

***Comment***

## **Pakistan Foreign Policy: An Analysis**

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Foreign policy is a device, a pattern of behaviour that a state adopts towards other states in the pursuit of its national interest. Employing the instruments of propaganda and diplomacy, policy formulators seek to realize the substantive objectives of state's security, maintenance and survival as well as economic well-being of the nation. Foreign policy, as such, is not only a reflection of national goals and aspirations but also of competence, political sagacity and skill of the leadership to plan and pursue the policy in such a way so as to promote national interest by achieving the set goals. In order to be effective, a policy has to be dynamic to adjust to the changing world situation. Strategies, tactics and options are to be chosen carefully and wisely, for whatever approach or a course adopted in relation to other states, an element of risk can not be completely ruled out. In the ever-changing world of real politik no strategy or option can ensure complete success and can be entirely risk free, one can at the most strive for a less risky course. Given the dynamics and complexities of world politics, it would be wrong to characterize a particular policy as a complete success or a dismal failure. An element of gain in some way and loss in other respect is inherently associated with an approach. A politically sagacious and farsighted leader would opt for a less risky course where in the element of loss is minimal, bearable and does not endanger state's survival and its independent existence. A successful policy is one which keeps the enemy farther and friends nearer, which is rational, pragmatic, fully cognizant of the exigencies of real politik and dynamic to adjust to the challenges of changing world.

There is no denying the fact that Pakistan foreign policy, since the fifties due to the country's geo-strategic location, has been subject to stresses and strains generated by power politics in the region during the Cold War and post-Cold War era. After the 9/11 episode and the US-initiated 'war against terror' external pressure on policy has markedly increased. Facing unfriendly neighbours on the border, having limited

resources and little if any capacity to change the course of events occurring at regional and global levels, Pakistan has limited policy options. Hence most of the time its foreign policy has been reactive based on a set of responses to an evolving situation. The questions that arise in this context are: How far have the policy planners succeeded in realizing the objectives? To what extent have they resisted external pressure on matters vital to state's security?

A penetrating survey of the last sixty years reveals the ruler's lack of dynamism and farsightedness in dealing with external relations as is indicative from three distinct policy constants—US centric, Kashmir's primacy and aid-oriented nature—which have remained the basic aspects of Pakistan's policy since the fifties permeating the entire gamut of Pakistan's relations with the external world. The questions arise: How far has the consistent adherence to the above traits over the years helped in realizing the set policy goals? Have the alliances with America secured Pakistan against India? Has the Kashmir centric stance brought the solution nearer in sight? Has foreign aid made Pakistan economically strong?

Notwithstanding the shifting power balance at regional and global levels, maintenance of special ties with Washington has remained the basic motto of the ruling elite be it civilian or military during the Cold War and post-Cold War periods. Beginning in the early years of independence with Liaquat Ali's visit to America bypassing Moscow's invitation at a time when Cold War had not yet engulfed Asia, the trend was consolidated during the alignment years and has now become an inherent part of Pakistan's foreign policy. Despite various ups and downs in the US-Pakistan relations and the latter's exit from Seato and Cento, the policy has remained US-tilted. Islamabad's position on regional and international issues continues to be conditioned by US global and regional considerations. After the 9/11 catastrophe the tilt has turned in to an unqualified alignment with America. Following its participation with the US initiated 'war against terror' (which in fact is America's war of terror to bully the weak and defiant states) without any known conditionalities, Islamabad has lost whatever little freedom of action in policy matters it had in the past. Musharraf's alignment with Bush has rendered Pakistan subservient to American dictates. The aligned Pakistan in the Cold War period was able to develop friendship with China in utter disregard to US displeasure. The Ayub government in the sixties had the guts to close the US communication base at Badaber despite President Johnson's insistence and financial incentives to retain the base.

