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BOOK REVIEW

Book Title: Aid, Politics, and the War of Narratives in the US-Pakistan Relations (A Case Study of Kerry Lugar Berman Act)

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This book analyses the aid, politics, and the war of narratives between the US and Pakistan under the Kerry Lugar Berman Act (2009–2013), using the security-development nexus as a framing discourse and taking a decolonial approach to the subject. The rationale behind this undertaking is that the US-Pakistan relations have witnessed a rollercoaster ride even since Pakistan came into being. Historically, the US interests hardly converged with that of Pakistan, rather they diverged frequently. Both states even interpret their issues differently. While it is a fact that Pakistan became a frontline ally of the United States in the War on Terror (WoT) in Afghanistan, Islamabad joined Washington only reluctantly.

It was America's coercive diplomacy and Islamabad's apprehensions about the potential Indian role in the region that compelled Pakistan to join the US WoT. Since 2001, US-Pakistan bilateral relations have been heavily securitized and have pivoted around the WoT in Afghanistan. It suggests that America discussed, conceptualized, and treated Pakistan from a myopic

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neocolonial lens to achieve its interests in Afghanistan. Hussain Nadim, in this book, thus fleshes out the aid, politics, and war of narratives between the US and Pakistan. Importantly, Nadim uses the security-development as a framing discourse under a postcolonial/de-colonial approach to offer a fresh understanding of US-Pakistan relationship which includes the power dynamics and their impact of civil-military relations in Pakistan. The core thesis of this book is that the security-development nexus implemented through KLB served as a powerful discourse that enabled America to advance its security and foreign policy goals by influencing Pakistan's national security strategy and civil-military relations, while simultaneously enabling local actors in Pakistan to exert their agency.

To understand the politics of aid and the war of narratives, the author takes what he calls a security-development nexus – a powerful Western policy discourse that integrates security and development as a tool to achieve US foreign policy goals in the developing world. The basis of this nexus is a widespread assumption, in academic and policy literature, that security and development move in cahoots and that poverty and underdevelopment in the developing countries pose a direct threat to the security of developed Western states. Some key assumptions of the nexus include: “security and development go hand in hand” and therefore, “there can be no security without development and no development without security”; that a more “secure world is only possible if poor countries are given a real chance to develop”; that “intervention in underdeveloped states, based on the security-development nexus, is mutually beneficial for both donor and recipient countries and can deliver results on the ground.” Nadim notes that security and development are woven inextricably to the point of becoming a dominant discourse in developed states in the Global North who donate large sums of money to the underdeveloped conflict-ridden states in the Global South. The nexus, although appears harmless for the recipients, has created its fair share of problems because it is a Western policy construct which has gradually

arisen from an inherent confirmation bias of the West. Besides, it manifests a deep neocolonial political tendency of the Western states who seek to manage, control, oversee, and influence the internal affairs of the poor recipient states.

Through the prism of security and development going hand in glove, Western powers harbor a reductionist conceptualization of the developing and the underdeveloped world. The reasons for this, according to Nadim, are the ease of developing policies regarding military and economic aid as well as it becomes easier to market it to the Western ears. Arguing that by providing development aid to the poor countries (the other'), their security will increase, and, in turn, the West will be more secure, is easy and effective. Such a simplistic understanding of the 'other' proves instrumental in providing legitimacy to directly intervene and indirectly control the internal affairs of underdeveloped states. Moreover, it gives great leeway to Western donor states to pursue their short-term security needs by undertaking the political, social, and behavioral engineering in the targeted recipient states with an agenda of "nation-building." Against this backdrop, the passage of KLB Act by the American Congress had been a direct enactment of the security-development nexus upon Pakistan. This Act, as the author has established in the book, was designed to serve the security of foreign policy goals of the United States in Pakistan and the whole regional at large. America (re)conceptualized Pakistan according to its reductionist perspective and with a narrow view of its strategic policy needs. After that, it attempted, through KLB, to systematically reengineer Pakistan's behavior on democracy and national security.

