

Pervaiz Musharraf and the War on Terror: A Neo-realist Approach

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Abstract

It was not a normal situation for Pakistan to join the Global War on Terror against those elements that were in the 'good books' of the United States in the Soviet-Afghan War in the 1980s. General Musharraf's decision was called a U-Turn regarding Taliban and Afghanistan and was widely criticized in Pakistan. Conversely, he was appreciated in the West and was called a 'courageous and visionary leader'. It was the most important decision of Pervaiz Musharraf because it had decided the direction of the country regarding War on Terror, for the future relations with the other powers especially of the United States and her neighbours. 'Pakistan comes first' was the reflection of neo realist approach in policies of Pervaiz Musharraf after 9/11 attacks.

Key Words: Neo-realism, 9/11 attacks, Pakistan, US, War on Terror.

Neo-realism

This is a widely discussed and most important theory of international relations. According to this theory, the international system is anarchical because of the absence of a central authority in the international system. Every state feels herself sovereign and free in her affairs. The main objective of the state is her survival in the anarchical system of the world. It is the power of the state which can give guarantee of her survival and security against the other states. In this anarchical world, a state is to act as there is uncertainty about its security. Foreign occupation or invasion is the most pressing threat to its security and this create an arm race among the states to balance the security threat from the hostile state.¹ To maximize its goal of security, the state is to act according to its own perceptions that another state is planning to attack her. This theory gave advantage to the major powers in relation to its security.

This theory is used as a threat to world peace and harmony because it compels states to acquire more arms and put them in arms race and struggle among themselves. A sense of insecurity among the states would prevail and a constant threat to their security engaged the states for all the time in preparation for wars and arms stocking rather than to concentrate on development and welfare of the masses. This theory brings a complete fiasco in building confidence and mutual cooperation among the states because of the perception of insecurity among them.

The theory has encouraged the arms race not only in the shape of more weapons in quantity but in most sophisticated technology gradually leading to the development of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) causing thus a threat to humans worldwide. This race is not limited to a few country, many more have developed their arsenals with nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. This arms race to ensure security has wasted billions of dollars while establishing factories arms manufacturing and ultimately led to the collapse of their economies under the huge burden of arms.

Neo-realism and the declaration of war on terror against the Al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations have impact on the state sovereignty and security because of the anarchical situation in the world. The emergence of non-state actors and the US unilateral actions against them has weakened the security of the other states. The US policy of pre-emptive strikes has pushed the world into more insecure position and on the mercy of great powers for its security.

The concept neo-realism and the war on terror in the contemporary world politics have weakened the state concept of sovereignty because of the threat of attack from the states and terrorists. The threat of the use of “weapons of mass destructions” by Saddam Hussain in Iraq in 2003 and the US attack on Iraq to destroy their weapons for the safety and security of the region was a clear example in this regard. After enormous search and inspection, there was no proof of the existence of WMD in Iraq.ⁱⁱ

The US drone attacks in the tribal areas of Pakistan was the part of war on terror campaign initiated by the US policy of pre-emptive strikes against the militants in the area. From the US perspective, these militants and terrorists were the potential threat to her security and thus should be punished and eliminated. This policy has not only violated the national sovereignty of state but has also given license to kill someone and somewhere who in the definition of the aggressive power are threat to its security. In the neo-realism perspective and the new development in shape of war on terror, it has now authorized the states to declare any individual, group, or state which might pose a threat to its security and declare them the potential threat to the world security. The Bush policy of “either you are with us or with the terrorist” have divided the states and individuals into two different camps.

The war on terror and the concept of neo-realism have authorized the powerful states to intervene in the internal affairs of other states or depict them as “terrorism sponsored states” and thus impose sanctions and even attack in the name of international security. While attacking Iraq in 2003, it was also an allegation that the ruling Bath Party has links with terrorist organization-Al Qaeda and its dethroning from power was important for the regional security and allies in the region. Taliban government in Afghanistan was declared “a terrorism sponsored state” and war against it was authorized by the UN Security Council and the world community supported the US move.

