

**Pakistan - USA**  
**Crafty Partners, Divergent Interests**  
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I am honored to be invited to present the very first lecture at the Forum for Diplomacy & Dialogue lecture series event. My thanks to the executive board for this special invitation and I see among this group of scholars and influencers many who I can call friends.

The content of my lecture is not only candid but what I call a mile wide and an inch deep or presented from a forest level. After my remarks, hopefully we will have an opportunity to discuss matters at the tree level.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Pakistan-US relationship is not about shared interests. It's about *deliverables* that both countries want from each other – full stop!

It is an uneasy tradeoff in which each country does what the other wants in return for getting the things it wants.

*That's the Divergent Interests.* Other uses of the word divergent are conflicting and or different.

Pakistan & U.S. affiliation has never been of a friendship or genuine partnership. Each nation tries to get as much of what matters to it while doing as minimum as possible in return.

*That's the Crafty Partners.* Other uses of the word crafty are shrewd and or sneaky.

I want to begin with two quotes which encapsulate the core of how each country stands to benefit from the other.

My friend Rick Perry: former governor, presidential candidate, and US Energy Secretary, invited me to visit him in Washington at the Department of Energy. In the building are the words, "*Nations don't have friends. Nations only have Interests*"

Ladies and gentlemen, from the U.S. perspective that is the Pakistan-US relationship in the above eight words that I just uttered.

Before Partition in 1947, Lord Mountbatten, last viceroy of British India, made it clear that he expected India to become a respectable nation. But for Pakistan, he said *“As far as Pakistan is concerned, we are putting up a tent.”* Now remember these twelve words.

Pakistan’s reaction to his statement has help define its trajectory since independence.

It is hard to find another relationship between alleged allies as dysfunctional as Pakistan and America. Yet, because we have need of each other, it endures.

So, ladies and gentlemen, settle in for the bumpy ride of Pakistan-US cooperation.

The US recognized Pakistan two months after the Partition, one of the first nations to do so. Almost from the beginning, it was clear this alliance would not be comprehensive. Instead, this cooperation would be limited to specific things. America largely defined this limited relationship through its lack of response to the 1965 Indo-Pakistan War and 1971 Fall of Dacca.

U.S. need was limited to Pakistan’s support in the Cold War. The US did not want Soviet military alliances through Warsaw Pact to spread beyond Europe. Conversely, America hoped to encircle the Soviet Union with its own alliances. Pakistan became a lynchpin of these efforts, participating in both CENTO and SEATO.

America also wanted Pakistan as a counterweight to India. While officially neutral, Delhi then clearly preferred Moscow over Washington. The US helped Pakistan keep India constantly rattled over Kashmir. In fact, the CIA helped develop ISI to exert covert pressure on India in Kashmir. Given America’s complaints about ISI today, I wonder how many policy makers in Washington regretted that.

While America has no regret about the limited relationship when it serves US interests - it is not always happy when Islamabad does the same thing.

On the other end, Pakistan has pursued its own self-interest, too.

Pakistan never forgot Lord Mountbatten’s description of Pakistan as *“a tent”*. At the time, I think, because Pakistan feared it might be true. Everyone’s question was *“What can Pakistan do to ensure it is not a tent, ready to be blown away with the first strong wind?”*

A twist of partition gave one answer. Compared to its small geography, Pakistan got 33% of British India’s military and did even better with key assets like the well-trained and highly disciplined officer corps, armor, and aircrafts. While Pakistan had fewer economic assets, mili-tar-ily it punched above its weight.

Leaning into that preexisting military strength seemed like a pragmatic choice. But it gave Pakistan's military an edge over its civilian leadership. Early on, the military's significant role was encoded in Pakistan's DNA.

Equally early on, Pakistan could not achieve political stability. Efforts were hijacked by large landowners and other privileged groups that placed self-interest over national interest and continue to do so. Political instability created frequent opportunities for military intervention, reinforcing its appearance of indispensability.

