**The Wolf and the Lamb (Part XII)**

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The chequered history of Pakistan’s rollercoaster relationship with the US suggests that birds of the same feather don’t necessarily make good partners. The two had a number of commonalities and were on the same page on almost everything except India and Israel. Which is what ruined a potentially enviable partnership!

The birth of Pakistan was induced by Hindutva, an ideology propounded by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in 1923, professing Hindu hegemony. Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah was an ardent Indian nationalist. He had joined the All India Muslim League in 1913 without leaving Indian National Congress; and retained dual membership till 1920. He was hailed as the ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity. However, disgusted at the Congress’ categorical rejection of electoral safeguards for the Muslims after the 1937 elections, he came up with the Two-Nation theory in 1940; demanded a separate homeland for them; and achieved it in seven years.

The proponents of Hindutva viewed the partition as a “vivisection of mother India”. They refused to accept Pakistan’s existence. This, Mountbatten’s parting kick in Kashmir, Nehru’s adventures in other Muslim majority states like Hyderabad, and India’s refusal to pay Pakistan’s share of assets aggregated as a declaration of war on the nascent state, which went scrambling for friends.

The US was the obvious bet. Pakistan’s affluent ruling elite was mostly educated at Oxbridge and Lincoln’s Inn. Bureaucrats, born and bred in British India and mentored in the Western tradition, were enamoured of the Western lifestyle. The commoners, averse to godless society behind the iron curtain, had no qualms about the Ahl-e-Kitab Christians. The Islamic Republic’s natural allies – Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia – were in the US camp. Capitalizing on this, the US took Pakistan for granted; and went all-out to grab India, which was being cold-shouldered by the Soviet Union. But Nehru kept his nerves despite Stalin’s snubs and, dexterously, manoeuvred India to Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

Pakistan’s decision to keep all its eggs in the American basket despite the US’ express preference for India could, at best, be interpreted as a calculated risk, taken in feigned ambivalence.

Liaquat Ali Khan, too, wanted Pakistan to stay non-aligned. Reacting sagaciously to Truman’s invitation to Nehru, he earned Pakistan an immediate nod from Moscow. The visit to Moscow would have strengthened Pakistan’s bargaining position vis-à-vis the US to a great extent. But, unfortunately, Khan was undone, inter alia, by the “progressive” bureaucracy and “retrogressive” clergy. Pakistan, thus, condemned itself to the American camp.

Pakistan’s decision to keep all its eggs in the American basket despite the US’ express preference for India could, at best, be interpreted as a calculated risk, taken in feigned ambivalence. Pakistan needed security against its enemy but was offered protection from the US enemy. Desperation, in the absence of any alternative, compelled it to accept this as “something better than nothing”. But the inherent mismatch of strategic objectives was bound to breed disaffection, duplicity and mutual disappointment, which it did.

The US never promised Pakistan any protection against India. But successive governments of Pakistan never shared this harsh reality with naïve masses and semi-literate media, which kept waiting for the seventh fleet in 1971.

The US did help Pakistan economically and militarily. Under the first military dictator, Pakistan made phenomenal progress in social, economic and defence sectors. Till 1985, the entire foreign aid and loans were, mostly, well utilized. Thereafter, however, as witnessed by Pakistan military’s world ranking, it was only the defence components of foreign funding and the country’s regular budget that were spent judiciously.

The defence was Pakistan’s top priority. Security against India was its primary concern, which was not addressed by the US or the alliances it had joined. As such, its perception of security and the need to have an impregnable defence against India dictated the acquisition of nuclear capability – at all costs. But the US had its own agenda – to patronise the Indo-Israeli nexus and keep Pakistan as a client state. Pakistan thus found itself face to face with its only “ally” on a question vital for its survival. The Prime Minister, who picked up the courage to “agree to disagree” with the US on this issue, was made a “horrible example”. This frightened the country’s political leadership into standing on the fence between the proverbial devil and the deep sea. But the deep state of Pakistan stood firm and achieved its objective on 28 May 1998.

Why the US allowed this to happen was explained by Paul Leventhal, President of the Nuclear Control Institute. In his testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on October 22, 1987, he said: “Pakistan had correctly perceived that the United States would be prepared to do almost anything to enlist Pakistan to help thwart the Soviets in Afghanistan — even to the extent of looking the other way, while Pakistan built its bomb…. The legislative history of the waivers of various amendment(s) provided compelling evidence that President Zia was right: the United States had been prepared to let Pakistan go far in developing nuclear weapons.”