Neo-realism and Pakistan

The 9/11 attacks have direct threat to Pakistan’s security on many grounds. Pakistan’s foreign policy has always been India centric and the role of India cannot be ignored in the present security threat to Pakistan after 9/11. The Indian government’s offer of all kinds of support to the US immediately after the 9/11 attacks had jeopardized Pakistan’s national interests and its own security at stake. The New Delhi’s support to the US was only to malign Pakistan in the international community and to declare Pakistan a state which is the supporter of terrorism in the region.ⁱⁱⁱ

As India has no direct links with Afghanistan, the US aircrafts flying from the Indian airbases would have been a great threat to its security and sovereignty. In that situation, Pakistan would have not been able to prevent the US forces to intervene from the Indian space to Pakistan and attack Afghanistan. As Pakistan was a close ally of Taliban government in the past, the Indian government propaganda to bracket Pakistan with Taliban in the new scenario could have damaged its international status and might face sanctions from the world community.^{iv}

As the US formally asked for support from Pakistan, the importance of Pakistan in the shape of an ally was better known to the US administration. The close border with Afghanistan and a vast intelligence network of Pakistan in Afghanistan, the US needed Pakistan’s support in dislodging the Taliban government and to capture Al Qaeda terrorists in a limited time. This was possible only with the help and support of Pakistan. The US war policy of “light foot”^v in Afghanistan was materialized because of Pakistan’s logistic support and the airbases facilities which Pakistan offered to the US forces. As Afghanistan is a land locked country, Pakistan’s ports were the main

supply route to Afghanistan for the US forces and the shortest as well as the most accessible route throughout the year was also a factor in seeking Pakistan's support.

Musharraf and the War on Terror

Pervaiz Musharraf response to the US demand was in affirmative because the state security and national interests were in threat. There were many factors which were in the mind of Pervaiz Musharraf while supporting the US in her War on Terror. While keeping in mind the US threat to Pakistan which was also discussed by Musharraf in his book, 'In the Line of Fire', Musharraf was realistic in his policies regarding the new development in the world and the region. Long before the 9/11 attacks, Musharraf banned many militant organizations in the country which the West and the US considered good sign in Pakistan and supported the initiatives.^{vi}

While supporting the US, Pervaiz Musharraf had many issues on the table which might be in danger, had Pakistan not compelled with the US demands. The first was the economic sanctions and aid embargoes which have already crippled Pakistan's economy for the last ten years. The economy of Pakistan was weak and could not sustain its growth without the foreign support and assistance. How Pakistan could sustain its security and sovereignty when the country was in bankruptcy with very little in pockets. 'The empty hands are the loser hands'^{vii} is the simple statement while dealing with other nations.

The people of Pakistan always supported the nuclear programme and were concerned about its security and development in the country. All successive governments whether civilian or military, have jealously guarded Pakistan's nuclear programme and taken steps for its preservation all the times. The strategic assets in the shape of nuclear weapons and technology have also come in direct threat from the US, had Pakistan not supported the US. Pakistan has no such power to prevent the US aircrafts from entering into her territory and thus will be on the mercy of US. How could Pakistan protect her weapons in such situation? Pakistan could not afford war with the US no matter even if her nuclear assets too have come in threat.

While supporting his decision of joining the war on terror, Pervaiz Musharraf was fully aware that the India factor in Pakistan internal and external policies is involved and this was the reason that he wanted to get support from the masses when he mentioned that the India threat was imminent if we did not comply with the US demand.^{viii} The fact was that India wanted to exploit the situation in its favour after 9/11 to make Pakistan scapegoat for the wrong done by the Al Qaeda and Taliban. India would attack on our nuclear assets with the help of US forces. The Indian involvement in the Afghanistan affairs was only to make a ground for her to launch war against Pakistan and thus make the Western border insecure for us. There are no large scale business activities of India in Afghanistan but still it has seven Consulates in Afghanistan near the Pakistan borders which were involved in the destabilization of Pakistan.

