**Ground realities - PART-II**

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

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The US has long been Pakistan’s largest export market. Washington feels there is great potential to expand bilateral trade with Pakistan further, particularly in energy, agricultural equipment and products, franchising, retail trade, information and communications technology products and services. Since 2019, US corporations have announced investment plans worth $ 1.5 billion, the highest in over a decade. An estimated eighty US companies are directly employing more than 120,000 Pakistanis. If the figures of Pakistan’s Embassy in Washington are to be believed, the present level of bilateral trade runs into billions of dollars. In fact, the trade volume has doubled in recent years. If all this is true, why does Islamabad keep asking for ‘more investment’ and ‘more trade’ from Washington? Clearly, there is more to it than meets the eye…!!

Apparently, Washington’s ‘punishment mode’ developed following the Taliban takeover in Kabul is gradually dissipating. The unnecessary misunderstandings created during the past two years including the ‘regime change’ conspiracy, are being removed one-by-one. Seemingly, both countries have found a common ground to reset the tone for a healthy bilateral relationship. Approaches might differ but the objective seems the same. Keep a constant check on rogue elements and eliminate terrorism and extremism from the region. During this exercise, Pakistan must have a reality check. This time, combatting terrorism is more of a need for Pakistan itself than a vicarious ‘responsibility’. Terrorism is rearing its head again mostly in KPK and Baluchistan.

[President Alvi condemns Israeli aggression against Palestinians](https://www.nation.com.pk/05-Apr-2023/president-alvi-condemns-israeli-aggression-against-palestinians)

The US has repeatedly assured Pakistan of its assistance in addressing the challenge of terrorism including the ever-threatening TTP. However, joint operations or follow-up actions, if any, have not been made public. A couple of delegations from Islamabad were received in Kabul but apparently no solution could be found for any joint Islamabad-Kabul approach to counter terrorist activities. In other words, Pakistan is fighting the menace of terrorism practically on its own, at least for the time-being. Washington believes that the ‘terrorist groups that may be active in Afghanistan, are no longer able to threaten regional stability.’ If that is their considered opinion, Pakistan might have to keep fighting terrorism, on its own, this time, for its own existence and security.

Do we see any change in Washington’s approach to the South Asian region?

Does it really matter? What option did Pakistan have when it was made a part of America’s Af-Pak policy? As the mantra of ‘terrorism’ is gradually waning in and around Afghanistan or at least that is what the West would wish us to believe, fighting TTP might not be Washington’s priority. Pakistan needs to tread the path of ‘cooperation’ against terrorism extremely carefully. Short-term gains must be resisted. Past mistakes must not be repeated. Similarly, expectations from the new-look Taliban particularly regarding their cooperation against the TTP, must be based on the ground realities. As has been said in this space several times, Pakistan must start looking at Afghanistan as an independent, sovereign State regardless of what kind of government is in Kabul at a given time.

[Foreign vets give new lease of life to ailing elephant at Karachi Zoo](https://www.nation.com.pk/05-Apr-2023/foreign-vets-give-new-lease-of-life-to-ailing-elephant-at-karachi-zoo)

Does Washington want to address Kashmir or for that matter, other issues existing between India and Pakistan? The answer is a big no. Let’s face it. No one in the so-called international community is interested in Kashmir. Full stop. Events of August 2019 have changed the entire spectrum of the J&K dispute. The almost muted response from the international community over India’s blatant and illegal ‘annexation’ of a disputed territory, should be more than enough to understand where Pakistan’s principled stand on the J&K dispute figures in the eyes of the world. Agreed, detracting from its principled stand anchored in the UNSC relevant resolutions would send all sorts of wrong messages especially in the Valley. However, serious reflection is needed to come up with a definite policy stand on Kashmir. The ‘moral, political and diplomatic’ support needs to be defined in the context of India’s actions of August 2019.

Unfortunately, unlike in India, the policymakers in Pakistan keep looking at the US purely from Islamabad’s point-of-view and through the emotional prism of Pakistan’s sacrifices rendered during the US-led war on terror. This has put Pakistan on an open-ended illusionary trajectory. Washington believes it paid for the services rendered and as such does not owe anything to Islamabad. Secondly, the ‘defiance mode’ that Islamabad found itself in during the past two years, has squarely put the country on the backfoot. Mending ways with the US seems the paramount consideration for Pakistan and rightly so. However, the approach may require a bit of innovation. To begin with, perspectives about the interests of the ‘international community’ in Pakistan and India needs to be placed as per the ground realities. Secondly, if India is an enemy, it should be expected to behave as such. Pakistan must come out of this perpetual ‘complaining mode’.

[Imran decides against appearing before IHC tomorrow](https://www.nation.com.pk/05-Apr-2023/imran-decides-against-appearing-before-ihc-tomorrow)

One of the latest statements issued by the Foreign Office might enable us to understand what has just been said about changing our approach. In the statement, India has been accused of propagating terrorism against Pakistan; vitiating the regional environment; and impeding the prospects for peace and cooperation. The so-called international community has simultaneously been urged to persuade India to introspect, change course and take necessary steps to create an enabling environment for peace in South Asia for the welfare of the people of this region. It is not understood why an enemy is expected to do so much good to us. Secondly, why would the international community that did not care to even read our dossiers on India, urge India to behave in a manner that Pakistan desires?

Closing your eyes to reality does not mean the cat is gone. Owing to their strong economic disposition, the US and India could afford to overlook the presence of a few cats in the international arena. Pakistan cannot. The inflated egos of internal ‘stakeholders’ are making matters even worse. Meanwhile, the ground realities are quietly sharpening their jaws.