**Back to the drawing board**

**[Najm us Saqib](https://nation.com.pk/Columnist/najm-us-saqib)**

November 01, 2021

Presenting dossiers on India’s state-sponsored terrorism to the world or announcing countermeasures to Indian misinformation and disinformation campaigns against Pakistan has not produced any tangible results. On the other hand, considering the complete ‘neglect’ manifestly exhibited by the US on Pakistan’s role in the American war on terror, the need to come up with a vigorous foreign policy narrative seems to have been realised by all concerned. The fact that the undeniable importance of Pakistan in the context of Kabul’s future has not even been properly appreciated has added fuel to the fire. But come to think of it, isn’t it a bit too late to convince the world of one’s past credentials? A dead-end facing Pak-India relations and Kashmir; no melting of ice in Pak-US relations; the Afghanistan imbroglio; a threatening TTP; internal and external security concerns; and no economic recovery in sight coupled with arm twisting by the IMF and FATF are reasons enough to get alarmed and worried.

['Enough of treating nature like a toilet,' UN chief tells summit](https://nation.com.pk/02-Nov-2021/enough-of-treating-nature-like-a-toilet-un-chief-tells-summit)

Seemingly, Islamabad is ready to even float multiple narratives for the West to understand its past sincerity, present selflessness and future nobilities with regard to bringing peace and stability in the region and of course India’s consistent pestering. By the looks of it, Islamabad is fully aware of the enormity of the task and has probably finalised a credible plan of action in this regard. Hopefully, instead of dwelling only on the past, the upcoming narrative would focus on the present intriguing challenges facing Pakistan. Hopefully, the strategists in Islamabad have realised that drum beating against New Delhi’s nefarious designs to malign Islamabad would not help in promoting Pakistan’s own narrative, unless of course the ultimate aim was just to embarrass India. Even in modern day hybrid warfare, merely embarrassing the enemy could be part of a comprehensive strategic plan but certainly not the lone objective. Experience has shown that anything emanating from Pakistan against India or vice versa, the West would like to either ignore it or see it through the prism of India’s usefulness in the context of China containment.

[Russian army to put next gen S-500 air defense system into use in coming years: Putin](https://nation.com.pk/02-Nov-2021/russian-army-to-put-next-gen-s-500-air-defense-system-into-use-in-coming-years-putin)

It is true that a narrative is all about telling a good story. However, in the contemporary digitised world, along with certain hardcore facts, evidence and logical arguments to substantiate the storyline, a country needs to spend huge sums of money and well-sharpened media tools to penetrate the already made-up minds of those who matter in the international arena. Eloquence used to be an effective tool in ancient Greek dialogue exchanges. Still, eloquence can win an argument but in the realm of realpolitik, it is the national interest that prevails against even the most Aristotelian arguments. No wonder NSA Moeed Yusuf has lamented the stark contrast seen in his American interlocutors’ behaviour during meetings in Islamabad and their change of heart after reaching Washington.

It is important to realise that the West is not buying Pakistan’s narrative. Nonetheless, it is more important to know why the West remains adamantly oblivious to Pakistan’s narrative even after knowing full well the enormous sacrifices that Islamabad rendered in the past over three decades. Agreed, there are double talks, double standards, blame-gaming and obvious discrimination in the West’s overwhelmingly unjust treatment meted out to certain countries of the world. However, as evident from recent events, crying, wailing, shouting, castigating and defying aimlessly is an exercise in futility. There is a need to search for a pragmatic way to get out of this quagmire. To begin with, the bitter question as to why the West is not buying Islamabad’s substantiated storyline needs to be addressed before finding ways to address the real issues.

[Biden seeks to rally globe on climate: 'This is a moral imperative'](https://nation.com.pk/02-Nov-2021/biden-seeks-to-rally-globe-on-climate-this-is-a-moral-imperative)

Building a narrative and promoting it through rigorous efforts with no concrete rationale and evidence can be managed only by big powers like America. Economically dependent countries like Pakistan can simply not afford to look stronger or logical without being strongly rebutted or simply ignored. Secondly, building a narrative is a discrete process that takes place behind closed doors. On TV screens or through press releases, one may announce contours of certain policies that are based on a country’s narrative. Talking about national narratives in public could only be useful for the purpose of public awareness. Thirdly, if the Foreign Office is using the obsolete ways of communicating with the world through press releases, one needs to have a revamping plan to digitise it and bring in technology savvy, well-trained motivated personnel into the Foreign Service. Fourthly, it needs to be realised that unless a country is internally and economically strong, no amount of plans or flawless narratives would work in convincing the world to change its perspective. Certainly, before convincing the world, one needs to take one’s own people in confidence and convince them of one’s seriousness and sincerity in the image-building process. Imagine the impact of social media campaigns launched through private cellphones by millions of Pakistanis?

[Injured Pique to miss Barcelona’s clash with Dynamo Kyiv in Champions League](https://nation.com.pk/01-Nov-2021/injured-pique-to-miss-barcelona-s-clash-with-dynamo-kyiv-in-champions-league)

All things considered, building a narrative by using US-based benchmarks is bound to fail. Pakistan needs to find its own parameters and methodologies to build and subsequently promote its narrative keeping its present state of the economy constantly in view. Further, building a foreign policy narrative must inevitably be preceded by taking certain corrective measures in the right direction at home. Requesting for deferred oil payments or taking loans to pay off loans or looking helplessly at the rising prices of consumer goods is by no means an ideal situation for floating fresh foreign policy narratives. The need of the hour is to initiate some practical steps to put economic activities back on track and take some bold decisions such as an immediate ban on the import of non-essential luxury commodities. If at all Pakistan needs a narrative right now, it has to be in the economic field. In terms of a long-term policy, as opposed to narrative building, nation building may be considered as one of the top most priorities. A strong nation does not need to build and promote narratives. It is self-evident.