Afghanistan is located in a strategic area where the most powerful states are located. The energy corridor is opened in Afghanistan from the Central Asian States and a gateway to link with Middle East. Politically, anti-US states are located near Afghanistan such as Iran, China and Russia. The US wanted to check the regional development from the Afghanistan territory because from here, the US can counter China, Russia and Iran, politically, militarily and economically. Pakistan had also apprehensions about the US involvement in the region and therefore had her right to support its own interests in the region. Pakistan could not isolate itself from the regional development and especially in Afghanistan because of its close border with it. The US wanted to give greater involvement to India in Afghanistan than Pakistan and Pakistan was fully aware of it, therefore it also engaged other actors in its favour to counter Indian influence and make space for it in the future of Afghanistan.^{ix}

The Kashmir issue is a vital ingredient of Pakistan's external policy. When Pakistan joined the US alliance in the war on terror, it was also an objective of Pakistan to save the Kashmiri freedom struggle from branding as terrorist movement. India tried to discredit the Kashmiri struggle and

declared all the organizations involved in the freedom struggle as terrorist organizations. Pakistan tactfully neutralized the Indian propaganda in its favour. Pakistan's support to the war on terror in Afghanistan was acknowledged by the US government on many occasions. Pakistan had impressed the United States by arresting and capturing many key Al Qaeda commanders including Abu Zubaydah, Ramzi Bin Al Shibh and Khalid Sheikh Mohammad.^x Besides these Al Qaeda leaders, Pakistan conducted the first military operation in South Waziristan in 2002 named "Operation Al Mizan" (The Balance) to capture and kill foreign militants like Chechen, Uzbek and Arab. In this operation, Pakistan deployed more than 70,000 troops in the area which was the first grand military operation of Pakistan on its own soil.^{xi}

It was also revealed by the Abbottabad Commission report that ISI had carried out 891 operations against Al Qaeda in which it had killed 866 of its network operatives, including 100 key leaders. It had also apprehended 922 Al Qaeda personnel, including 96 high level targets and busted 42 networks.^{xii} This policy of arrest and killing had a price to be paid by Pakistan as on December 2003, there were two assassination attempts on Musharraf while he was going to the President House from the Army House.^{xiii} More than 40,000 innocent people lost their lives in terrorist attacks while the Pakistan Army lost two division of its operational capacity since 2004.^{xiv}

From all these discussion, one can draw the conclusion that this policy of Pakistan has not only alienated the masses of the country, on the one hand from the government efforts and remained a cause of militancy growth, on the other hand. This is all because of this dual policy regarding the war on terror. The Musharraf's policy of Neo-realism in the context of war on terror in Pakistan has backlash in the shape of more militancy and terrorism. This policy of appeasing and opposing has frustrated the entire nation and has created confusion in all segments of the society. On the one hand, the army is conducting military operations against the militants while, on the other hand, the government is making peace deals which have undermined the strength of the state and weakened the morale of the state institutions.

Pakistan's role

While the government policies are also responsible for violence in the country, the military operations in the tribal areas without much concentration on the core issues of extremism also caused more violence in tribal areas. The first military operation against the foreign militant in South Waziristan in 2002, led to the local militants support for them. Once military operation started in a limited area spread to the rest of the tribal areas and then to rest of the country. From the operation Al-Mizan to Operation of Zalzala, all were ended in more violence and destructions in the tribal areas. The government lost much areas and much authority there and ultimately made peace agreement with the militants. This enabled them to get more support in the areas and the weak administration in FATA made their job easier.^{xv}

The repeated mistakes in operation and the agreement with the militants made them the genuine stakeholders in the tribal areas which virtually weakened the state position in dealing with them. The gap between the masses and the government raised much when the government decided to launch a military operation against the Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) inmates in 2007. This was a turning point in the escalation of tension and violence throughout the country. After the Lal Masjid operation, the militants declared the state of Pakistan enemy of Islam and announced Jihad against the forces of the country.

