
Analyzing Pakistan's Strategic Choice to Align with the US in the War on Terror

Sher Akbar¹, Gigyani²

¹ M.Phil Scholar, Pakistan Studies, Qurtuba University of Science and Technology Peshawar, Pakistan, sherakbar2008b@gmail.com

² Ph.D. Scholar, Qurtuba University of Science and Technology Peshawar, Pakistan, gigyani491@gmail.com

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Abstract

The decision by the Pakistani leadership to unconditionally support the US in its war on terror after the 9/11 attacks has had long-term consequences. Now that the US intervention in Afghanistan is rapidly moving towards its denouement, the implications have become painfully clear. At the time the decision was made, the prevalent environment dictated the government of Pakistan to act quickly in favour of the USA. To defy the US would have meant grave consequences. Pakistan lacked the means and resources to chart an independent path. In this atmosphere of overwhelming coercion and fear, the only rational choice was total and complete cooperation. The government of Pakistan chose to unconditionally side with the US. This paper argues that the decision-making process is short-circuited when a single person is calling the shots, and the long-term consequences can be less than satisfactory. A multi-layered decision-making process not only buys time for the decision makers, but it also makes for greater responsibility and reduces the negative fallout to a large extent. A holistic response requires greater participation from all stakeholders. It also needs courage and imagination on the part of all concerned parties. An extraordinary situation must be thought through in great detail before making a strategic commitment.

Keywords: Pakistan-US Relations, War on Terror, Strategic Alliances, Counterterrorism, Afghanistan Conflict, Military Cooperation, Geopolitical Strategy, Foreign Policy, Extremism, and International Security.

Introduction

Arguably, anyone in President Pervez Musharraf's place would have decided in favour of siding with the US in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. What has since become contentious is the „carte blanche“ he gave to the Americans.¹ In hindsight, a number of questions come to mind, such as: What choices were available to the Pakistani decision-maker(s)? Was unconditional cooperation the only rational choice? Was a standard procedure for decision-making followed? Were all the *pros* and *cons* carefully considered? Can the decision be ultimately classified as slick *realpolitik* or crass appeasement?

There is no one-size-fits-all strategy in strategic decision-making. Eisenhardt and Zbaracki suggest a number of decision-making models such as rationality and bounded rationality, politics and power, and the garbage can paradigm.² President John F. Kennedy used the Executive Committee (ExComm) model of collective decision-making during the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962.³ As the President and Chief of Army Staff (COAS), General Musharraf had the liberty to make unilateral decisions on matters of national security.⁴ As a Special Forces man, he was trained to decide quickly in adverse

circumstances. Some of his quick-fire choices were surely the product of gut feelings.⁵ His lucky escapades, dash and enterprise engendered in him the confidence to make snap decisions based on his personal judgment.

After the 9/11 attacks, Musharraf was faced with a major policy decision to either support the US or remain neutral. There was no other option. Since arch-rival India was straining to side with the US, Musharraf did not have the choice to dither. India could have certainly used the advantage to influence the US stand on Kashmir and magnify its nuclear capability.⁶ India had already offered the US strike forces three airbases in Jammu, Punjab, and Gujarat, as well as unspecified port facilities.⁷ With a great deal of alacrity and common sense, General Musharraf decided to side with the US. It is difficult to imagine what would have happened if Musharraf had chosen to do otherwise, but it would have certainly changed the course of history.

