India that did not allow the regional balance of power to be disturbed. It is worth mentioning here that; overall, Pak-US relations during 1950s have been encouraging them to work in cooperation either in Cold War to negate the Communist influence or in the War on Terror to uproot the militancy from the South Asian region. Time and again, some points of divergence separated them but these points could be underestimated or compromised and they have tried to attain the mutual strategic, economic and security goals for making the region peaceful and prosperous. The critics are up to the mark with the arguments that Pakistan has lost the more than US as its ally, particularly in the War on Terror but international political scenario and ill-will of the Pakistani politicians indulged it while US was expecting the same performance from Pakistan which it had shown in Cold War.

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