Leonard Spector of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in a study of restrictions on aid to Pakistan, observed that “for Pakistan, acquisition of nuclear capability was purely a question of its survival. Pakistan was determined to pay every price for this and it did. As for the US, it was a question of a policy, which was at times in conflict with its wider national interests. And, as pointed out by Leventhal, whenever non-proliferation policy came against a competing foreign-policy interest it loses badly. In the ultimate analysis US could not take a strong non-proliferation stance regarding Pakistan, without compromising US security interests in the region, including Afghanistan.”

This showed the US’ pragmatism – the gap between its precepts and practices. That is exactly why, on the one hand, it encouraged the civil-military divide in Pakistan as witnessed, inter alia, by the Memo Gate, and demonised Pakistan’s Armed Forces and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in the name of civilian paramountcy. And, on the other, it garlanded military dictators, who could and did pursue its agenda. Reagan embraced the General behind the judicial killing of a popularly elected civilian Prime Minister and gave him a new lease of life. Bush hugged the General who had toppled a civilian government and gave him almost a decade to dictate. Apparently, Pakistan’s four military regimes received more US aid than all the civilian governments combined.

The judicial murder of April 4, 1979, sent an unambiguous message to Pakistan’s politicians that the road to Islamabad passed through Washington. This was reconfirmed by Condoleezza Rice’s intercession with President Musharraf for the rehabilitation of the “corrupt.” This underlined the unequal relationship, with divergent objectives. Rice pursued her national interests but Pakistani leadership their vested interests. This was the first reason which kept Pakistan in the blind alley despite the US’ incessant bullying.

The second reason was the absence of any alternative. In all fairness, Pakistan had nowhere else to go till recently. It had antagonised Moscow more than once and was, quite understandably, written off by the latter. China was, no doubt, an option but it was still taxiing on the power tarmac till the mid-1990s. It couldn’t, obviously, stand in for the US.

A ray of hope shone on Islamabad in August 2018. The nation spotted an unorthodox leader, totally different from his immediate predecessors. He was Sadiq and Amin, with no personal agenda, while they were a bunch of convicts, absconders, asylum-seekers, and the accused. He was a celebrity before starting his political career, while they were nobody. They hitch-hiked to the corridors of power and stayed there with the US’ blessings. He made it to the top, step by step, in 22 long years, despite the US’ disdain. For him, politics was a public service. For them, it was a dynastic commercial enterprise. He spurned Goldsmith’s fortune, disposed of his property in London and made Pakistan his home. Most of them relocated their nouveau riche families. All of them built castles in the West, with dubious financial sources they were ashamed to disclose. And, for the first time since August 17, 1988, his government and the Establishment were seen on one page. This gave him the strength to stand up to the US in the country’s best interest.

Meanwhile, China had also sky-rocketed, having come of age in every sense of the word. China believes in Panchsheel (five principles of peaceful co-existence). It has never interfered in the internal affairs of others, unlike the US, which is notorious for master-minding regime changes. China showed keenness to solidify its relations with Pakistan and Pakistan seized the opportunity to correct the chronic imbalance in its relations with the US.

On seeing Pakistan slip out of its clutches, the US reacted angrily. It blamed Pakistan for its humiliation in Afghanistan and threatened it with sanctions. Pakistan was indeed happy to see off the US and India from Afghanistan. But it could not, justifiably, be held responsible for their ignominious exit. The US resented the Pakistani Prime Minister’s visit to Moscow and criticized it, not India, for standing neutral on the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. The European Union followed suit. The New York Branch of the National Bank of Pakistan was collared for 8-year old transactional lapses. Pakistan was kept on the FATF’s grey list despite compliance with 26 out of 27 conditionalities. A fresh spate of terrorism was let loose in the country. “Foreign funded” no-confidence motion against the Prime Minister was tabled in the National Assembly, following a formal ultimatum from Washington. And, traditional politicians across the board joined hands against the Prime Minister, reminiscent of the 1977 PNA.

The Prime Minister knew it fully well that the US was a Super Power, with tremendous clout and enormous nuisance value; and that Pakistan’s survival with dignity depended on steadfastness, tact, and restraint. Therefore, having made his point – Absolutely Not – he assured and reassured the US of Pakistan’s desire to be its “partner in peace, not war”. Repeating President Ayub’s words, he said, Pakistan needed “Friends, not Masters.”

Given Pakistan’s strategic importance, the US is likely to eventually accept the correction as a fait accompli – provided, of course, the Sadiq and Amin’s lamb could persevere and survive. Postscript (April 3, 2022): The lamb did persevere and has survived – in the first round!

(Concluded)

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