

Partnership, not expediency

By Anwar Kemal

PAKISTAN'S relations with the United States have revived and regained strength since 9/11. Prior to that catastrophe, the United States felt it could afford to ignore events in remote lands. Its precipitate loss of interest in Afghanistan in the wake of Soviet withdrawal created a power vacuum and opened a window of opportunity for the Al Qaeda to move in.

Pakistan underestimated the perils of Osama bin Laden's presence next door, even after the bomb attacks on the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania provoked retaliatory US cruise missile attacks against targets in Afghanistan and Sudan. While Islamabad was becoming increasingly disenchanted with the Taliban's antediluvian policies and its uncooperative attitude, it was not deemed expedient to threaten Mullah Omar's regime with a break in relations. President Clinton's national security adviser Sandy Berger's testimony to the 9/11 commission indicates that Pakistan did not apply the requisite pressure on the Taliban to expel Osama bin Laden because it was under US sanctions.

The jolt of 9/11 provided the necessary impetus to Pakistan to turn a full circle by opting to become a US ally in "Operation Enduring Freedom" and the war on Afghanistan-based terrorism. This title is ironic, as enduring freedom in a

Pakistan in the future. One hopes that legislators in Washington realize that sanctions and embargoes against Pakistan have always produced unintended consequences, without diminishing Pakistan's determination to strengthen its security.

Since the mid-1970s, Pakistan's nuclear programme has been subjected to western scrutiny and opposition. What needs to be understood is that Pakistan's nuclear and missile programme is a clear case of responding to multiple challenges, starting with the 1965 US arms embargo. This was followed by India's conventional weapons build-up culminating in the bitter experience of 1971. In 1974, India carried out its first nuclear test and also launched an ambitious ballistic missile programme.

Pakistan appreciates the potential threat that the proliferation of WMD technology poses to American security, especially

ly. Ongoing defence and economic cooperation could be terminated, and sanctions re-applied on any pretext.

Pakistan is deeply disappointed that the US and other western nations, having initially favoured self-determination for the people of Jammu and Kashmir, and having supported UN Security Council resolutions to that effect, have changed their position in favour of an unjust status quo.

It would be a big mistake to treat the on-going India-Pakistan "composite dialogue" as a pretext for postponing the solution of the Kashmir problem through interminable talks and posturing. The search for a mutually acceptable solution has to be pursued in all seriousness.

Peace and stability in South Asia is in the interest of the United States as well as all the states of the region. In this respect, the Kashmir dispute is a major stumbling block. The US cannot impose a solution, but it can strongly encourage both sides to move forward.

Pakistan apprehends that the US does not intend to supply weapons systems to Pakistan that will significantly enhance its overall defence capability. The F-16 issue still rankles. The military equipment requested by Pakistan under the five-year aid package is facing delays owing to red-tape and more serious issues of release. US reservations and lack of trust are being reinforced by Pakistani reluctance to bear the high political cost of rendering assistance to the US in Iraq

ate of bellum omnium contra omnes prevails in much of post-Taliban Afghanistan. Warlord rule, violent crimes, poppy cultivation, heroin production, and many other evils have increased manifold. As a friend of Afghanistan, Pakistan can only hope that Afghanistan's presidential elections will herald a more peaceful and stable era.

Pakistan's efforts to eliminate terrorists who sought safe haven in the country's rugged mountains and teeming cities have earned it US recognition as a "major non-Nato ally". During President Musharraf's visit to Washington in September, Pakistan received assurances of continued US support, but whether it will receive all the benefits that are due to a "front-line state" in the struggle against terrorism is open to doubt.

While the US may not be fully satisfied with the degree of Pakistan's commitment against its erstwhile allies, the Taliban, President Musharraf has gone out on a limb by launching military operations in the autonomous tribal territories. In so doing not only has he risked his life, but has also aroused the hostility of local Pakhtun tribesmen.