Anatomy of Strategic Decision-making

The first step in any kind of decision-making is to identify the problem. This is based on a thorough assessment of the situation and the prevailing environment, and an audit of the resources and time available to respond to it. In national decision-making, intelligence agencies are major input providers. Based on the available information, aides, advisors, colleagues and concerned experts provide objective and unbiased advice based on a realistic cost-benefit analysis. The principal decision-maker is then provided a set of possible options in order to make a strategic choice. An important decision is always backed up by a number of alternative strategies.⁸ General Musharraf claims that he made “a dispassionate military-style analysis” of the problem.⁹ He consulted his corps commanders, who represent the collegiate forum of decision-making within Pakistan Army. Some claim that General Musharraf used the corps commanders’ meeting simply to inform his fellow generals of his decision to side with the Americans.¹⁰ The Chief of General Staff in Musharraf’s time, Shahid Aziz, actually blames him for keeping the corps commanders in the dark about the volte-face on Afghanistan.¹¹ On the other hand, Lieutenant General Hamid Javaid, Musharraf’s Chief of Staff (COS), says that Musharraf did consult “his cabinet, National Security Council, GHQ, the chief justice, politicians, corps commanders, religious scholars, intellectuals and representatives of other sections of society.”¹² One can assume that after becoming the COS in September 2001, General Javaid was too new to his job to have made any meaningful intervention himself. It was General Musharraf’s good luck that there was no major opposition to his decision. Ordinary people heaved a collective sigh of relief for not supporting the anachronistic Taliban. The widespread feeling was that siding with the obdurate mullahs ruling Afghanistan would have invited the wrath of the Americans. However, with time, his decision to unconditionally grant concessions to the Americans without getting the necessary *quid pro quo* benefits would invite critical comments.¹³ In hindsight, the immense international pressure notwithstanding, General Musharraf had the means to reach out to a larger cross section of the society to make his decision to support the US plans to invade Afghanistan more meaningful and inclusive. He could have, for instance, resorted to the mechanism of a referendum or an opinion poll. A year later in 2002, he would actually legitimize his rule and give himself an automatic extension up until 2007 through a referendum. One of his predecessors, General Zia had also used the same means to continue his rule. In 1984, he made a clever political move. He did not ask his nation, whether they liked him or not. He instead asked them to endorse the process initiated by him, “to bring laws in conformity with the injunctions of Islam as laid down in the Holy Koran and Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) and for the preservation of the ideology of Pakistan.” He used the results of the ingeniously crafted referendum-question to extend his rule for 5 more years.¹⁴ Taking a leaf from Zia, Musharraf needn’t have asked his nation, if it agreed to his decision to support the Americans or not. Instead he could have asked their opinion regarding the seven demands that he had received from the Americans. He could have got a fair indication of what was acceptable and what was not at the national level. He could have then negotiated

with Americans the extent of support he was allowed to offer by his nation. Referendums can be tricky. In July this year, the Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras held a snap referendum and urged his countrymen to reject the bailout plan offered by the European Union (EU).¹⁵ The Greeks rejected the plan, but the EU refused to allow the Greeks to exit the Eurozone. Tsipras had to resign and call for early elections, for upholding the revised bail out deal. Tsipras for his heroics has become extremely popular and is likely to get re-elected.¹⁶ Unlike Tsipras, Musharraf had already made the choice of supporting the Americans. He was not defying the big power like Tsipras. He only needed to know the level and degree of support that his nation was willing to provide to a big power. This could have absolved him of the criticism of selling out cheap and ignoring national interests.