As for the objective of securing protection against India through defence alliances with a super power, Pakistan's membership of Seato

and Cento failed to provide that security as was borne out by the 1965 war with India and the break up of Pakistan in 1971. Seato and Cento were a part of US strategy to counter and contain communism in the region, where as Pakistan wrongly construed its membership as a guarantee against external aggression. The policy on the contrary backfired by incurring Soviet wrath. Moscow retaliated by endorsing India's stand on Kashmir and backing Kabul on the 'Pukhtoonistan' issue. The late sixties and the period that followed thereafter witnessed how Indo-Soviet collaboration formalized by their 1971 friendship treaty helped inflicting defeat on Pakistan forces in the former East Pakistan province. An alliance between two unequal parties of varying strength with divergent interests and threat perceptions often proves advantageous to a powerful partner as it renders the small ally vulnerable to the former's pressure. Same was the case with the US-Pakistan alliance. Washington had never shared Pakistan's threat perception vis-à-vis India nor does it view recent Delhi-Kabul collusion as Pakistan targeted. The cost of alignment of the Cold War era was thus much higher in terms of Pakistan's freedom of action and prestige than the benefits it received in the form of military and economic assistance of which the latter was much less than what India procured from Washington after its 1962 war with China.

However in the unipolar world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, without a balancing force to contain and restrain the US might, small and weak states find themselves at the mercy of US whims and fancies. In 2001, facing economic sanctions and external isolation after its nuclear blast Pakistan was on the verge of economic collapse. Musharraf military regime, therefore, had to side with Bush's war against terror. However, since 2004 situation in the region has changed the way America had not anticipated. Without achieving its war objectives in Iraq and Afghanistan, America now finds itself badly entrenched there, with no face-saving honourable exit. This being the ground realities, Pakistan's continued cooperation with the US 'war against terror' is fraught with dangerous pitfalls having ominous portents for the country's future.

The grave consequences of the policy are already discernable from religious extremism, increasing anti-Americanism, growing militancy and incidents of suicide bombing and mounting number of civilian and military casualties suffered in the military operation by Pakistan and Nato forces in the tribal areas. Needless to state that Pakistan's military operation in the tribal areas, in compliance with Washington's persistent calls to 'do more', has led to increased clashes between the security forces and the militants there. Besides inflating the number of casualties on both sides, the action has brought discredit to the

army and wrecked national cohesion – a situation watched gleefully by the outside forces projecting the break up of the country. Musharraf's full cooperation with Bush has thus not only compromised the country's sovereignty but has put its territorial integrity and existence at stake.

When assessed against the prevailing domestic scenario, the policy instead of enhancing the security has made the country so vulnerable that even the US 'protégé Karzai whose writ does not extend beyond Kabul had the courage to threaten Pakistan of military action. Emboldened by the prevailing state of affairs, Delhi and Kabul have joined hands in their vilification campaign against Pakistan accusing it of involvement in terrorism in their countries. If Pakistan, according to some western analysts, has become the most dangerous country in the world, the pertinent question is: Who has made it so? Besides the US Afghan policy, both Zia and Musharraf by siding with America, though under different circumstances and for varying motives, can be held responsible for bringing this country to the brink of disaster.

The gravity of the situation necessitates an urgent policy review by the present coalition government. The entire policy adopted and followed by one man at the helm of affairs before February 2008 elections needs to be debated threadbare in the parliament with all its pros and cons including the ramifications of secret undertaking, if there was any, given by Musharraf to Bush.

It is high time Pakistan should de-link itself from this so-called war against terror which has no end in sight and no enemy in visible proximity. As for terrorism and militancy in the frontier region, rooted in the past US sponsored Afghan 'jihad' waged in alliance with Zia-ul-Haq against the Soviet Union, the problem though aggravated by Musharraf's full cooperation with Bush, has to be tackled as Pakistan's own internal matter. A two-pronged strategy of dialogue and development should be adopted. To establish the writ of the government, force could be used as a last resort when all other avenues are exhausted. That America opposes peace deals and insists on the use of force against the militants' is evident from its continuous violation of Pakistan border by its spy planes and drones, firing of missiles in to Pakistan territory and its repeated threats of Nato forces' action in hot pursuit in the tribal area. Nonetheless, the US needs Pakistan as long as its forces remain engaged in Afghanistan. Without having Pakistan on board, it would be difficult for America to bring their involvement in Afghanistan to any logical conclusion. American and Nato troops get their supplies of fuel, arsenals, rations and other essential commodities through the courtesy of Pakistan. Using its clout, the government can refuse to be bullied. Pakistan's

strategic location enables it take a firm clear cut stand against the US intransigence.

