

## **The Troubled Triangle: US-Pakistan Relations under the Taliban's Shadow**

**Author: Zafar Iqbal Yousafzai, Routledge 2022; Pages 193.**

**Sabeel Ahmed**

The logical assessment of the troubled relationship between the US and Pakistan is critically investigated from Taliban's point of view. The author examines the relations between Afghanistan, Pakistan and the United States that are of vital significance in the backdrop of the War against Terror, to which South Asia was the epicenter. The central focus of the discussion of this book is the Taliban, which has two extreme variables namely the USA and Pakistan. Due to the complex triangular relationship between the US, Pakistan, and the Taliban, the book holds some vital explanations. Students, scholars, diplomats, and military personnel will find this book a valuable contribution to the study of South Asia.

The author has suggested a new theory 'New Balance of Threat Theory' (P.21) and utilizes its scope on the Taliban as a case study. It analyzes the dynamics of the US-Pakistan relationship with the Taliban as a central variable. The author has tried to analyze the intricacies faced by both the states due to the emergence of the Taliban in the aftermath of the Soviet disintegration. Yousafzai gives a historical overview of the US-Pakistan relations covering the post-WWII developments till the event of 9/11, after which a dramatic shift took place in the relations of both states. The book mainly focuses on the post-9/11 developments and their impact on the relationship between Pakistan and the United States in the context of the Taliban's movement in Afghanistan.

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The book is very important for reference for all the researchers and academicians who have an interest in South Asian studies, the field of security studies, international political relations, global history, peace, disarmament and conflict studies, foreign policy of the US, etc. This book is a blend of historical and current analyses of the important political developments that took place from 1945 to 2021. The book starts with the post-World War II events, covers the Cold War era, and then post-9/11 developments. It concludes with the discussion on the recent US-Pakistan-Taliban entente, which made the US leave Afghanistan after its longest war comprising over 21 years of the time period (P.70). This war is the largest American war fought anywhere in the world, and has many important policy evolutions of the US vis-à-vis Pakistan and the Taliban. Academics, practitioners, and researchers around the globe can use the information with a profound confidence.

In all the six chapters of the book, the author tries to draw a historical link to the current developments between the US, Pakistan, and the Taliban. The book begins with the historical review of this complex relationship. In the next stage, the organizational structure of the Taliban is analyzed briefly. Afterward, US engagement policies vis-à-vis the Taliban are discussed which culminates in the discussion on Pakistan's tilt toward the Taliban. Then, the whole period of the global War on Terror (WOT) is quickly mentioned, eventually highlighting the US-Taliban peace agreement and Pakistan's role. Finally, the developments covering the new type of relationship (between US-Pakistan and the Taliban) from a subtle balance to an updated entente are thoroughly discussed.

An important strength of this piece of writing is regarding Pakistan's inclination toward the Taliban about which the author expresses a variety of aspects containing Pakistan's past relationship with the Taliban. The detailed study of the events give an in-depth knowledge how the Taliban and Pakistan remained at par with each other which

was often misunderstood as Pakistan's double game in Afghanistan by the US.

The author, with the help of his research-based knowledge introduces a fresh analysis of the emergence and conclusion of the Afghan wars especially the underlying factors which made Pakistan an important state for the US interests in Afghanistan. However, the book also contributes to the spiral effect of this war on the internal security apparatus of Pakistan. The author's discussion on terrorism emanating from Pakistan is yet another important dimension adding to the literature

Furthermore, the author tried to explain that Pakistan has been the most vulnerable state due to the War on Terror (WOT) (P.146), and the consequences thus caused for Pakistan were always viewed with suspicion by the US. It never took Pakistan into its confidence, rather it always demanded to 'do more.' It concludes that Pakistan supported a strong proxy group in order to protect itself from an external threat. Pakistan, on the other hand, always wanted a friendly government in Kabul. 'New Balance of Threat Theory,' further explains that a weak state does not align with a powerful state to mitigate the threat from external powers but with a powerful non-state actor with whom it has a convergence of interests. Hence, Pakistan's support for the Taliban is a case study of the theory.

This is, indeed, an important read on the South Asian political dynamics and the complicated US-Pakistan relationship. He expanded the earlier established balance of threat theory to give his own logical understanding of the subtle convergence and divergence of interests in Pakistan and Taliban relations.

- The page numbers given in the text for reference are according to the ebook.