**Pakistan’s Foreign Policy in the 21st Century**

**Introduction**

The challenges of the 21st century especially to the developing states like Pakistan are indeed daunting. In this era of globalization, only those states can compete for bigger role in international political order that are politically stable, technologically advanced and economically sound. After the fateful incident of 9/11, the world was put in a dangerous situation. Clash of civilizations, more sophisticated weapons and the unprecedented rise of non-state actors coupled with their high-handedness of the world superpowers have further aggravated the situation. On the pretext of security, the US has breached civilized norms of international law and has consolidated its presence in Afghanistan; Pakistan’s neighbouring country. Moreover, the US and India are becoming closer and closer with every passing day. China’s “One Belt, One Road” initiative is also integrating the South Asian region. Iran Nuclear Deal, Russia’s growing interest in Pakistan, the Yemen conflict and the rise of ISIS in the region have also exposed Pakistan to newer challenges. This changing geostrategic, geopolitical and geo-economic environment of the South Asian region has posed new security, economic challenges to the foreign policy of Pakistan.

**Growing US-India Bonhomie**

Most analysts hold the view that the 21st century is for the Asians. In our part of Asia, India and China are emerging as economic giants and Pakistan, due to its proximity with both countries, is bound to have a spill-over implications of their policies especially because Pakistan and China are both all-weather friends while Pakistan and India have always been hostile toward each other. Events like Russian invasion of Afghanistan as well as the 9/11 and the ensuing war on terror have made Pakistan important for the United States.

It is pertinent to mention here that Pakistan is always pivotal to US interests in South Asia and progressive, amicable relations with Pakistan are also crucial in managing restraint in the South Asian region for nuclear proliferation of both India and Pakistan.  
In South Asia, the policymakers of the United States have always focused on the China-India-Pakistan triangle. In this region, China is the biggest competitor of the US, India is a strategic ally while Pakistan is an important partner in the US-led war on terror. However, the US has always shown a tilt towards India in order to pursue its strategic object of China’s containment. However, China has adopted low profile, and a policy of peaceful coexistence in the region, and the world at large.

The increasing bonhomie between India and the United States during the 1990s has been detrimental to Pakistan. It was an era of isolation for Pakistan and Pakistan’s “most-allied ally” — the United States — showed a great deal of concerns over country’s nuclear programme and made all endeavours to force Pakistan to roll it back. Towards the end of 1990s, America’s tilt towards India, especially after the Kargil episode, grew even stronger and it was seen as a paradigm shift in the relations between world’s largest democracies.

However, then happened the 9/11 that not only shook the whole world but also made the US policymakers reorient their policies as the monster of terrorism was right before them. The sea changes introduced in US policies affected the South Asian region as well. The US took a U-turn and Pakistan was once again the ally and the front-line state in US-led war against terrorism. But, the US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement, or the 123 Agreement, delineates US’ interest in institutionalizing its relations with India. But, the nuclear deal has caused a great concern among almost all countries in the region. According to military analysts, the deal will throw the whole region in a new nuclear race that will disturb the balance of power in this part of the world.

The National Security Strategy of the United States of America says, “In South Asia, the United States has also emphasized the need for India and Pakistan to resolve their disputes. This [Obama] Administration invested time and resources building strong bilateral relations with India and Pakistan. These strong relations then gave the US a leverage to play a constructive role when tensions in the region became acute. With Pakistan, our bilateral relations have been bolstered by Pakistan’s choice to join the war against terror and move toward building a more open and tolerant society. The Obama Administration sees India’s potential to become one of the great democratic powers of the twenty-first century and has worked hard to transform this relationship accordingly.”

But, the US is itself violating its own strategy only to achieve its strategic objectives in South Asia.

**Kashmir Issue and Nuclearization in South Asia**

Another great challenge before the foreign policy makers of Pakistan is Kashmir issue and the nuclearization of the region. The issue of Kashmir has always been of cardinal importance to the foreign policy of Pakistan. On this very issue both India and Pakistan have fought wars of 1948, 1965, 1971 and 1999 (Kargil). Moreover, due to India’s ambitions to create a hegemony over the South Asia, evident in its 1998 nuclear tests, Pakistan was forced to conduct nuclear tests in the same year. But, it is needless to say that the nuclear arms race has made the region more dangerous and more vulnerable to devastation.

The Indo-US civil nuclear deal has further aggravated the situation. Pakistan has great concern over it because the deal has disturbed the balance of power in the region and it is responsible for igniting a new nuclear race in South Asia. The deal would undermine the global non-proliferation regime, and Pakistan is also not willing to accept “discriminatory treatment”. The preferable move would have been a “package deal” that accommodates the energy security interests of both India and Pakistan.

**Threat of Globalization**

Globalization is a challenge rather than an opportunity for underdeveloped or developing countries like Pakistan. A major critique on the globalization has been that only economically strong and politically viable countries would be able to survive in the rapidly globalizing world.

Great deal of increase in world economy is the creation of international standards and principles as the fundamental criterion for all economies. Indeed, there are principles of monetary policy, fiscal transparency insurance and payment system, securities, corporate, governance and the entire draw up of other fields. It means a probing of policies of individual countries by taking part in the competition of market and policy managers have to endure in addition of projecting their policies to worldwide by greater transparency.

Keeping in view the above credentials of globalization, Pakistan has to reform its political system, to flourish its economic performance, and to set out the essential elements like good governance and maintain rule of law to keep abreast of the new challenge of globalization. In South Asian perspective, India is a threat not only in terms of arms race but also in terms of economic competition. India’s rising role horizontally and vertically affects the policy matters of Pakistan; because in the globalised world, economic interests of countries are prior to the other interests.

**Afghan Issue and unending War on Terror**

The most gigantic challenge to the foreign policy of Pakistan is the issue of Afghanistan, and unending war against terror. Despite promising to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan by 2015, the US President recently announced to keep US troops in the war-torn country on the pretext of training Afghan forces and stemming the wave of Taliban’s rise.

Moreover, besides Pakistan, China, Russia, Iran and India are also showing greater interest in Afghanistan due to country’s geopolitical and geostrategic importance. Intelligence wars in Afghanistan have also been of greater concern for Pakistan. Moreover, issues of sovereignty as well as the complex social, historical and religious dynamics in Afghanistan pose greater challenges to policymakers of Pakistan.

**Terrorism Extremism and Sectarianism**

Terrorism and extremism are the gravest challenges before Pakistan. Since, its joining of US-led war on terror, Pakistan has seen an unprecedented rise in acts of sectarianism and extremism. This menacingly perplexing phenomenon has been costly for Pakistan’s economy in recent years. In foreign policy terms, Pakistan seems to be an unsafe place, and the country is perceived to be the hub of terrorism. The foreign policy makers have to pay a special attention in this realm as well.

**Conclusion**

Foreign policy of Pakistan remains hamstrung by host of issue; the formation and implementation of a robust policy and ensuring its effectiveness and minimizing its domestic and political implications on it being the most important. So, on foreign policy front, Pakistan needs an ever-vigilant leadership that has a vision to overcome all these challenges. The role of parliament should be enhanced and implementation of foreign policy should be overlook by a committee of senior parliamentarians who are highly intelligent and are blessed with strong political acumen. Moreover, Pakistan must improve its economy and settle down its debt reduction, so that the interference from the donors can be curtailed in matters related to the foreign policy of Pakistan.