

**Book Review**  
**By**  
**Majid Mehmood**

**Daniel S. Markey, No Exit from Pakistan: America's Tortured Relationship with Islamabad (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 247**

In *No Exit from Pakistan: America's Tortured Relationship with Islamabad* Daniel S. Markey argues that Pakistan has often been a hostile and difficult partner for United States to manage. In his opinion, however, despite several setbacks and failures in the bilateral relationship neither Pakistan nor the United States can afford a permanent breakup. Markey maintains that there are immediate, vital and emergent threats emanating from Pakistan that will have a negative impact on US' regional interests in South Asia, Central Asia and Middle East. It is due to this reason the author, contrary to what many experts and officials may feel in Washington, argues that the United States cannot afford to disengage from Pakistan. The term "No Exit" in the title of the book borrowed from an old WWII French play *Huis Clos* is meant to convey this sense of compulsive engagement.

Daniel Markey methodically surveys Pakistan – US relations disaggregated at three levels of domestic, regional and international politics. As a result the reader easily grasps the arguments presented in the book. Markey has linked all his arguments on these three levels with broader US interests in the region in a manner that they truly reflect his all – inclusive understanding of Pakistan and US policy objectives in the region.

There are broadly two themes covered in the book. The first theme is that Pakistan has transformed into a more dangerous country for US interests and poses a complex foreign policy challenge for the US. Markey in his observations on Pakistan notes the societal trends towards the radical right, the growing deterioration of state institutions and governance weaknesses. He believes that these trends coupled with Pakistan's geopolitical and geostrategic features will create problems for US policy. The Second theme is the set of recommendations he gives to US policy makers as to how they could salvage the interests of the United States under multiple possible scenarios *vis a vis* Pakistan.

Writing about Pakistan's domestic politico-economic milieu, Markey has identified four different faces of Pakistan: an elite dominated country where feudals and top industrialists have appropriated its resources; a garrison state where the political center of power is the military; a terrorist incubator and lastly, a land of youthful idealists. The author has explained the evolution of these distinct faces of Pakistani society and arrives at three conclusions about the future trajectory of Pakistani State: First is revolution and state failure, second is continuation of crisis of Pakistani state in case if the revolution does not happen, and third is the success of reformist politics within Pakistan.

The author describes in some detail the roots of anti – American sentiments within all the sections of Pakistani society i.e. among the liberal, nationalists and Islamists. The book focuses on how these sentiments have played a role in frustrating US financial and political engagement with Pakistan.

A significant portion of the book covers the larger geopolitical context of US engagement with Pakistan and the South Asia region. The author has correctly identified that US engagement with Pakistan did not exist in a vacuum and was influenced by what was happening in the broader region and at the international level. In Cold War days, the author argues, containment of communism was US strategic goal which led to the engagement with Pakistan and resulted in security alliances and economic support. In the current context, managing the rise of China is becoming the operative principle underlying US interest in continuing its engagement with Pakistan. So the interest is not in Pakistan *per se*, but the broader regional developments are driving US policy.

In the concluding chapters of the book, Daniel Markey has outlined policy options for the United States and also discusses their implications. The three options he presents are: defensive insulation, military first cooperation, and a comprehensive approach.

In defensive insulation, the author argues for a stronger US pressure on Pakistan in case the US continues to fails in getting cooperation from an increasingly hostile Pakistan. According to Markey, this should be done by building diplomatic, military and political barriers around Pakistan in its immediate neighborhood. He argues that the US should also be prepared to target Pakistan's nuclear program militarily.

On military cooperation, Markey says that the US should enhance its military to military cooperation with Pakistan in order to cultivate officers within the Pakistan military ranks. In Markey's opinion, this strategy would be aimed at countering increasing Islamist and anti-American currents in Pakistan's military ranks.

On comprehensive approach towards Pakistan, Markey argues for increasing US spending on economic, cultural and political spheres in the country and thus build moderate constituencies there. At the same time he argues against subsidizing Pakistan's economic growth. The author maintains that this work has to be done by Pakistanis themselves and the US role should only be supportive.

For South Asia watchers, the book provides tools for a deeper understanding of US policy towards Pakistan and South Asia. Three other books on similar topics written by important scholars on South Asia have recently been published in the United States. These are Stephen Cohen's *'Shooting for a Century: The India Pakistan Conundrum'*, Bruce Reidel's *'Avoiding Armageddon: America, India, and Pakistan to the Brink and Back'* and Vali Nasr's *'The Dispensable Nation'*. It is interesting to note that Markey's assessment is not fundamentally different from what has been discussed in these books. In fact, this book reinforces the view that there is continuity in the US approach towards South Asia which is anchored around three core principles: rebalancing to Asia – Pacific, containment of China and propping up India as a regional counter weight to China.

As a new government came into the office in Pakistan in 2013, it appears that the Obama administration has reviewed the tactics of its approach towards the new government but not the strategic objectives. These tactics include components of all the three policy options laid out by the author, Daniel S. Markey e.g. managing anti – Americanism through less visible involvement, giving time to Nawaz administration to settle down, suspending drone strikes, pushing IMF to inject money into Pakistan's economy, increasing people to people contact and supporting Nawaz's overtures to India and support for Afghan elections.

The book reaffirms the prevailing view across all the sections in Pakistan that the US - Pakistan relations will remain transactional at best and may turn outright hostile in certain situation despite what the pleasantries of strategic dialogue

process may suggest. It is also difficult to agree with the author that any potential radical/revolutionary political change in Pakistan will lead to state collapse. Linking the two without any substantive evidence reflects the tendency towards oversimplification on the part of many western writers on a complex subject of state, society and political order in a developing Islamic state.

It will be a test of Pakistani leadership to navigate the country out of complex strategic environment evolving in the wake of the US policies in the region.

The book provides an excellent reading material for Pakistani and non-Pakistani academics, practitioners of policy and strategy in the fields of security, foreign policy, observers of the US-Pakistan, and US – South Asia relations.