**Ground realities**

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

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India knows the disputed nature of Jammu & Kashmir but continues ignoring the hard facts. This vital omission might cost India dearly in the years to come. A recently issued US-based report warns that given the prevailing heightened tensions, the disputed valley of Kashmir could become a nuclear flashpoint between India and Pakistan. This is certainly not the first time that the Jammu & Kashmir dispute has been quoted as the main bone of contention between the two South Asian archrivals. However, given the US’ muted response to India’s actions of August 2019, as if the dispute was over once and for all, still considering Kashmir as a ‘dispute’ is meaningful. In fact, a favourable development for Pakistan’s principled stand on Kashmir and of course for the people of Kashmir. Nuclear flashpoint or not, New Delhi would certainly not wish the US to keep considering Kashmir as a dispute. Washington’s implied interpretation of the J&K dispute seems more of a balancing act than a change in policy.

[PM urged to extend the close date for census: CSJ](https://www.nation.com.pk/03-Apr-2023/pm-urged-to-extend-the-close-date-for-census-csj)

The same report says that the US continues to see China as a major threat to its global interests and would like to keep India on its side in this conflict. The Sino-India rivalry, thus, suits this approach. On the other hand, Pakistan is also needed to be on its side. Washington feels that ‘the goal of a stable and secure South and Central Asia, free from terrorism, depends on the strength of, in large part, our partnership with Pakistan.’ Clearly, the US wants India for its China-containment endeavours while Pakistan is perceived to be an effective partner in counterterrorism. The bottom line? The US would like both India and Pakistan on its side when it comes to pursuing its policies in the region. That brings us to an important question. Does Pakistan have an option of saying ‘no’ to the US? There is no such thing as an independent foreign policy. As a developing country, Pakistan must work towards its economic stability to have a comparatively reasonable foreign policy. As Pakistan is dependent upon the US, the US-led IMF, and the pro-US Europe, saying a straightaway ‘no’ to the US would not be possible unless the country stands on its feet politically and economically. Meanwhile, diplomacy must be allowed to play its role. Pakistan must explain the reasons of saying ‘no’ first and more importantly, the whole argument must be devoid of any emotionalism. Pakistan must also realize that its relationship with the superpower could never be on equal footing. Hence, respective positions need to be understood clearly before expecting a positive response.

[Federal cabinet approves withdrawal of services of Registrar Supreme Court](https://www.nation.com.pk/03-Apr-2023/federal-cabinet-approves-withdrawal-of-services-of-registrar-supreme-court)

Another important question: what are the US foreign policy challenges in the South Asian region and what role are Pakistan or India expected to play? In South Asia, Washington is facing a few challenges especially when it comes to interpreting the region’s complexities vis-à-vis the US’ overall policy especially after the withdrawal of its forces from Afghanistan. First: China’s unlimited patience with Pakistan and the history of Sino-Pak relationship shall keep on posing a challenge for the US in its pursuit of China containment through ‘friends’. Even if the US lures Pakistan with commercially viable deals or technical assistance in the defence field, the possibility of Pakistan’s falling in anti-China scales is as low as Canada’s falling in any anti-US camp. Given China’s long-term economic plans in the region, the Sino-Pak bondage is likely to strengthen in the coming years notwithstanding certain mishandling of matters by Islamabad. Second: From electioneering to political debates in Parliaments to pursuing foreign policies to bilateral trade to cricket, India must portray Pakistan as an enemy and vice versa. Imagine, the issues of Kashmir and terrorism are addressed finally and completely to the satisfaction of all stakeholders…. What kind of geo-strategic, geo-political and geo-economic scenario would emerge in South Asia? Visualize a South Asia minus Indo-Pak animosity? Imagine the SAARC bringing in fruits for the entire South Asian region at par with the ASEAN? Now, come to the real world…! As a matter of fact, Indo-Pakistan rivalry suits not only the West but also the geo-political pundits on both sides of the fence. Hence, whenever it needs attention from either of the two, Washington just mentions the word ‘India’ to Pakistan and the word ‘Kashmir’ to India. The rest will be easy.

[Record-holder Abid Ali sets sights on making a strong comeback](https://www.nation.com.pk/03-Apr-2023/record-holder-abid-ali-sets-sights-on-making-a-strong-comeback)

Third: China is too big an enemy for India. From the 1962 war to the recent skirmishes and face offs, India has experienced it first-hand. Hence, India must avoid China militarily. However, with Washington’s patronage, India would wish to think itself as a future global power or at least at par with China. Geo-political objectives particularly with the idea of Akhand Bharat in the background and the dream of becoming a permanent member of the UN Security Council to the continuation of its revered civil nuclear deal, India would need to sell itself as an anti-China force. An enemy’s enemy is a friend. Therefore, New Delhi falls in the category of Washington’s natural ally. Here, the challenge for the US is: how not to annoy India while keeping Pakistan at its side at the same time? Fourth: For the US, wasting twenty-years in Afghanistan and achieving neither a political nor a military solution of the Afghan conflict, there were certain lessons learnt. Afghanistan should better be left to its own devices. Keeping Pakistan on its side would suit any future policy regarding anti-terror drives in the region. The challenge is: Islamabad not only needs cash and commercial deals but also the required technical assistance in the defence field including a desire to enhance its capacity to counter terrorism. The obvious way to address this challenge would be to keep Pakistan hoping for the best. Hence, issuance of commercially viable statements such as ‘a robust trade relationship between the US and Pakistan is important for the latter’s economic stability.’ Or steps like an exchange of delegations to simultaneously discuss counterterrorism and trade; transfer of a couple of additional Pakistanis from Guantanamo Bay to Pakistan; some relief at the FATF; and, issuing a statement or two on Kashmir.