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The American tax-payer at last no longer has to suffer the indignity of continued payments to Pakistan. (Photo: The Quint)

Mike Pompeo's Trip to Pakistan: Old Whines in a New Bottle

C CHRISTINE FAIR | 07.09.18

OPINION 7 min read



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made the pilgrimage to Pakistan with the stated goal of achieving a reset by securing Pakistan's assistance in bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table and a real commitment to retard the capabilities of the congeries of Islamist terrorist groups groomed by Pakistan.



As the former head of the CIA, Pompeo knows better than most how well US-Pakistani cooperation *can* work in the ideal state and how badly it usually works in practice.

The timing of this visit was ostensibly pegged to the emergence of Imran Khan as the new prime minister following a general election in which the army did everything possible to foist Khan into power while enervating his competition.

The Desultory Nature of US-Pakistan Relationship



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As Pompeo was about to depart for Islamabad, the Taliban confirmed that Jalaluddin Haqqani had died peacefully at the age of 71 in Afghanistan. Perhaps no event punctuates the desultory nature of the US-Pakistan relationship and the perduring American failures in Afghanistan than the simple fact that Haqqani died not in a drone strike or Pakistani military operation, but unremarkably after a long illness.

His death will change nothing on the battlefield: Sirajuddin (one of his twelve sons) had long been the steward of the brutal eponymous terror network and a deputy of the Afghan Taliban. Under Sirajuddin's guidance, the network executed brutal and audacious attacks in Afghanistan at the behest of Pakistan.

But the elder Haqqani's death is a poignant reminder that, despite receiving billions of American dollars, Pakistan has continued supporting the Taliban and allied



assassins in Afghanistan and, until recently, the United States continued to write checks no matter how outrageous Pakistan's crimes of commission and omission were.

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Enter Trump: Upending America's Long-Standing Policy



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president, has upended America's long-standing policy of fiscal cupidity.

More so than any other US president since 9/11, Trump presents challenges that Pakistan has yet to confront. His administration disregards diplomatic niceties.

In January 2017, Trump unleashed a tweet-storm in which he announced a cessation of US funding to Pakistan because of its incessant duplicity without warning anyone in the US government, including the American ambassador in Islamabad who was caught off guard by the move.



Equally discourteous, last week, the US government announced that another \$300 million in Coalition Support Fund (CSF) reimbursements would be declined in advance of Pompeo's announced trip. In fact, by the end of September, all fiscal year 2017 CSF monies will disappear and Pakistan will not have received a cent of it.

Pakistan's army – the primary beneficiary of this programme – is irked because it believes it is entitled to these funds for its own so-called “counter-terrorism operations”, and for allowing the United States to continue using its ground and air space to sustain US operations in Afghanistan and to replenish the Afghan National Security Forces.

No one saw this coming (including this author). In the past, US officials lugubriously complained that Pakistan is an epicenter of



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The Pakistanis are learning the hard way that Trump is indifferent to Pakistan's repines.

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So Will Pompeo Succeed?

Trump cares about one thing: not being seen as “losing Afghanistan”. Trump is vindictive, vituperative, obsessed with slights, real and imagined, and he will do what he feels is necessary to put pressure on Pakistan. Pakistan has never had to deal with an American president who does not care that Pakistan is too dangerous to fail or whatever hand-wringing excuse Pakistani apologists in Washington offer to defend the status quo.



But will Pompeo succeed where others have failed despite this sea shift in US willingness to keep footing the bill for Pakistan's endless undermining of US interests? Probably not for several reasons.



The first reason is simple: Imran Khan has likely learned the limit of his remit. He is the mayor of Islamabad. His jurisdiction excludes Rawalpindi, the seat of the powerful Pakistani Army which dictates the policies on issues the United States cares about. The army – not Imran Khan – will call the shots on



umbrella to harass India and Afghanistan while coercing the international community to indulge its crimes.

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The second reason is geography and the American logistical demands of remaining in Afghanistan.

While Trump has correctly taken Pakistan off the dole, he has made unwise moves elsewhere in the region. Trump, it seems, has yet to become acquainted with a map.



The United States cannot stay in Afghanistan without logistical routes to supply itself as well as the Afghan National Security Forces. For the former, Washington uses Pakistan airspace, and for the latter, Pakistani ground space.

Earlier Trump (likely illegally) withdrew from the multi-lateral Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran's nuclear



programme and re-imposed sanctions upon Iran and entities doing business with Iran.

This effort may well jeopardise the critical Iranian port in Chabahar that Afghanistan vitally needs to become strategically independent upon Pakistan. It is not yet clear, whether India will receive a dispensation from this sanction regime.

Trump's intemperate position on the JCPOA was largely driven by a desire to court the evangelical vote for whom Israel is a critical issue. (Evangelicals believe that Israel is necessary for the second-coming of Jesus and the rapture, after which all Jews will be cast into hell.)

Israel (and its back-door ally Saudi Arabia) was opposed to the deal with Iran. However, Chabahar was the only meaningful logistical alternative to Pakistani ports. The much-touted

need for multiple bilateral agreements and frustrated by Russia which seeks to undermine US interests in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Pakistan could simply deny use of either, leaving the United States with no option. Without an alternative, Trump may find himself check-mated by Pakistan. Would the United States be willing to declare war on Pakistan for doing so? With Trump, no one can quite be sure. And that's not a bad thing in this case.

Simply Browbeating Pakistan Will Not Produce Results

Third and most importantly, simply cutting Pakistan off from American largesse and browbeating Pakistan to "do more" will not produce results.

The United States will have to pursue other measures if it hopes to coerce Pakistan to abandon its murderous policies.



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Most immediately, the United States should withdraw its support for Pakistan at the International Monetary Fund. Pakistan has a long history of taking the IMF for a ride.

The fund would likely cut Pakistan off if it weren't for Washington. Washington does not have a majority of the votes; however, it has the highest share of the votes. Pakistan's allies on the fund (China, Saudi Arabia and possibly Russia) are not enough to counter the loss of the American support.



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IMF lubricates the friction that would ordinarily arise between a people exploited by the army (which has never won a war except democracy) and that same army that hogs all of the resources while consigning its people to live off of the generosity of others.

IMF funding, simply put, is bad for Pakistan because it allows successive leadership to abscond from fiscal responsibility.

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Second, while Pompeo has said that IMF payments should not service Pakistan's excessive debt to China, money is fungible. It is impossible to stop Pakistan from taking IMF monies with the right hand and handing it over to China with the left. If Pakistan can count on IMF bailouts, it has no incentive to not accept Chinese efforts to enrich itself at the expense of Pakistanis.

Over the longer term, the Trump administration will have to



consider real sanctions against Pakistan that will impose pain where it matters – on the army.

While the current measures and insistence that Pakistan “do more” are not likely to produce change, the American tax-payer at last no longer has to suffer the indignity of continued payments to Pakistan – the very country which bares the most responsibility for our loss of life in Afghanistan.

And for now, I can live with that.

(C Christine Fair is a Provost's Distinguished Associate Professor at Georgetown University in the Security Studies Program within the

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