This operation not only gave a unified stance in the shape of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)- an umbrella organization of more than two dozens of militant organizations in the entire country, but people also thought after the operation that the government is supporting the US agenda and was therefore, against Islam, madrasa and mosque. This perception among the masses had developed alienation and distrust between them which resulted in the failure of the government efforts in eradication of militancy and extremism from the country.^{xvi}

Pakistan is situated in a complex geo-strategic location and truly can be truly called the victim of its strategic importance. On the Eastern border, a hostile state always in search of harming Pakistan not only militarily but now is trying to make it desert by stopping or diverting the flow of water on the rivers running towards Pakistan. Afghanistan- a battleground for the last thirty years on its Western border not only disturbed its economic and social structure but also remained a source of tension for all the time. Iran, on its South-Western border, is in the grip of international embargos and the US-Iran tussle on its nuclear programme has also affected its relations with her neighbours. China is more comfortable for Pakistan as the latter is enjoying friendship in the shape of economic, military and scientific cooperation, not based on neo-realistic approach in international politics (no permanent friend or foe but own national interests), but on mutual understanding and respect for one another.

Musharraf's decision to join the US War against Terror

Pakistan was asked by the United States immediately after the 9/11 attacks to cooperate in the war against Al Qaeda and Taliban. There are many reasons for which Pakistan's support was required. It was the only country in the world which had diplomatic relations with the Taliban government in Afghanistan and it might convince them to avert the imminent attacks from the US to handover Bin Laden for the sake of security of the Afghan people and the region. It was also believed that Islamabad had cordial relations with the Kabul for the last five years and most of the observers were of the opinion that the Taliban government had the overt and covert support of Islamabad therefore, to dislodge the Taliban rule in Afghanistan; Pakistan now had to cut-off its relations with them.^{xvii}

The second reason was the strategic location of Pakistan in the region. The location of Pakistan next to Afghanistan is the most important made its cooperation vital for the success of any military strike against Afghanistan. Pakistan's close border for logistic support in war was important because it was the cheapest route to Afghanistan to supply arms and other equipment. The most important factors which the United States wanted in support from Pakistan was the vast human intelligence network in Pakistan for the last few decades and in the war on terror, the United States wanted to share Pakistan's vital information with her to make the Afghanistan campaign successful. Without Pakistan's support, the United States also acknowledged that this war would be difficult to win and therefore while India offered the US full support in the War in Afghanistan, it turned to Pakistan.

General Musharraf was forced to confront militants when they were strong enough in the region and the US quote the willingness of Pakistan in the war on terror despite opposition of the masses in the country.^{xviii} Facing with a possible choice between joining the US "War on Terror" or be ready to be "Sent back to the Stone age", General Pervaiz Musharraf opted for the former.^{xix} While defending his decision to support the United States, Pervaiz Musharraf told that the nation that the reaction of the US would be more severe for us if Pakistan did not support them against the Al Qaeda elements located in Afghanistan. The support of Pakistan was also important in the sense that it had vast information network inside Afghanistan and the US needed it most at that time. The terrorist group Al Qaeda was operating in Afghanistan with the protection of Taliban. This attack not only brought changes into the entire world but remained into an unknown destination of the history.^{xx} Musharraf defended its decision while saying that he refused the US to give any air or naval facilities only two airport were given for logistic support and not for the attack on Afghanistan. He said that when he decided to joined the war on terror, he addressed to the nation to explain the masses its position and decision.^{xxi}

The decision of General Pervez Musharraf was widely criticized by most of the Pakistanis. According to a respondent, "This decision was the root cause of all the problems of Pakistan since 9/11. All the extremism and violence which occurred in Pakistan in the last ten years was due to the Musharraf decision. "He not only made operations in his own territory but weakened the Army

strength while deployed in the length and breadth of the country”.^{xxii} “Pakistan was in isolation in the world on the Taliban issue before the 9/11, and it was the compulsion of the time to join the war on terror because Musharraf had no option but to cooperate”.^{xxiii} It was a rational approach at that time because the entire world had no option but the alliance with the United States but with the passage of time, we could modify the policies according to the environment and the fall out of the decision was revealed in many developments in the country. It was not a failed policy at that time.^{xxiv} One analyst stated that where there is war, there will be destructions and which has no boundaries to be limited. The wise ruler is one who fights the war on the others land but Musharraf brought the ‘others’ war into his own home and now we can see the repercussions of those policies today.^{xxv}