Civil-Military Relations

Musharraf was a surprise choice for the powerful position of COAS.¹⁷ Nawaz Sharif had appointed him the army chief by superseding two senior generals, thinking that his *muhajir* (immigrant) antecedents would make him more amenable. His independent streak, however, soon brought him into a collision course with the prime minister.¹⁸ Nawaz Sharif's warming up to the Indian prime minister during the Lahore summit of February 1999 marked the beginning of the civil- military split. The Summit Communiqué did not mention the core issue of Kashmir.¹⁹ The next dent in the relationship was the Kargil conflict. In May-July 1999, before the spring thaw, Pakistani forces had infiltrated across the Line of Control (LoC) and occupied an area of approximately 500 square miles.²⁰ To this day, it remains unclear whether or not the army chief took the prime minister fully on board before he launched the operations in Kargil. Once the Indians recovered from the initial shock of Kargil, they aggressively used their air space and artillery to dislodge the Pakistani infiltrators, who found themselves low on supplies and without air cover. Pakistani political leadership had no appetite for an extended war and as the ground situation changed for the worse, Nawaz Sharif rushed to Washington D.C. to seek US intervention.²¹ In a hastily called meeting held on the 4th of July holiday, President Clinton informed the Pakistani prime minister that his generals were planning a nuclear war without his knowledge.²² Under pressure, Nawaz Sharif agreed to unconditionally order the withdrawal of his forces and pledged to respect the „sanctity of the LoC.“²³ This decision proved to be unpopular, and as a result, the army felt betrayed.²⁴ The politicians and generals blamed each other for the debacle. General Musharraf's efforts to patch up the differences with Sharif brothers and their patriarch at their Raiwind palace brought only temporary respite.²⁵ On October 12, 1999, Nawaz Sharif in his capacity as prime minister dismissed General Musharraf from his position as COAS.²⁶ Musharraf, on his way back from an official tour of Sri Lanka, was denied permission to land in Karachi.²⁷ His loyal generals saved the day by taking control of the situation and reversing the dismissal orders.²⁸ After taking over, Musharraf vowed to set his country right.²⁹ As a modern and progressive man,³⁰ he would bring in „true democracy“. ³¹ His seven- point agenda for reform called for “devolution of power to grassroots level.”³² At this juncture in history, he was hailed as Pakistan's saviour, and was expected to steer his country back from the brink of economic disaster.³³ Musharraf remained in power for eight years and made a number of formative decisions. The one to side with the US in their war against the Taliban/al-Qaeda would remain part of his dubious legacy.

The US Threat Matrix

After the attacks on US embassies in East Africa in 1998, Osama bin Laden (OBL) and al-Qaeda became the focus of their attention. Retaliatory measures against al-Qaeda in Afghanistan ranged from missile strikes³⁴ to covert plans of snatching bin Laden from a UAE hunting party in 1998.³⁵ Warships deployed in the Persian Gulf on August 20, 1998 carried out the cruise missile attacks against al-Qaeda's training camps in Khost.³⁶ The missiles had to pass through Pakistani airspace but for want of secrecy, the Americans did not want to inform Pakistan in advance.³⁷ To preclude the possibility of Pakistanis

misjudging the missiles as an Indian attack and retaliating with nuclear weapons, then-vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Ralston, was sent to Pakistan to inform the top military commander minutes before the attack that the missiles flying through their territory were American and not Indian.³⁸ The casualties in Khost included 11 Pakistanis belonging to a militant organisation operating in Kashmir. This only incited minor protests in Pakistan.³⁹ On the contrary, it hardened Mullah Omar's resolve to not hand over bin Laden.⁴⁰ After the al-Qaeda leadership sought refuge in the Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, US officials began pressuring the Pakistani government to use their influence with the Taliban to convince them to hand over OBL.⁴¹ The assistant secretary of state for South Asian affairs at the time was Karl Inderfurth, who visited Islamabad and pressed the then-DG ISI Lieutenant General Mahmood to track down Abu Zubaydah, the chief perpetrator of the millennium plot. Mahmood denied any knowledge of Zubaydah's whereabouts.⁴² In his meeting with the new president, Inderfurth ratcheted up the pressure by warning him that Washington seriously monitored Pakistan's active support to al-Qaeda and Taliban. To placate the US officials, Lieutenant General Mahmood was sent to discuss matters with the Taliban leaders in Kandahar. Mahmood found out that the Taliban were not ready to comply on the issue of handing over Osama. However, the Americans thought that Mahmood hadn't tried hard enough.⁴³ During his one-day visit to Pakistan in 2000, Clinton asked Musharraf to "use Pakistan's influence with the Taliban to get bin Laden." Next day, Musharraf told the then-undersecretary of state for political affairs, Thomas Pickering, that his country had „little leverage“ with the Taliban.⁴⁴ The CIA was convinced that they could reach the Taliban through General Mahmood. Mahmood quite naturally avoided the Americans and wasn't too keen on visiting the US. He did not like being lectured about Pakistan's inability to get OBL and "hated being rebuffed when he tried to explain Pakistan's need for strategic depth."⁴⁵ The CIA looked for a chink in Mahmood's armour. They worked on his profile and discovered that as a student at the Staff College, he had written a research paper on the battle of Gettysburg. When he did agree to visit his CIA counterpart in Langley, a guided tour of the battlefield at Gettysburg was added as an incentive.⁴⁶ The visit took place in the ill-fated month of September 2001. The conducted tour to Gettysburg was a great success,⁴⁷ but wasn't really needed. Fate was about to intervene in the most sinister way, and Mahmood was about to become part of the quickest U-turn decisions in Pakistan's history.