As for the Washington – Kabul concern about border crossing by the Taliban militants, despite Pakistan's deployment of about 80000 troops and build up of 800 check posts to monitor the border, militants sneaking cannot be completely stopped due to the difficult terrain of about 1200 mile long Pak-Afghan border and also because of the presence of sympathizers and supporters of Taliban in both the countries. Given the above ground realities, Pakistan should respond to US incessant 'do more' sermons by telling the Americans to do more in Afghanistan for reconstruction, and control of corruption and poppy cultivation there. At the same time it should, notwithstanding Kabul's objection and the US-UN pressures, go ahead with the border fencing and repatriation of Afghan refugees to Afghanistan. As long as foreign forces remain in Afghanistan, peace is unlikely to return to that war-ravaged country. The ongoing conflict between the Taliban, the Karzai regime and the western forces would continue to have spill over effects on the countries in proximity. Pakistan, a small but strategically located nuclear power, beset with enormous problems of its own, can ill afford a policy of interference and bear the brunt of others' war. Playing its card well and wisely, it should extricate itself from the Afghan quagmire.

Regarding the Kashmir-oriented approach, Pakistan stance towards India indeed revolves round the Kashmir dispute. Causing three military encounters in the past, the dispute remains a major irritant in Delhi-Islamabad ties, consistently driving both to massive arms build up, conventional as well as nuclear. Suffice is to say that the policy of dialogue and dualogue has not served the purpose. Despite past military confrontations on the border, several parleys held between the two from time to time, the recently resumed slow and unproductive peace process in the aftermath of the Kargil war, the resolution remains as distant as ever. Even Musharraf's yielding on the relevance of the UN resolutions on plebiscite in Jammu and Kashmir has failed to soften India's stance. It remains unwilling to move an inch from its so far adhered position on the issue and refuses to reduce its massive military presence in Kashmir. Given Delhi's obduracy, unwillingness of major powers, especially America, to exert effective pressure on India and the apparent slowed-down pace of Kashmiri freedom fighters' armed struggle, the issue is unlikely to be resolved the way Pakistan seeks in the new future. Except the two countries consensus on CBMs, soft border concept and recognition of Kashmiris as a party to the dispute, their continued negotiations have not made any headway towards a solution acceptable to all three parties. In view of its own domestic compulsions and deep

involvement in the US war of terror, Pakistan has little option except adhering to its principled stand on the Kashmiris' right of self determination as promised under the UN resolutions, keep extending its moral and diplomatic support to Kashmiris freedom struggle and publicizing the issue of human rights violations at all international forums. Without forsaking the Kashmiris cause, Pakistan has to first make itself economically strong and politically stable so as to negotiate with Delhi from a position of equal strength. Any demonstration of haste by Islamabad under the prevailing unfavourable political atmosphere would be harmful to the cause. For, a powerful India, finding the climate conducive, would try to extract as much concessions as possible from a weak Pakistan by procuring a settlement on its terms. Any settlement in order to be effective, lasting and enforceable, has to be between parties of equal strength, ensuring gains for both without a loss of face of either party.

Concerning the so far pursued objective of seeking foreign aid, Pakistan, beset with enormous problems needed foreign assistance in the initial years of its inception. However, with the passage of time, rulers' reliance on foreign aid has increased so much that the country's foreign debt now amounts to about \$ 36 billion. Failing to make the country economically strong and self-sufficient enabling it to stand on its own feet, foreign aid has on the contrary enhanced its dependence on the IMF and World Bank which now dictate their terms in economic matters. Being the major aid donor giving \$1.5 billion annually since 2001, US feels no hesitation in showing its preferences about the way Pakistan internal and external affairs could be managed. This is borne out by statements made on different occasions by Bush, Rice, the US envoy and other American officials. Under the tutelage of IMF-WB-WTO, Pakistan is selling its vital industrial assets and decides to specialise in industries like textiles without producing textile machinery thus making its market available for foreign goods of industrialized nations.

Besides compromising its sovereign status, the policy pursued in the last sixty years has failed to achieve the objectives of strengthening security, resolving Kashmir dispute and making Pakistan economically strong. Hence the urgency for a policy reshuffle at all levels – global as well as regional. However, the question of import is: Does the present civilian set up have the capacity, will, and resolve to undertake the reappraisal and initiate a change in the so far pursued stance? Only time will tell.