The flaw in Pakistan-US relations is that they appear to rest primarily on expediency. It was anti-communism during the 1950s, the alliance against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan during the 1980s, and today counter-terrorism is Pakistan's trump card, which sets it apart from other states in the minds of US policymakers. American goals to restore peace in Afghanistan are proving difficult to realize and could become next to impossible without Pakistan's active cooperation.

Assuming that this time round certain new elements or compulsions require that the Pakistan-US partnership should be made to endure over the long haul, in the larger interests of the two countries, it is incumbent on the two governments to address issues of bilateral concern objectively and in a focused manner.

The first problem is that of approach. Before the current relationship has even jelled, moves are afoot in the US Congress to enact pettifogging legislation (spearheaded by Representative Ackerman) aimed at facilitating

the light of the 9/11 attack. The US authorities may still be harbouring doubts that they have been apprised fully of the relevant facts in the recent transfer of nuclear technology case. In fact, Pakistan has shared all relevant information with the US and the IAEA. Likewise, there is no danger of terrorists or any other non-state groups gaining access to our nuclear assets, as the government has ensured responsible control over the entire strategic programme.

A sensitive issue is Pakistan's nuclear status as compared to India's. One of the factors that impelled Pakistan to test its atomic weapons in May 1998 was the belief that the West would tacitly accept India as a nuclear weapons state, but not Pakistan unless it too demonstrated its nuclear capability. Another issue that is likely to arise in the foreseeable future is that of the Fissile Materials Control Treaty.

Military rule, other perceived shortfalls in democratic practices in Pakistan, allocation of woefully inadequate resources to health and education, suspected official tolerance of jihadi culture in religious seminaries (madressahs), human rights violations, gender issues, religious intolerance and bigotry, and child labour are big negative policy points for Pakistan in the eyes of Washington. We have to address these problems not in order to please the US, but in the larger interests of our own people.

Pakistan is at the receiving end of inspired news reports that its Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) is operating free of central control and sponsoring radical Islamic terrorist organizations in Afghanistan, in Indian-held Kashmir and within Pakistan. Such reports lack substance because in fact the ISI is a disciplined agency answerable to the chief of army staff.

Several US policies are a source of concern to Pakistan, forcing the government to look beyond the immediate benefits of US assistance of \$3 billion, pledged over five years. A common fear is that the boom-bust cycle of Pakistan-US relations may repeat itself. When Afghanistan becomes less of a concern to Washington, interest

the lion's share of American resources and impacting on areas of lower priority, such as aid to Pakistan, which is \$600 million per annum, plus an additional \$100 million in the first year. In retrospect, the US decision to intervene in Iraq is proving to be a costly blunder, as it is diverting resources from the struggle against global terrorism; in fact, the Iraq conflict may be fuelling terrorism.

Just as India looks askance at any US military assistance to Pakistan, the latter is worried that the growing US-India strategic partnership, especially in hi-tech areas, including space, which may adversely affect Pakistan's security.

Pakistan would like the US to play a greater role in its economic development through export-led growth. At present, Pakistani exports to the US amount to a modest \$2.5 billion annually, which is about a quarter of one per cent of US imports. High on Pakistan's wish list are increased American investments, greater access to the US market for Pakistan's products and removal of restrictions on travel and opportunities for Pakistanis to study in the United States.

Harsh treatment of Pakistanis in the US, including impediments to our nationals wishing to study at American universities, is a source of deep concern. The imbalance between the requirements of security and the academic needs of overseas Muslim students is another policy issue for the US which is impacting on its relations with Pakistan and other Islamic countries.

President Bush and Musharraf have established a good personal rapport but one hopes that the convergent national interests of the two countries will form a more solid basis of continued US support for Pakistan, no matter who is elected in the upcoming US polls. Pakistan needs America and not for the first time does America need Pakistan. Hindsight has shown that as the sole superpower, with global interests and vulnerabilities, it is in the US interest to stay engaged with a pivotal country like Pakistan in an increasingly interdependent world.

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