**At the Edge of a Cliff**

**What next? An unending demand list from IMF?**

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‘I never dreamt of success. I worked for it’ - Estée Lauder

Seemingly, Washington’s carrot and stick policy has decisively taken a turn that Pakistan can ill afford. At least, not right now. The developments in the last few days provide ample evidence of tough days ahead. The absence of a strong government in Islamabad makes the situation even worse. History repeats itself but in the realm of Pak-US relations, it repeats itself rather a bit too often. Is the US up to teaching a fresh lesson to its major non-NATO ally - again? The punishing mood seems quite menacing, to say the least. More importantly, what has, or has not Pakistan done recently to merit this sudden unwanted attention? Which direction Islamabad is required to go now and ‘do more’? Facing an acute economic crunch and unending political uncertainty, Pakistan seems to be running short of viable options.

The US has imposed sanctions on four entities for their alleged involvement in supplying ‘missile-applicable items’ to Islamabad’s long-range ballistic missile program. Rejecting the idea politely, the Foreign Office has termed the move as ‘discriminatory approaches and double standards’ and the ‘political use of export controls’ (read exploitation). The entities are said to be provided by China and Belarus. Washington hastened to add that it was not a punishment but an effort to bring about ‘a positive change’ in Pakistan’s behavior while explaining that ‘the integrity of these sanctions lies not only in the ability to designate and add persons to the Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List (SDN) but also in the willingness to remove persons from the list in accordance with the law.’ Clearly, these sanctions contradict the claims made recently by the US to assist Pakistan in its economic recovery endeavors through the IMF and the like.

[PMAS-AAUR hosts Int’l Literacy Award ceremony](https://www.nation.com.pk/24-Apr-2024/pmas-aaur-hosts-int-l-literacy-award-ceremony)

Coincidentally, a footnote in the IMF-World Bank reports revealed a couple of days ago, the list of war-torn countries in MENA (Middle East and North Africa). Besides West Bank and Gaza for obvious reasons, the list includes Iraq, Yemen, Sudan, Syria, Somalia, and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Which war has devastated and racked Pakistan lately? Has Pakistan been invaded by another country lately that skipped our eyes? Is the new wave of terrorism facing Pakistan being construed as war? The exclusion of Afghanistan from the list indicates the absence of any kind of war-torn ingredient from the Taliban-ruled unrecognized government in Kabul. Does the footnote refer to the wars fought between Pakistan and India – 1948, 1965, or 1971? But then, India should have been mentioned in the list as well. A country with over 240 million people, who have just experienced peaceful general elections - is devastated by war just like Syria or Yemen - is surprising. Something is not making sense here. Another surprising fact is the exclusion of Israel from the list. It has been eight months now that Hamas and its cohorts are racking and devastating the most peace-loving country in the Middle East.

[Pakistan keen to enhance cooperation with Australia: PM](https://www.nation.com.pk/24-Apr-2024/pakistan-keen-to-enhance-cooperation-with-australia-pm)

Yet another coincidence! The finance minister’s talks aiming at securing at least $6 to 8 billion from the IMF did not produce any encouraging results as the Fund would not start the next program once the current $3 billion arrangement ends in late April. The IMF Mission is now likely to visit Islamabad somewhere in mid-May. A serious cause of concern? Not really. However, as President Zardari has recently observed, ‘the time is running short’, the delay in getting IMF’s nod on the next arrangement will automatically procrastinate the process of economic recovery, the expected structural reforms, and of course, the much-needed credit ratings’ announcement. Where does the IMF take its talking points from, is anybody’s guess.

What next? An unending demand list from IMF? A fresh rebuff from FATF? Downgrading in ratings? The default reverberations? A nasty EU debate and revision of GSP+ criteria? More sanctions on unforeseen sins? The talk of AJK’s future and revisiting the Indus Water Treaty? Another accidental landing of a cruise missile in Pakistan? The dreadful list of possibilities goes on and on when you start looking Eastwards or beginning the economic recovery program on strong footings, making certain ‘unnecessary’ changes in the usual foreign or defense policies, or keep sticking to the China-orientated approaches. Or simply put - when you stop behaving yourself!

[Sindh govt launches project to improve rural economy](https://www.nation.com.pk/24-Apr-2024/sindh-govt-launches-project-to-improve-rural-economy)

Being a nuclear Islamic Republic, Pakistan ipso facto qualifies to be a country of grave concern for the West. This fact gets prominence particularly when Islamabad’s ‘geostrategic value’ is intentionally overlooked by the US or its European allies. The situation gets worse when Islamabad keeps committing sins - one after the other, in quick successions; such as, not adhering to the ‘do more’ instructions with regard to Afghanistan and Taliban; declining the invitation to attend a Joe Biden-hosted Summit of Democracies; its PM being seen with President Putin on the day Russia invaded Ukraine - and staying neutral over Moscow’s ‘Special Operation’ - but ‘keeping in touch’ with Ukraine; involving a superpower in any regime-change conspiracy; saying ‘absolutely not’ to a ‘legitimate’ request from the big brother; sending all undocumented individuals back home; not showing even an inclination to recognize Israel; staying committed to the two-state solution of the Middle East conflict; immediately de-escalating Pak-Iran tensions after exchanging drones and missiles only once; refusing to budge on the Pak-Iran gas pipeline project; and, keep singing Chinese songs in and around Gwadar.

[NASA's Voyager 1 returns intelligible signal for 1st time in months](https://www.nation.com.pk/24-Apr-2024/nasa-s-voyager-1-returns-intelligible-signal-for-1st-time-in-months)

And then Islamabad committed the cardinal sin of arranging President Ebrahim Raisi’s visit to Pakistan at a time when Israel’s might was seriously challenged following a direct attack by Iran. Oh, and what is going on with KSA and its expected investment in Pakistan worth billions of US dollars? What does SIFC stand for?

It is high time that Pakistan swallowed a few bitter pills and decided to pay the price of staying nuclear or being able to operate long-ranged ballistic missiles – but economically weak. Otherwise, it may get ready to be perpetually embroiled in this painful overdependent predicament. You cannot have the cake and eat it too. The choice is simple. Understand what the US wants or else. Either ‘behave’ and keep the country afloat economically and militarily or expect the wrath of a superpower every now and then and face the music. Undoubtedly, it’s a choice between the devil and the deep blue sea. But then, how long could the pigeon close its eyes and deny the cat’s presence?

[Iran president pledges to boost ties with Pakistan](https://www.nation.com.pk/24-Apr-2024/iran-president-pledges-to-boost-ties-with-pakistan)

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