9/11 and the Pressure on Pakistan

Mahmood met with Director CIA George Tenet on September 9, 2001, and left him with the distinct impression that he was a Taliban sympathiser.⁴⁸ At the precise moment of the attacks on September 11, Mahmood was having a breakfast meeting with Porter Goss (later Director CIA) on the Capitol Hill. The meeting was hastily adjourned and Mahmood rushed back to his hotel.⁴⁹ As he was being driven along the Constitution Avenue, he saw the plume of smoke rising from the Pentagon building across the Potomac.⁵⁰ He gravely turned to the Pakistani defence attaché, and said: "It is Pearl Harbour all over again."⁵¹ The next day, General Mahmood called upon Director Tenet again, only to find him in a „state of shock.“ Next, he was ushered into a meeting with the then-deputy secretary of state Richard Armitage and a few other State Department officials. Armitage was beside himself with rage. He was not prepared to listen to anything,⁵² and gave him no choice: "You are either 100 per cent with us or 100 per cent against us."⁵³ As the Pakistani delegation was leaving, a US official startled Mahmood by swearing that a discussion was going on regarding the possible use of nuclear weapons on a target probably in Afghanistan.⁵⁴ Mahmood reported sombrely to Musharraf that Armitage had threatened to bomb Pakistan "back into the Stone Age" if they sided with the terrorists.⁵⁵ Musharraf told him to assure the Americans that they would get what they wanted. At 3 pm, Armitage held a second meeting with Ambassador Maliha Lodhi and General Mahmood. He told them that the US wanted basic logistical support and a high degree of intelligence cooperation. Mahmood assured Armitage that Pakistan would cooperate.⁵⁶ On the eve of 9/11, the people of Pakistan found themselves in a state of bewilderment. The

public mood was muted and sombre. Pakistani press reported the attacks in the US with black banner headlines and splashed photographs of death and carnage in Manhattan.⁵⁷ *The News* reported: “Unknown terrorists demolished symbols of American economic and military power – the World Trade Centre and Pentagon ... in unprecedented airborne attacks involving four hijacked commercial aircrafts, killing hundreds or may be thousands of people.”⁵⁸ A sense of personal grief was evident from reports about the fate of hundreds of Pakistanis working in the WTC.⁵⁹ Commentaries in Pakistani newspapers hinted at serious repercussions for any country found remotely complicit with the attacks.⁶⁰ In his newspaper analysis dated September 12, experienced commentator Rahimullah Yusufzai wrote that because of their close relations with the Taliban, Islamabad risked more sanctions, unless it gave up on the Taliban and helped US get bin Laden. He feared that an attack to get bin Laden could fuel anti-US protests in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and provoke the Islamists.⁶¹

