**Bloody Nose to India, Iran and Afghanistan**

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Pakistan’s geopolitical trajectory has been deeply intertwined with the interests of superpowers since its inception. Positioned as a frontline state during the Cold War, Pakistan found itself at the epicentre of the ideological battle between communism and capitalism. Opting for the latter, Pakistan forged significant alliances with the United States and its allies through agreements such as SEATO and CENTO, positioning itself in direct opposition to the Soviet Union. This geopolitical alignment exposed Pakistan to intense regional tensions, exacerbated by the infiltration of communist ideology within its society. The resulting confrontation between the state and socialist elements contributed to significant internal strife, further compounded by periods of dictatorship and political discord. This turbulent backdrop ultimately led to three devastating wars, draining Pakistan’s precious resources that could have otherwise been allocated to the nation’s growth and development. Additionally, the culmination of these conflicts resulted in the secession of East Pakistan, giving rise to the independent state of Bangladesh. In the late seventies and eighties, Pakistan grappled with a tumultuous period marked by social, cultural, religious, and political upheaval. This era was characterized by a double jeopardy scenario: on one hand, the USSR’s expansionist ambitions led to the subjugation of Afghanistan, bringing Soviet forces dangerously close to Pakistan’s borders. Simultaneously, Pakistan endured the imposition of another dictatorship, which sought to instil jihadist fervour within the populace, fostering a climate conducive to waging jihad against the USSR in Afghanistan and later against India in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

The influx of Afghan refugees, coupled with the presence of die-hard elements from foreign intelligence agencies and armed forces, transformed Pakistan into a battleground of ideologies, low-intensity operations, psychological warfare, and overt and covert operations across the nation. Among the Baloch population, grappling with abject poverty, the allure of communist ideology catalyzed the emergence of the Baloch insurgency, particularly along the borders with Iran’s Balochistan and Sistan provinces. This insurgency led to cross-border movements of Baloch insurgents, sparking tensions with Iran.

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The sour relations with India on the one hand, and Iran on the other hand finally culminated in surgical strikes by India inside Pakistan on 26th Feb 2019 allegedly targeting terrorist hideouts, with no consequence and Iranian missile and drone attacks inside Pakistan’s Balochistan province on 16 January 2024, claiming that it had targeted the Iranian Baloch militant group Jaish ul-Adl. In response to India’s miscalculated and non-professional strikes, which resulted in minimal damage, Pakistan’s armed forces demonstrated exceptional precision, control, and professionalism in their strategic operations. Employing surgical precision, they locked the high-value industrial and military assets deep inside India, disengaged and unloaded their load away from them ensuring minimal collateral damage while maximizing effectiveness. This strategic execution not only took India by surprise but also garnered international recognition for Pakistan’s adept military capabilities. In contrast to India’s anticipated surgical strikes, Iran’s missile and drone attacks inside Pakistani territory resulted in civilian casualties, eliciting shock from both civilian and military leadership in Pakistan and drawing international attention. Responding swiftly, Pakistan’s armed forces executed precise and targeted counterattacks, effectively neutralizing high-value terrorists sheltered within Iran while safeguarding civilians from harm. Much like India’s experience, Iran also gleaned a valuable lesson: the repercussions of provoking Pakistan’s armed forces. These incidents highlight the imperative of dialogue, diplomacy, and restraint in de-escalating cross-border tensions. They reaffirm Pakistan’s dedication to protecting its citizens and territorial integrity while promoting regional stability through peaceful resolution of disputes.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Pakistan found itself thrust into the global spotlight once again, this time in the fight against a new adversary: Al-Qaeda. This stateless terrorist organization, adept at recruiting volunteers and jihadists from various regions, including the Swat Valley, Pashtun belt, and other parts of the country, posed a significant threat. Initially supported and armed to combat the Soviet Union, Al-Qaeda shifted its focus to the United States, leveraging its newfound power, influence, and vast military and financial resources.

Following the devastating coordinated attacks orchestrated by Al-Qaeda on iconic symbols of American power, including the destruction of the Twin Towers and an attack on the Pentagon, the United States was driven to a state of fury. In response, the U.S. issued a stark ultimatum, threatening to bomb Pakistan into the Stone Age unless it collaborated in the fight against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban government in Afghanistan, which provided sanctuary to extremists.

