**Climate, world order and Pakistan** Part - II

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By Ashraf Jehangir Qazi

By 2050 Pakistan will have at least 350 million people. Its military and elite dominated political paradigm, neo-feudal attitudes, budgetary priorities, economic strategies, and raging climate heat make it impossible to finance a Pakistan Green New Deal.

External financial assistance, even on the most optimistic assumptions, will not cover even a fraction of the cost. Trebling tax revenues, curtailing inessential imports, reducing corruption, providing investment opportunities for human resource and infrastructure building investment, etc can help meet the costs of survival. But resource mobilization for national transformation and climate resilience will require political reform on a scale the prevailing political system will not permit.

Meanwhile, the US is exacerbating the global crisis. It precludes the emergence of a world order that can collectively address the challenges of climate warming and its several lethal consequences. It has, instead, prioritized the elimination of Putin’s Russia as a potential rival power and the unravelling of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership. This would leave China to face the might of the US alone. It also relegates the climate challenge to the back burner.

Putin made a fatal mistake in Ukraine. He may not lose the war but his regime could be undermined. China will resist the absorption of Russia into the American sphere of influence. Russian public opinion prefers being an independent strategic partner of China instead of becoming a subordinate of the US. Accordingly, the Ukraine-Russia war has been transformed by the US into a US-Russia war on Ukrainian soil at the expense of the Ukrainian people. Ukraine borders Russia and lies on the historic invasion path to Russia. The US decision to make it a de-facto Nato member state raises the risks of nuclear confrontation and conflict. This could strike midnight on the DDC.

The US has designated China as its number one enemy. It is hostile towards the BRI and, accordingly, also dislikes CPEC. It is dangerously encouraging Taiwanese independence which according to international law, acknowledged by the US, is an integral part of China. But through its policy of 'strategic ambiguity', the US threatens China in its own backyard, and through its Quad strategy in the Asia-Pacific region. China knows the US will resist its emergence as a global power and is, in turn, developing its own global diplomatic and financial influence.

The US is also determined to ensure – if necessary through conflict with Iran – that Israel remains the sole nuclear power in the Middle East. This will ensure continued regional instability with all its implications for terrorism. However, there are super profits to be made from an endless war on terrorism.

Iran supports the creation of a nuclear weapons free zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East which would remove any nuclear threat to Israel. But Israel and the US prefer to maintain Israel’s nuclear monopoly. This represents a nuclear threat to the region. Iran’s determination to protect itself against such a threat is seen as nuclear provocation. US demands – vis-a-vis the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – exemplify the situation. Iran has been in complete compliance with the JCPOA in contrast to the US and yet the US insists on Iran making further concessions in return for the US rejoining the JCPOA. Iranians may have reservations about their regime but they will not accept nuclear blackmail.

The overwhelming majority of Americans are decent and peace-loving but have little say in or reliable information about policies made by the ruling 0.01 per cent. Nevertheless, after allowing their rulers to bring the whole world to the brink of destruction only they in cooperation with the rest of the world can save themselves and the world.

As for Afghanistan, we should be the best of friends for the Afghan people, especially given the state of our relations with India. The attack on our Kabul mission is a new low point in our relations with Afghanistan which is now ruled by our erstwhile favourites who no longer like or trust us. The rest of Afghanistan does not like us either for having imposed the Taliban on them. We have no friends in Afghanistan today.

Our Kashmir policy has become posturing largely empty of realistic content. The Kashmiris are only too aware of this, hence the independence option gaining ground. Meanwhile, the unstable India-Pakistan stalemate is exacerbated by the US partiality. As a result of American indulgence of the Modi government, Kashmir remains a nuclear flashpoint between two nuclear powers that no longer discuss nuclear risk reduction measures.