Pakistani Response

Musharraf was meeting with the local corps commander in Karachi when his attention was drawn to CNN’s live transmission of the Twin Towers’ bombing. He was sure then that the US would “react violently, like a wounded bear,” and “if the perpetrator turned out to be al-Qaeda, then the wounded bear would come charging straight towards us.” His country was the only one “maintaining diplomatic relations with the Taliban and their leader Mullah Omar.” He prepared to make “an irrevocable turn from the past.”⁶² As per foreign office advice, president Musharraf went live on TV to condemn the “vile act” and assure the Americans that his country stood by them.⁶³ The next morning, while chairing a meeting in Governor House Karachi, Musharraf was interrupted to take an urgent call from the then-US secretary of state Colin Powell, who simply wanted to know if: “You are with us or against us.” The ultimatum was clear.⁶⁴ The foreign office now braced itself for a formal list of demands from the US State Department.⁶⁵ A prompt letter of condolence was sent from the office of the Pakistani President to the US President, and was reproduced in the local papers on September 12. The letter “strongly condemned the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington” and called upon the world to unite in the fight against terrorism to root out “this modern day evil.”⁶⁶ The inputs from foreign office called for a clear and unambiguous partnership with the US. The policy of defiance was a non-starter.⁶⁷ Pakistan could be declared a “terrorist state” and its territory, including that of Azad Jammu Kashmir, could be attacked to eliminate “terrorist bases.” This would give India a “free hand” to target Pakistan’s nuclear sites. The very idea of the cost of “non-cooperation” appeared cost-prohibitive.⁶⁸ The official policy called for “cautious cooperation” in an UN-approved action against the Taliban. It was considered prudent to “join the global consensus,” and “not oppose US attacks against targets within Afghanistan.” The foreign office advised “a positive approach and to negotiate details later. Such a “Yes-but” approach would allow Pakistan tactical flexibility.”⁶⁹ If such an approach was indeed adopted, one wonders what details were worked out with the US. In anticipation of the official demands, a high-level conclave was held in the evening of September 12 at the army chief’s official residence.⁷⁰ The principal decision was not to defy the Americans.⁷¹ On September 13, Wendy Chamberlain presented her credentials to General Musharraf and gave him a list of seven demands viz:

1. Stop al-Qaeda operatives at its borders and end logistical support for bin Laden.
2. Give the United States blanket overflight and landing rights for all necessary military and intelligence operations.
3. Provide territorial access to the US and allied military intelligence and other personnel to conduct operations against al-Qaeda.
4. Provide the US with intelligence operation.
5. Continue to publicly condemn the terrorist acts.
6. Cut off all shipment of fuel to the Taliban and stop recruits from going to Afghanistan.
7. Break relations with the Taliban government, if the evidence implicated bin Laden and al-

Qaeda and the Taliban continued to harbour them.⁷²

All demands were accepted without any preconditions. General Musharraf informed the ambassador that his corps commanders were onboard.⁷³ Musharraf says he had reservations about the second and third demands, but bases were provided to the US forces for more than “logistic and aircraft recovery.” Pakistani officials privately admit that small groups of US Special Forces were admitted into “operational territory in Waziristan” for counter-insurgency operations, and were allowed the use of the military base in Tarbela. At one time, the estimated presence of the US soldiers in Pakistan was between “one to three regiments.”⁷⁴ According to the 9/11 Report, on September 13, then-US secretary of state Colin Powell informed the National Security Council (NSC) session that Pakistan had agreed to all seven demands, but Musharraf wanted substantial concessions for the “domestic price” he had to pay for his decisions.⁷⁵ On September 19, Musharraf addressed the nation and explained the rationale for siding with the US. The Americans had three targets: OBL and the al-Qaeda movement, the Taliban, and international terrorism. From Pakistan they wanted intelligence-information exchange, use of airspace, and logistic support. They already had the necessary international support, including that of Muslim states. He informed the nation that he had consulted his corps commanders, politicians and prominent Pakistanis, and that he would consult the tribal leaders the next day. He admitted that the opinion was divided, but the vast majority supported him. In his assessment, only “about 15 per cent” were “tending towards emotional reactions.”

He told his countrymen that India had already extended full cooperation to the US and wanted Pakistan to be declared a terrorist state. He then addressed the Indian leadership directly and told them to “layoff” as his forces were “fully prepared for a do-or-die mission.” He informed the domestic audience that his critical concerns were sovereignty, economy, strategic assets (nuclear and missiles), and the Kashmir cause. He feared that all four would be harmed if a wrong decision was made. He noted that the decision “must be according to Islam” and misplaced bravery could amount to stupidity. He appealed to his fellow countrymen to resort to “hikmat” (wisdom) and that “Pakistan comes first, everything else is secondary.” To those ulema (religious leaders) that were being emotional, he drew parallels from Islam’s early history in which the Holy Prophet (PBUH) had entered into a no-war pact with the Meccans to lessen the Jewish threat. He explained his concerns about Afghanistan and the Taliban, and his efforts to convince the world leaders to not impose sanctions. He was still trying to convince the Taliban to be “wise.” His government had also asked the US to provide evidence against bin Laden, but it was in the interest of Afghanistan to work with the international community instead of against them. He advised his people not to play into the hands of the enemy, which was working to harm Pakistan, which was the fort of Islam.⁷⁶