The mainstream parties and political analysts have their opinions on Musharraf’s decision according to the needs of the time. Most of them think that the decision of Musharraf was right on the ground that he was compelled by the prevailing situation of the world and it was a good decision but it had some repercussions on this ground that he never took the people’s representatives in its favour. “We are against the war and violence and we never support those decisions which led to more violence in the region. Musharraf was right in supporting the US but to become a party in the war, it was wrong”, said the ANP leader Mian Ifikhar Hussain.^{xxvi}

“Pakistan needed to support the world community and cooperate in building its relations with other nations. But this cooperation would not be based on to compromise of its national interests. Pakistan should cooperate with the international community with care to determine on what price we were going to support. We should now think what price we have paid in this cooperation in the war on terror with the US”.^{xxvii} Most of the views that there was no option before Musharraf but only to join the US alliance but “this alliance should have been made on some rules and engagements. Without proper mechanism, this has created so many problems for Pakistan”.^{xxviii}

“Pakistan has isolated itself regionally and internationally on the Taliban issue before the 9/11 attacks and this was the reason that the US openly asked Pakistan to explain its position. At that time even if Pakistan had opted to remain neutral, it would have been considered that they are supporting and saving Taliban. Pakistan was to clearly declare: “friendship with the US or with the Taliban”.^{xxix}

On popular level, Islamic groups and tribal people marched on the streets of major cities in Pakistan against the imminent attacks on Afghanistan. It was estimated that 82 percent of popular opinion in Pakistan was opposed to intervention. The backlash was not surprising, giving the links between Islamic groups in Pakistan and the Taliban. The Taliban had been educated in a network of madrassas in Pakistan and many had attended those run by Maulana Samiul Haq. He had led the pro-Taliban Alliance in Pakistan, the Afghan Defence Council, and publically threatened Musharraf on 14 September, 2001, saying he should be mindful of the sentiments of his under command.^{xxx} After Pakistan, becoming partner of the United States in the global War on Terror, the Islamists staged demonstrations throughout the country and a wave of anti-American atmosphere was raised to pressurize Musharraf to alienate himself from the ongoing war against the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. These demonstrations had also strengthened its position to bargain with the United States.^{xxxi}

Musharraf had multiple reasons for supporting the United States. He was at that time isolated in the world community and wanted to gain recognition from the world community if supported the United States in the on-going war on Terror campaign in Afghanistan. By agreeing to join, he was turned from a pariah of the international community for destroying democracy in Pakistan into a staunch ally of the West in the global war on terrorism.^{xxxii} His decisions to join the United States alliance in the War on Terror had been widely criticized in the country but he defended his decision in a press conference on September 19, 2001. Musharraf told the Pakistanis that had Pakistan not accepted the US demands after the September 11 attacks; her critical concerns would have come under threat. Musharraf was critical about the prevailing situation and he was more concerned

about the nuclear issue as well as the Kashmir problem because if there are some threats to both of these, it will be a very worse position to Pakistan.^{xxxiii}

Conclusion

The Musharraf decision to join the War on Terror was widely criticized by all political parties in the country especially of the religious parties. They called it a 'betrayal' from the Muslim cause and support to the 'infidels' against a Muslim state. The mainstream parties were of the opinion that he did not consult the masses and the Parliament on the decision. But it was a time when the prevailing situation in the entire world was to be kept in mind. No country could dare to oppose the US policy of 'Either you are with us or against us' regarding the war on terror. Even the Russia and China had the apprehension but they declared support to the US at that time.

As Pakistan is a weak country economically and strategically, Musharraf was wise to take a decision to save the country from destruction which surprised many in the country and this was the reason that strong resistance was shown by the Islamists in the country. If Musharraf was not in the reign at that crucial time, the political government in Pakistan would have been in a very weak position against the US pressure. This we can see from the preceding years and developments when the political leaderships in the country divided on the decision as how to tackle terrorism in the country for the last fifteen years. The Musharraf decision was, in fact, based on the neo-realist approach regarding threat to the state security at that time. 'Pakistan comes first' was the policy decision in the country which was the first of its kind in the history of Pakistan as was largely ignored in the past by the rulers while taking similar decisions in similar circumstances.

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