Nevertheless, our position on Kashmir is in conformity with the UN Charter, UN resolutions, international humanitarian and human rights law, and the wishes of the majority of the Kashmiri people. India’s position and actions are in violation of all these. The Kashmir dispute, however, cannot be settled through conflict of any kind. After India’s illegal annexation of Occupied Kashmir on August 5, 2019 and the intensification of its brutal repression the prospect of meaningful dialogue has been put on hold. Track II conversations, however, should continue although they currently contribute little or nothing towards progress on Kashmir because of India’s obduracy.

The US, moreover, does not want Pakistan to rock the boat over Kashmir and, for that matter, neither does China. The US and other Western countries have from time to time conveyed their concerns over the human rights situation in Occupied Kashmir and major human rights organizations have been much more critical. Nevertheless, the contrast between the West’s preoccupation with Ukraine and its relative indifference towards Kashmir is obvious. The award of this year’s Nobel Peace Prize to an anti-Putin Russian human rights activist – ignoring the life-long sacrifices of Kashmiri freedom fighter and peace activist, Yasin Malik – is a case in point. The US refusal to designate India as a country of special concern with regard to religious discrimination is another.

Although India’s frustrations in Occupied Kashmir continue, it has been assured Pakistan’s nuclear deterrence does not extend across the LOC. Pakistan’s de-facto acceptance of the prevailing status quo – vehemently denied in public policy statements – is known to every Kashmiri on both sides of the LOC.

While there is no need to hurry towards any structured dialogue with India in the absence of any real improvement in the situation in Occupied Kashmir or any willingness on the part of India to consider principled compromise solutions, there is the need to engage with it in the context of the climate and nuclear imperatives. Neither India nor Pakistan can effectively address such challenges without engaging with each other.

A Saarc Climate Summit could pave the way towards informal discussions on bilateral issues that obstruct critical regional cooperation on climate and other issues. With India these could include exchanges on Kashmir, nuclear doctrines and avoiding mishaps, reducing hostile narratives, confidence and security building measures, etc. Musharraf’s four point proposal could be revisited whenever India is ready.

Currently, Indians and Pakistanis know little about each other except in terms of negative narratives and stereotypes. How to address this situation is a matter of public education and political leadership. Until recently, this was not considered a priority. But climate awareness should make it clear that both countries share a common fate.

China has been the jewel in Pakistan’s strategy. Its economy will soon be several times larger than that of the US. While relations with the US and China are not mutually exclusive, the view that Pakistan has to maintain a 'balance' in its relations with them is flawed.

The US's strategic partner in South Asia and the Indian Ocean is India, not Pakistan. It opposes BRI and CPEC which have enormous potential for Pakistan. It sees Pakistan’s internal political mess as a strategic card to keep Pakistan in line through interventions and sanctions. China does not leverage its relations with Pakistan in this manner. It is the principal contributor to Pakistan’s conventional deterrent capability. It has a strategic interest in Pakistan’s independent viability.

And yet because of Pakistan’s failing state syndrome this critical relationship is at a crossroads. Xinjiang is a challenge but the Foreign Office has managed it competently and maintained the confidence of China. Politicians with little knowledge, strong opinions and a range of exploitable vulnerabilities are a different matter. The 'security establishment' is closest to China but feels the pressure of the US. The Chinese have, accordingly, intimated they are not fated to be eternal enemies of India and have no plans to go to war with India although they see it as a hostile and dangerous rival.

We should partner China in the war against terrorism instead of the US which has actually exacerbated terrorist violence in Afghanistan and the region through its arrogant, brutal and short-sighted policies. Accordingly, the bilateral China-Pakistan relationship should complement and reinforce the emerging trilateral China-Russia-Iran relationship within the context of the BRI, the Shanghai Cooperation Agreement (SCO) and climate cooperation.

In conclusion, I believe renowned think tanks like the PIIA, Karachi should begin charting in specific detail an integrated set of survival, development and external strategies that the people of Pakistan will need to discuss, elaborate, amend and adopt to avert fatal tipping points.

Allama Iqbal’s call to the people is more valid than ever: Az Khaabi-e-Giraan Khez!

Concluded

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