

# Going round in circles

Pak. J. Bulletin  
Down  
2-1/10

Continued from Page 1

developing nuclear capability. This is one of the issues on which we see a bipartisan approach and consistency in the policies of both civilian as well as military governments.

At a time when Pakistan became isolated in the late '70s, the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan that set in the second Cold War offered another opportunity to align with the United States. In the entire decade of the '80s, Pakistan's foreign policy focused on seeking withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan. Pakistan had two choices: to capitulate to Soviet pressures and accept the 'reality on the ground' or support the Afghan resistance. Those who managed the Afghan policy in that decade understood the vulnerability of the Russians and had a very ambitious domestic and regional agenda. Confronting a superpower and finally defeating it by organizing counter-intervention through the Afghan Mujahideen was the greatest foreign and security policy achievement. Being a front-line state in this war, Pakistan was successful in building a broad international coalition of Muslim and Western countries against the former communist giant. At every international forum, including the General Assembly, Pakistan led the condemnation and demand for Soviet pull out. It skillfully used the opportunity to quicken the pace of its nuclear programme because Pakistani leaders knew it too well that once the United States achieved its objective of Soviet defeat it would be less tolerant of the nuclear programme and would terminate its assistance. This is exactly what happened once Soviet forces completed their withdrawal as a result of the Geneva Accords that were completed in 1988.

Pakistan, however, failed to benefit from its success against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Its goal of a friendly, peaceful and united Afghanistan evaded it in the next decade. Policy consensus on Afghanistan collapsed with the signing of the Geneva Accords, an issue that became enmeshed with a struggle for power between General Ziaul Haq and Prime Minister Mohammad Khan Junejo. Zia had a very ambitious and unrealistic agenda for Afghanistan — an exclusive Islamic government of the Mujahideen. He rebuffed secret overtures by Dr Najibullah

to reach a settlement that could lead to the formation of a national government. He himself became a casualty of domestic political polarization and foreign policy chaos.

Pakistan's Afghan policy after the end of the Soviet occupation has been a major disaster. Neither Pakistan nor other countries in the anti-Soviet coalition paid any attention to the politics of the Mujahideen. They remained divided and factionalized, a fact that resulted in a civil war and, unfortunately, Pakistan became a party to it in supporting the Pushtun Taliban against other factions that were supported by Iran, Russia and India. That has left deep scars among the Afghans that continue to see Pakistan more of a trouble maker than a genuine friend interested in peace, stability and order. The Afghans from non-Pushtun groups interpret our U-Turn on the Afghan policy as an expedient diplomatic move made under American pressure in a vastly changed world. It will take time to repair the damage done to our relations with Afghanistan that is so vital to our links with Central Asia and so important for us in terms of our own stability.

It is for the second time that events in Afghanistan, this time with the presence of Al Qaeda network, brought Pakistan into the American-sponsored coalition against terrorism. The U-Turn on Afghanistan was a difficult decision, but a right one under the circumstances. Pakistan made virtue out of necessity. The new alliance with the US has given Pakistan a fiscal space to restructure economy and come out of the debt trap. The writing-off of some loans and rescheduling of some others and greater flow of aid are some of the windfall benefits of change in policy. International isolation is over, and the sanction regime imposed in the wake of nuclear tests has come to an end. These are positive effects of foreign policy. On the negative side, support for US operations in Afghanistan has caused internal divisions. Army operations in South Waziristan, apparently to flush out foreign militants, have alienated the tribesmen that have been so loyal to Pakistan.

Pakistan's foreign policy has been a mixed bag of successes and some disappointments. The biggest disappointment is that the Kashmir issue continues to remain a festering wound and after so many sacrifices of the Kashmiris and

Pakistanis there is no solution in sight. The problem has taken a life of its own and in the process has grown too tangled and complex to be settled any soon in the near future. Therefore, one has to be cautious about the recent thaw in relations with India. There is a possibility that the two countries might open up trade, allow free movement of peoples and increase government to government interaction. India will, however, continue to remain at the centre of Pakistan's foreign policy for managing security in the traditional sense, negotiating nuclear risk reductions or enhancing regional cooperation. This belongs to the future to see if the two countries would understand the logic of a globalized world where economic security and welfare issues are reshaping the entire discourse on the nature of state and its relations with the society it governs.

The successes of foreign policy are not too meagre. Pakistan, starting from a very limited base and going through the painful and humiliating experience of the East Pakistan debacle, has resurrected itself as a powerful, influential, and the first Muslim nuclear state. Pakistan greatly benefited from its foreign policy turn in the early '60s by establishing close relationship with China. Beijing has been a valuable partner in security and development fields. It sold arms when other sources had dried up. It has been quite generous in the transfer of defence and other technologies, and in assisting big infrastructural projects. Pakistan has also used its Islamic connection with the Muslim countries very effectively for their diplomatic, political and economic support. It played a leading role among the Muslim countries during the Afghan war. But its efforts to create an Islamic economic or political bloc have been frustrated, because of the influence of other more powerful actors in the Middle East politics.

Vastly disadvantaged, operating in a very difficult regional environment, and having few cards to play with in world politics, Pakistan's foreign policy record seems to be impressive. Pakistan had the benefit of brilliant diplomats like Sir Zafarullah Khan, Sahibzada Yaqoob Ali Khan and Agha Shahi who provided stewardship to Pakistan's foreign policy at very difficult junctures. Since the foreign policy of a country is rooted essentially in its domestic environment, Pakistan could do better had its domestic politics been stable, orderly and democratic. For domestic troubles we have done far below our potential in foreign affairs. ■