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A View From Pakistan

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The relationship between Pakistan and the United States seems to be at a critical juncture as the two nations are at a decisive moment to defeat or be defeated at the hands of their the common enemy – terrorism/militancy.

The bilateral ties between Pakistan and the United States date back to the creation of Pakistan itself in 1947. But visible ups and downs in the relations have persisted over time due to clashes of interests or reasons other than that.

The present relationship between the two strategically important countries is significant in the sense that both are battling a common enemy – militants in the shape of the Taliban, al-Qaeda, or other kinds of terrorist outfits. Presently, both the countries have further strengthened relations in a variety of fields ranging from strategic to socio-economic sectors.

Despite all these joint ventures, there is still a high degree of misunderstanding and a lack of trust between the governments and between the people of the two states.

Washington thinks that Pakistan's leading spy agency, the ISI, is not sincere in rooting out the Taliban and wants to keep them as its strategic asset. In that context, the U.S. has many concerns about allegedly presence of the Quetta Shura and Haqqani networks, believed to be operating across the border against the interest of the United States. The United States also believes that Pakistan's military shows leniency towards certain militant groups in its broader strategic perspective.

On the other hand, the Pakistani people and the government are unhappy with the U.S. because of some of its foreign policies. One of Islamabad's serious concerns is the America's strategic

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ties with Pakistan's traditional rival, India, as well as the increasing involvement of India's chief spy agency, RAW, in Afghanistan, which Pakistan believes is working against its interests. At the same time, there is also a grave concern within Pakistan about the drone attacks in the tribal areas of Pakistan. The people cite a number of reasons for opposing the drone attacks, despite successful operations against some of the major targets. In addition to the violation of Pakistan's border sanctity, such attacks cause collateral damage and create sympathies with the militants due to increasing civilian casualties.

Even then, the majority of Pakistanis are against the militants, hold little sympathy for the militant leaders, and want to eliminate them from the region. Nevertheless, Pakistanis also strongly blame Washington for being a mastermind behind the creation of the Mujahideen (who later evolved into the Taliban), for using the Mujahideen to achieve American strategic objectives in Afghanistan against the USSR in the 1980s, and for leaving Afghanistan without establishing any strategy to handle this menace. Consequently, the militants flourished there and became a threat to the world in general and Pakistan in particular.

Moreover, Pakistan's powerful military, a key stakeholder in the decision making process, also has some reservations about some of the United States's policies. In particular, Pakistan's military feels uneasy over certain clauses in the Kerry-Lugar bill pertaining to the Pakistan military. The military not only wants maximum financial and strategic support from the U.S., but also to handle all the security related challenges within its own jurisdiction and without interference from the Pentagon. There is no doubt that Pakistan's army is capable and efficient enough to cope with any situation if it has the requisite resources. Crushing the militants in Swat and in the South Waziristan could be cited as successful examples of the Pakistan military's professionalism.

However, the dominant opinion of political and strategic experts in Pakistan is that extremism and terrorism is a common enemy of the two countries which they both want to eliminate. The major hurdle in achieving this joint goal is the trust deficit between the two countries.

The conclusion could be that allocation of huge resources in the war against terrorism cannot yield fruit without bridging the gulf in their trust.