The Taliban Unmoved

On September 16, Musharraf sent a delegation led by General Mahmood to Kandahar to convince Mullah Omar of the futility of not handing over Osama to the Americans. After meeting with the Taliban leadership, Mahmood telephoned Armitage and gave him the gist of his meeting with Mullah Omar and members of the Afghan government. He had conveyed to them three US demands: of handing over OBL to the International Court of Justice or extraditing him; handing over or extraditing 13 of his top lieutenants; and closing down all terrorist training camps. He had added a fourth condition i.e. the opening of all “training sites for inspection by neutral international observers from the West, including the US. Mahmood felt confident that the Taliban would take the demands seriously and not choose one man against the well-being of 25 million citizens of Afghanistan.⁷⁷ On September 20, President Bush repeated the demands. He wanted the Taliban leadership to turn over all al-Qaeda leaders in their country, close all training camps, hand over all terrorists to appropriate authorities, and give US full access to the training camps. There would be no negotiations and the Taliban had to “act immediately.” Bush warned the war against al-Qaeda would continue until “every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated.”⁷⁸ The Taliban leadership feared the worst, but could not convince

itself that OBL was guilty of the crime. In Islamabad, the then-Taliban ambassador Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef condemned the attacks and hoped that the perpetrators would be caught and brought to justice. In his opinion, their Saudi guest lacked “the facilities to carry out such activities.”⁷⁹ In Kandahar, the then-Taliban spokesman Abdul Hai Mutmaen surmised that 9/11 was not the work of ordinary men, and he doubted that OBL had the resources to launch the attack.⁸⁰ The then- Afghan foreign minister Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil claimed that the Americans did not have credible evidence to prove Osama’s involvement and blamed the incident on their intelligence services.⁸¹ Mullah Omar rejected the American demands to extradite Osama because he was not convinced that the latter could train pilots to carry out such precision attacks. In his view the Americans were blaming Osama for their own intelligence failure.⁸²

A shurah (council) of Afghan Ulema (religious elders) in Kabul issued a fatwa (religious edict) condemning the attacks and hoping that the Americans “would not attack Afghanistan in haste” without thorough investigations. They called upon the UN and the OIC to “conduct an independent investigation” to prevent the “undue killing of innocent people.” They took note of the statement by the President of USA, in which he had declared the war in Afghanistan a crusade. This had hurt the sentiments of Muslims worldwide and “endangered the world peace.” They hoped that such statements would not be repeated in the future. They called upon “Arab Muslim countries to compel OBL to leave Afghanistan willingly and shift his dwelling to some other place.” Despite such entreaties, if the US decided to “attack Afghan soil and continued with its hegemony design,” then it was binding upon Muslims to wage jihad against the aggressor. All Muslims, Afghans or non-Afghans, were required to render all possible logistical support and facilitation, and sharing of information with “non-Muslims during the American attack” would “be liable to death sentence.”⁸³ CNN reported that the Taliban had appealed to the US the next day to not attack Afghanistan, following “inconclusive” talks with a Pakistani diplomat carrying a message to the Taliban leadership in Kabul.⁸⁴ The Americans immediately started preparing for the invasion. On September 12, the US invoked Article 5 of collective defence enshrined in the NATO Treaty, making it incumbent on the Atlantic Allies to support the invasion of Afghanistan.⁸⁵ All the diplomatic and UN staff was withdrawn from Kabul on September 13.⁸⁶ The invasion of Afghanistan began on October 7, 2001. The Taliban couldn’t match the military might of the US and NATO forces and fled to the countryside. OBL escaped, only to be killed in the Pakistani city of Abbottabad on May 2, 2011. The war formally ended 13 years later, in December 2014. 3,500 international soldiers were killed on Afghan battlefields.⁸⁷ Many more Afghans and Pakistanis were killed and displaced from their homes.