Consequently, Pakistan found itself once again entangled in the affairs of a superpower. Sensing the urgency to dismantle Al-Qaeda, the U.S. orchestrated a change in Pakistan’s civilian government, replacing it with a military dictator who, in the subsequent decade, aligned with U.S. objectives. However, this collaboration came at a price as it drew the ire of Al-Qaeda and its Pakistani affiliates, such as Tehrik-e-Taliban (TTP), resulting in heightened internal strife and security challenges for Pakistan.

As a result, Al-Qaeda and Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), steadfast in their commitment to wage war against the United States, deemed Pakistan a friend of the U.S. and their staunch enemy. Fueled by access to modern and lethal American weaponry, TTP militants seized control of the Swat and Buner valleys, imposing their draconian laws on the populace. The gravity of the situation dawned upon the Pakistani government and armed forces when TTP forces advanced towards Islamabad, threatening to impose their version of Shariah nationwide. In response, Pakistani forces launched a courageous operation, resulting in the martyrdom of numerous soldiers who valiantly fought against TTP operatives. While many militants fled across the border to Afghanistan, seeking refuge in safe havens, the imposition of Taliban rule on 15th August 2021 emboldened these rogue elements. They became increasingly active, launching cross-border terrorist attacks within Pakistan, often with support from certain elements within the Afghan Taliban’s administration. Since 2021, TTP attacks have claimed the lives of over 2000 security personnel and civilians.

In the latest incident on March 16, 2024, a group of suicide bombers targeted a military checkpoint in Pakistan’s North Waziristan district, located in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province neighbouring Afghanistan. The attack resulted in the martyrdom of seven soldiers, which infuriated the armed forces to the extent that they finally decided to teach TTP a befitting lesson.

The heinous and abhorrent attack prompted the Pakistani armed forces to undertake precise and intelligence-based anti-terrorist operations within border regions of Afghanistan as a last resort and killed over eight hardcore terrorists belonging to the Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group, a faction of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which had claimed responsibility for numerous terrorist attacks inside Pakistan.

However, the aftermath of these attacks and counter-attacks has cast a shadow over Pakistan’s entire border regions. With borders spanning 559 km with India, 2670 km with Afghanistan, and 959 km with Iran (except China), the security situation has intensified dramatically. These border areas, often insecure and deserted, lack basic infrastructure such as roads, electricity, and gas, rendering them highly vulnerable and porous. This poses a grave risk to the lives of border guards and troops stationed there, while logistics and supply provision become arduous tasks, straining financial and economic resources.

Consequently, Pakistan faces the daunting challenge of allocating significant financial resources and deploying armed forces to these volatile borders. This reallocation of resources, predominantly from civilian sectors, to bolster military capabilities further exacerbates economic strains. The resulting higher inflation and financial burdens weigh heavily on the common man, already struggling to make ends meet. Thus, the nation finds itself grappling with multifaceted challenges that demand prudent management and strategic foresight to navigate through this turbulent period. Indeed, the prevailing hostility and perceived security volatility in Pakistan, regardless of its justification, send shockwaves across the globe. These conditions instil fear among investors, traders, and businesspersons, deterring them from engaging with Pakistan. As a result, the country faces additional premiums and costs associated with investing, trading, and conducting business, further hindering its economic growth and development.

To address these pressing issues, it is imperative to prioritize intense diplomatic efforts led by our top diplomats, including the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, the foreign ministry and the establishment. This necessitates comprehensive brainstorming sessions to devise strategic approaches aimed at engaging all neighbours with transparency, sincerity, and noble intentions. Establishing highly effective channels of communication, operational 24/7, is crucial for facilitating dialogue and resolving differences through bilateral or multilateral discussions.

Moreover, it is imperative to develop short-term, medium-term, and long-term plans to tackle underlying issues comprehensively. Emphasizing mutually beneficial trade, investment, and business relations can foster dependencies and overlapping interests across sectors, promoting stability and cooperation. Additionally, pursuing common interests with neighbouring countries is essential, as it creates a scenario where resorting to kinetic power usage would prove detrimental to all parties involved. Additionally, investing in people-to-people exchanges, cultural diplomacy, and educational initiatives can foster greater understanding and goodwill among citizens of neighbouring countries, laying the foundation for enduring friendships and constructive engagement at the grassroots level. By adopting a multifaceted approach that combines diplomatic finesse, economic cooperation, regional collaboration, and people-centred initiatives, Pakistan can navigate its geopolitical challenges effectively and chart a course towards a more peaceful and prosperous future.

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