Cooperation with America allowed Pakistan to expand its military strength. But this was a purely transactional decision. This approach continues even today. Whether it's security cooperation with the US or UN Peacekeeping, Pakistan always looks for ways to maintain military units, acquire training, and field experience - on someone else's wallet!

For Pakistan military large defense budgets and entitlements require that India be perceived as a constant existential threat.

Since its independence, The United States of America has provided Pakistan over \$78 billion in aid. While most aid has been military, it includes considerable economic and

humanitarian assistance. True, \$78 billion is just a little over half of the \$150 billion given to Israel but it is more than twice the \$35 billion received by South Korea.

Israel used that money to build itself into a regional superpower, to a degree where the Trump administration largely outsourced Middle East foreign policy leadership to Israel.

South Korea, which once envy Pakistan's growth, emerged as one of the world's top economies and for Pakistan, regardless of how aid was earmarked, very little trickled down for common citizen.

America looks to Pakistan to advance its security interests, and the relationship has soared and plunged as those interests change. During the Cold War, Pakistan was America's bulwark against the Soviet Union in South and Central Asia. That put Pakistan in a good place. After 2001, America became convinced that Islamic terrorism and Islamic rogue states were its main threats. That left Pakistan, understandably, in an awkward position, having printed on its passport *Islamic Republic of Pakistan*. This also gave way to Pakistan's detractors to strongly pursue foreign policy of pushing Pakistan into isolation.

Then Washington's anxieties shifted to China. Arguably, this is a crisis of America's own making. For 30 years, America's political parties have focused on scoring points

against each other by moving one party to extreme right and another pulling to the extreme left.

Both Republicans and Democrats pushed their ideologies rather than cooperating to advance citizen-focused interests. This left a huge hole in the middle where special interest groups and lobbyists poured billions of dollars to buy influence in congress.

It also allowed China a free hand. We see today what China was able to achieve in those 30 years while American political beliefs got polarized.

While Islamabad spent years building ties with China, it was unprepared for America's eventual pivot trying to constrain China's growth. The ground shifted under its feet and Pakistan got blindsided.

*Ladies and gentlemen, condensing seventy-five years of Pakistan-US affairs into a single equation: The US uses Pakistan as an extension of its security interests in the region. Pakistan uses America for funds and military equipment to keep itself strong against India.*

America accuses Pakistan of playing a double game, but that's true for both sides. Pakistan has played this game better than America. And better than most nations in transactional relationships with Washington. Pakistan is not like Saudi Arabia or Kuwait where the ruling family needs to be *loyal* to America to protect itself from its own people.

America doesn't have that kind of leverage on Islamabad and Pakistan does not have to be so called *loyal* to America. A case could be made here that the US needs Pakistan more than vice-versa.

Now that we've examined the bilateral relationship, let's consider where each country is today...and how it got there.

Let's start with Pakistan first. Since the inception of Pakistan in 1947, first the military, then the large landowners, land mafias, and industrialists have dominated three-quarters of Pakistan's economy. Their singular goals have been to maximize their wealth while minimizing their obligations including avoidance of paying taxes - with no sense of duty to less fortunate citizens or enlightened self-interest to uplift the nation as whole.

When Ayub Khan launched large infrastructure development projects like New Karachi and others, he was thwarted. With the projects left half-completed, the land mafias came in and took over. Still, their power remained tenuous. Until Bhutto arrived on the scene wanting his own political powerbase, offered, and said "If you support the PPP, I will legitimize you. I will protect you and your assets." And that's what happened. Today in Sindh the party is run by these land mafias and waderas.

Big industry in Pakistan is also protected. They have their own political patrons or are politicians themselves. They are protected through sugar mills and other subsidies. Look at all the politicians in Punjab today.

The landowners are protected. The military is protected. The land mafias are protected. Major industries are protected. That leaves just a quarter of the economy for everybody else. And these people are tired and disillusioned, because with the major players protected, it's the small group of actors left shouldering the burden for taxes keeping the country afloat.

