**Lost diplomatic map of Pakistan**

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To make diplomacy work, goals of a state must be clearly defined with relation to other states. Diplomacy uses communicative skills, avoiding military force. Diplomacy helps achieve these goals and also plays a role (if allowed to) in preparing foreign policy decisions.

What one sees happening in Pakistan, is the diplomatic initiatives being taken away by non-professionals, in many cases putting all eggs in one basket, besides blunders created by our politicians.

Whereas it is the leaders & ministers who do formulate the policy (however, these policies need to be followed consistently, unless some catastrophic event makes one change course). Its implementation in the department of foreign policy is the job of diplomats. The civil servants can influence policy but the development & making of policies is up to politicians & Parliament. Unfortunately institutionalization of the foreign policies has been abdicated in favor of individual whims.

Claiming that China is Pakistan’s friend having stood by us in thick & thin, and that “Western countries are using India against China,” was a comment by PM Khan that should have been best avoided. China grew closer to Pakistan with the investment & development of CPEC, part of BRI.

With U.S-China rivalry, U.S will place pressure, directly or indirectly for Pakistan to decrease momentum on the project, if not to decrease the sphere of the project. This places Pakistan in a tough spot & requires superb diplomacy to maintain the balancing act.

Pakistan’s foreign policy is unconditionally been formed by the circumstances it came in creation. However, high time the approach and narrative must change with ground realities.

Pakistan has a tendency to diplomatically lose balance. Those who handle foreign policy see everyone as a friend or a foe. They need to bear in mind that no state is either.In international relations there are only alliances & alliances change with time & changing circumstances.

Prime Minister Imran Khan reached out to the Saudis in an effort to rebuild bridges. In return for a balance of payments bailout and an introduction to US President Donald Trump’s senior adviser Jared Kushner, Khan and Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman agreed that the Saudis would invest $10 billion in a strategic oil storage and refinery facility to be built at the Chinese-operated port of Gwadar. *(Reference TRT World)*

The offer to Saudi Arab to invest near the Iranian border was not the brightest of ideas after U.S decision to exit from the 2015 nuclear deal and place stringent pressures (sanctions) on Iran. One must not overlook the fact that Pakistan is not only part of the army to defend Saudi Arab’s borders but a former COAS heads that Army. It was no surprise that Iran clamored for Saudis to leave Baluchistan.

Another example of whimsical diplomatic bad shot was PM Khan’s refusal to attend Kuala Lumpur Summit end December 2019. PM Khan had travelled to Saudi Arabia a week before the Summit give or take to reassure the Kingdom that the participation in the Summit did not mean compromising on Saudi interests. One must consider then why the decision to participate without taking an institutional policy direction was made adhering instead to wishes of an individual.

These two examples are taken from recent history for better reader recall.

Challenges in diplomacy in today’s world are many. It has to struggle with conflicts in religion, racism, differences of local, regional, global interests between states, diversity within states. So many new actors in the arena influencing the diplomatic space. New forums like Twitter & Face Book where posts by politicians can destroy years of relationship building between nations in the click of the keyboard. Intrusion of unprofessionalism in the diplomatic arena that can flare up issues where there are none & add fuel to fire when they do exist.

With the new world order, politicians, diplomats, other actors; the policies must be clearly stated, after discussion, pondering over & weighing pros & cons. With different people shooting in a different direction, the efforts will be diluted and can (in Pakistan’s case they do) back fire.

Pakistan lacks a coherent, long-term view on issues that reflects in its poor diplomatic efforts-if any.  Governments come and governments go, the thrust towards issues involving nations remains even- of course needing periodic assessment based on emerging situations. War in neighboring Afghanistan has weakened Pakistan as a modern state, policies that are more India-centric than focusing on using diplomacy as a tool to develop  better relations in the region as well as internationally makes her muddle her way through emergency situations more on ad hoc basis than based on any long- term strategy.

Talking to a very senior diplomatic friend, he said something that is worthy of being shared: Pakistan’s government, in his opinion should have cultivated a coterie of intelligent people including diplomats and writers. Each group talking in favor of different countries. An extended arm of the government foreign office aimed at developing relationship with and winning confidence of key people there to gain information and assess that information for Pakistan’s diplomatic efforts to further her national interests.

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