In 2011, abduction of a development aid worker named Warren Weinstein by Al-Qaeda and the killing of Osama bin Laden by the US in Pakistan took place after which two things happened. A diplomatic crisis

between Pakistan and the United States ensued and a critical fallout between the civil and military actors in Pakistan. The civilian leaders blamed the military for this security lapse while the military leaders charged that the civilian leadership colluded with the United States. The diplomatic crisis between the United States and Pakistan in 2011 and the civil-military tension in Pakistan were not unexpected; it had been brewing ever since the United States passed the Kerry Lugar Berman Act (KLB) i.e., two years earlier. Under the KLB, the US committed to provide \$7.5 billion over five years in development aid to Pakistan and to the NGOs on the ground, like the USAID, that were working for the socio-economic development of the country. The reaction to the KLB Act varied across civilian and military leadership.

The civilian government headed by Pakistan People's Party (PPP) accepted KLB and dubbed it a pro-democracy bill while the military leadership resented it. It is because the Pakistan Army (as well as the opposition political parties such as the PML-N, PML-Q, and JUI-F) saw this assistance under the KLB as an attempt to sabotage it as an institution and, in this way, influence the national security policy of Pakistan, under the guise of development assistance and democracy promotion. For example, through KLB's stringent terms and conditions, America put the responsibility and the blame of its failure in the war on terrorism on Pakistan, both at policy execution and the narrative levels. Through these conditions, not only was the negative narrative about Pakistan legitimized but also reinforced as policy. Moreover, America reconfigured Pakistan's geographical cartography by lumping it with Afghanistan in what is termed AfPak thereby moving Pakistan away from South Asia. The immediate result was a surge in terrorist attacks in Pakistan but a drop in business, tourism, investor confidence and capital flight resulting in a dip in country's GDP. Pakistan GDP's growth rate was 5% in 2007 but dropped to 1.7% in 2008, and 0.36% in 2009. After doing

so, the US applied the “winning hearts and minds” strategy to sway public opinion in its favor by supporting NGOs, media outlets, and religious groups. Nevertheless, Pakistan was never a passive bystander in all this and actively co-produced American narrative of itself. That is why, despite all the outrage over KLB, Pakistan, especially its military, accepted it.

The security establishment in Pakistan was highly critical of the KLB and viewed it as an attack on national security and sovereignty of Pakistan. However, it still accepted KLB to pursue its strategic interests. Hence Pakistan exerted its agency from a position of relative weakness. It transpired in two ways. First, Pakistan helped create an emergency-like situation by using the narrative that it is a weak state with large nuclear arsenal, raising the stakes for America and the rest of the world to get involved in Pakistan's long-term development and security requirements through programs like KLB. Second, by becoming the most-allied ally of America on WoT, Pakistan quietly modernized its armed forces and military technology in preparation for the greater threats of civil war in Afghanistan and Indian aggression. In the same vein, Pakistan was able to implement its long-term policy of fencing the Afghan-Pakistan border and pursuing its Kashmir policy with India with the assurance that America would intervene to protect Pakistan from Indian aggression. This was made possible by having America dependent on Pakistan’s support in the fight against terrorism. In this way, Pakistan asserted its agency while co-producing the nexus.

This book gives a fresh understanding of US-Pakistan relations and is thus important in that regard. Its findings are significant because they have demonstrated that foreign aid under KLB sparked a dialectical power struggle between Pakistan and the US and between local actors in the former. These actors utilized the indivisibility of security and development to further their vested interests – essentially the politics of aid. Through this book, Hussain Nadim views Pakistan and the US as reluctant allies, perhaps reluctant

enemies, as they seldom tried to build upon their potential strengths, but they largely focused on each other's vulnerabilities.

Nadim, sanguinely, notes that the root cause of the US failure in Afghanistan and Pakistan is the deep-rooted Western centrism and the scarcity of any serious intellectual expertise by American scholars or policymakers on the developing world. Based upon this, he predicts that the US will also fail in China. He hopes that this work will prove to be an evidence-based study for academics, think tanks, and the policy community in both Pakistan and the US who may break free from the confirmation biases and delve deep into the true nature of this bilateral relationship. The evolution of respectable relations will help mitigate and clientele style of engagement and might prove mutually beneficial for both states. Cordial relations with the US might put Pakistan, being ruled by extractive ruling elite for decades, on the path of functional democracy and true sovereignty.