And now for America, In U.S. we make many claims of American exceptionalism, private sector wealth creation is one where it is true. Since World War Two, America's private sector has been the most formidable engine of wealth creation in the history of mankind. But America's wealth creation rests on foundations of its own: rule of law, higher education, meritocracy, business climate, and infrastructure investment.

Unfortunately, those foundations are now squeezed by politicians from the extreme left and right. Results-focused citizen dialogue is being supplanted by ideological dogma, threatening the scaffolding of American success.

In the eighties Republican President Ronald Reagan would have lunch every Friday with Democratic Speaker of the House Tip O'Neal to discuss citizen-focused issues. Can you imagine Nancy Pelosi today sitting with Donald Trump for a lunch in the White House?

Both parties have papered-over these weaknesses by using military to prop up the economy. Most of the \$2 trillion the US put into Afghanistan for 20 years came back to America through the purchase of military hardware, pharmaceuticals, and infrastructure - a backdoor subsidy. We have come far from America's use of *soft power diplomacy*. The word soft-power has literally disappeared from politician's vocabulary.

The US is out of Afghanistan, but that shell-game continues. There are reasons why military support for Ukraine makes sense for American foreign policy. But there is no doubt it's also been good for the US balance sheet.

Another genuinely exceptional aspect of America is the dollar itself. Never has a currency come so close to being a universal means of exchange. That means almost no part of the global economy is beyond America's reach and its sanctions can be a genuinely effective foreign policy tool. But it also means Washington is always tempted to weaponize dollar rather than exploring other options. With each application, sanctions lose effectiveness by giving other countries incentive to diversify the global financial system.

Large scale immigration, higher education and few other foundational anchors have played a vital role in where America is today. When the Mogul King Shah Jahan was building Taj Mahal, here in Cambridge, Massachusetts Americans was building Harvard University. We in America have trained more PhDs around the world who are presently leading every sector of progress including governing of those countries.

I want to finish by dialing back to the bilateral relationship. Despite the problems I've highlighted, the US and Pakistan will continue to need each other. In the interest of time, I want to limit myself to one example.

When America went into Afghanistan in 2001, most of the world said, "The Taliban's are gone forever." Pakistan knew better; that one-day U.S. troops will withdraw. For 20 years Pakistan kept talking to the Taliban. For Islamabad the hope was that America would value Pakistan as a backdoor channel for what former US Ambassador to Afghanistan & Pakistan Ryan Crocker called "Trump's surrender talks". Instead, America went with Qatar - leaving Pakistanis thinking "Really? Qatar?" It was a missed opportunity as Pakistan would have delivered America a better deal.

As the drone strike killing Ayman al-Zawa-hir shows, the US isn't done with the region. Even if Washington doesn't realize it yet, Pakistan is America's best bet for interacting with the Taliban.

*Ladies and gentlemen, "Nations don't have friends, nations have interests," summarizes Pakistan-US relations.*

If Pakistan and the US were friends, they would have fallen out. If they were married, they would have divorced. But it is an alliance of crafty partners with divergent interests. We keep needing things from each other, so we put up with each other.

Pakistan and America don't have to like each other. I never see us having the kind of relationship like America and Israel where, in the words of Congressman David Price, "When Israeli lobby AIPAC say 'Jump' we say, 'How High?'" in the U.S. congress. But, for the U.S. and Pakistan, each country would benefit from better respecting the other's capabilities.

Of course, there is an elephant in the room. We in America are witnessing the potential Talibanization of America. Trump may be a conman with no real ideology. But many of his backers are Christian fundamentalists and white supremacists pushing America towards theocracy.

My firm belief is, and U.S. history stands behind me to say that the magnificence of America is that our democracy is an ongoing experiment. In last 200 years, many episodes have nearly derailed America's democracy; while we have seen fascism and

**other forms of radical governments coming and going in Europe and rest of the world, America has always remained a strong democracy, it has a way of self-correcting, so I see a strong America for many years and a robust America aggressively competing with a stout China.**

**Now I think it's good time for the leadership of The Forum for Dialogue and Diplomacy to put its best foot forward in examining where the relationship between Pakistan and USA should go from here.**

**Thank you very much.**