Consequences

The decision to side with the US to save the country and its citizens from being bombed back into the Stone Age was based on two narrow choices. General Musharraf could have either abandoned the Taliban and thrown in his lot with the Americans unconditionally, or made the cooperation conditional.⁸⁸ Based on his consultations with his corps commanders, cabinet members and important stakeholders, he did make a few demands, namely, no American combat troops on Pakistani soil; and US mediation on the Kashmir issue. While Americans had no issues with the first demand, they chose to ignore the second one.⁸⁹ There was no documentation on the understanding reached between Pakistan and the US.⁹⁰ This gave the Americans a choice to interpret it to their own benefit. Pakistan paid a heavy price for these verbal understandings. After the Salala tragedy in November 2011, the government of Pakistan decided to block the NATO ground lines of communication (GLOC) and asked for a written document to legalise movement through its territory. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the transportation of non-lethal goods was signed on July 31, 2012.⁹¹ For eight years, the Americans had used Pakistani road and rail infrastructure without paying any charges. In the ninth year, the US started paying a nominal handling fee of \$220 per container.⁹² Another issue left unaddressed was the legality of allowing drone raids inside Pakistani territory. Those killed in the strikes included innocent citizens uninvolved in combat.⁹³ What is more regrettable is that drone strikes in FATA were being launched

from the Shamsi airbase in Balochistan. Shamsi had been leased to UAE for the purposes of hunting, but was further sublet to the Americans.⁹⁴ The Americans were asked to vacate the base after the Salala incident. Pakistani losses continue to mount. The military losses are calculated to be equivalent to two full-fledged infantry brigades.⁹⁵ The army headquarter, Pakistani naval base Mehran, and a number of other sensitive installations and personnel belonging to the military and their kin have been attacked and killed. The attack on Army Public School Peshawar on December 16, 2014 was the worst incident to have happened. The police and paramilitary forces have borne the brunt of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and suicide attacks. Hundreds and thousands of civilians have been uprooted from their homes in settled and tribal areas, and have been internally displaced. Between 40,000 to 50,000 Pakistani citizens have lost their lives. A larger number of citizens have lost their means of livelihood, and have been reduced to penury and begging. The direct economic loss incurred by Pakistan is estimated to be more than \$70 billion.⁹⁶ This is a far greater amount than what has been doled out in terms of aid. Payments from the Coalition Support Fund for counter- terrorism operations have been occasionally blocked to convey American resentment and ire.⁹⁷ It took the political government nearly seven months to reopen the NATO supply routes after the Salala incident.⁹⁸ The Saudi demand for Pakistan's participation in the military operations against the Houthis in Yemen was referred to the parliament. This is in stark contrast to a single man making a hurried decision under tremendous pressure.

Conclusion

Collective wisdom, however muddled or confused, is necessarily spread over a longer time period. This helps gain critical time in making a more nuanced judgment. There is much to learn from the post-9/11 decision-making process; the major lesson here is that the decision-making apparatus should not be a one-window operation, but a multi-layered one. Although no one will allow a government to drag its feet indefinitely on a critical issue, all institutions of the state, or at least those directly concerned with making the strategic choices, should be involved. They must share the blame or credit equally, and accountability should be across the board. Fear of internal censure or external opprobrium should never be the main factor in making a decision. When more people are involved, they have a better perspective of the problem at hand, and the element of fear lessens. A sense of shared responsibility brings greater strength to the decision. The decision to support the US after 9/11 suited the prevailing environment. The only correct thing was to rethink the concessions granted once the situation had begun to stabilise. A course correction could have prevented the hopeless situation that was ultimately created.

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