**Pakistan’s next battle**

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January 04, 2020

A butterfly fluttering its wings or want of a nail in soldier’s boot have ripple effects

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USA is a power in retreat. Weary of two decades of battle fatigue, ‘shock and awe’ is morphing to working through allies, vassals and non-state actors. After 9/11, the world forgot that international financial institutions, NGOs, political parties, pressure groups and even civil rights movements are non-state actors. In the past two decades we have witnessed the employment of this alternative method in Middle East, Ukraine and Afghanistan (Nation: The Devil’s Triangle March 22, 2014). Pakistan has remained in the eye of this building hurricane but survived.

In the US strategic landscape, Middle East is left to Saudi Arabia and UAE who will bid for USA and Israel. The Asian pivot i.e. South Asia and parts of Central Asia have been delegated to Modi’s India. Both do not have the capability and potential to take on the building nexus that includes Turkey, Iran, Qatar and Malaysia; powered by Russian technology and China’s BRI projects.

Pakistani policy making reflects the bankruptcy of thought and awareness that the country has global reach. For this to happen, Pakistan has to put its act together. Pakistan has to think beyond India and Afghanistan to the Greater Middle East to which it is a pivot. A begging bowl leaves no independent choices and trade-offs. The butterfly must flutter and the soldier must march.

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In the North, the eastward expansion of NATO is halted at Crimea. After Brexit, EU could shrink further. As narrow nationalism takes over in USA, UK, Hungary and India, the world is shying away from the ‘Global Village’ that is drifting towards authoritarianism. Narrow nationalism was a major cause of military conflicts in the late 19th and early 20th century. What is different in 21st Century is that this conflict will be led by non-state actors with military power of major players used as a ‘minimum last resort’; not directly but on peripheries. To recap, Pakistan is in the core and not periphery.

This is the power of nuclear weapons and what Bernard Brodie called, the ‘weapons of peace’. What has commenced with the assassination of Iranian Revolutionary Guard’s Commander General Qasem Soleimani in Iraq is a new phase of instability affecting Arab Countries, Iran and Turkey. Pincers will reach as far away as Kuala Lumpur. Similarly, Libya, Iraq, Yemen and Syria will continue to face the springs that became autumns. Pakistan too is on the hit list.

Invariably, the victims of this new warfare (Hybrid) will be people who have to endure economic hardships, poverty, segregation and genocide. What has recently happened in Africa, Venezuela and what is happening in Indian Held Kashmir is a continuation. Communal riots in India as reaction to new citizenship laws is a direction towards segregation and genocide. Pakistan over the past two decades has been pushed into this and it is time to plan and execute an exit.

KSA and UAE abstained from making any mention of Kashmir at UNGA. With Pulwama, Balakot and Kashmir fresh in his mind, the speech of Prime Minster Imran Khan at UNGA came from the heart and not the scripts. Perhaps it revealed too many intentions that never went unnoticed. With propensity to succumb to limitations and not exploit leverages, Pakistan bumped into a tight spot.

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Turkey and Malaysia supported Pakistan. Intelligentsia in Pakistan was convinced that sooner or later the country had to move out of the Saudi Shadow. Prime Minister’s initiative to start an English TV channel was the beginning of a shift to challenge USA’s Eurasian and APEC Strategy. The Independent of UK commented, “As is commonly believed, it is darkest before dawn. With expectations suitably calibrated to the tough reality that Khan’s leadership faces, it is possible to see green-shoots emerging in political and economic arenas”.

The question is where were these green-shoots planted; in parched land, under the smothering wild growth or fertile land? A purr from Prince Muhammad Bin Salman against the Kuala Lumpur Conference was a reality check. Did Pakistan’s initiative pegged with hopes appeared and vanished like a twister? Circumspectly, his biggest limitation to his rise to the arena of ‘high politics’ was the domestic situation and performance of his team. A shift in priorities; and Pakistan moves to a spot where it belongs.

The initiative was promptly capitalised by Turkey, Iran and Malaysia. Iran’s inclusion in the group and Erdoğan’s direct speech had an effect. Instead of Prince Salman reading out the ‘Riot Act’ to Pakistan, it is Erdoğan and Mahathir who have done it to Saudi Arabia.

Both Saudi Arabia and UAE understand that Pakistan has been humiliated ‘Khashoggi Style’. But they have their own vulnerabilities. The recent rush of Saudi and UAE diplomacy indicated something more sinister was in offing and President Tump set it off with General Qasem Soleimani’s killing. Pakistan has to be prepared for the next battle.

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An alternate block much beyond the Muslim world is taking shape backed by Russia and China. Pakistan’s national interests warrant a complete reappraisal of its National Power and how to overcome odds with a strong home led policy. This means a completely new national script.

The statement by Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Quraishi that India is trying to impose a hybrid war on Pakistan is an understatement. Much beyond India, it is the situation in Middle East and Afghanistan that is necessitating keeping Pakistan in check through the Middle Eastern Allies, International Financial Institutions, western sympathisers within the system and every manifestation of a hybrid conflict. Pakistan’s only succour lies in its neglected domestic polity and its people.

To do this, it is utmost important to understand the larger canvas so that Pakistan ultimately places itself to where it belongs.

Present policies do not supplement its pivotal position in West, Central and South Asia. It is imperative that its power potential is reshaped around very strong domestic indicators that have yet to be tapped. IMF has to be shown the door earlier than stipulated and Pakistan has to stop the practice of currency swaps from countries whose interests’ conflict with Pakistan’s security.

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The frontline of this assault will not be the military, rather more than 50% Pakistanis being driven close to poverty. The salvage operation will be spearheaded by agriculture and small to medium enterprise (SME) that has a super-fast return on investments.

Three crop seasons were enough to turn around Pakistan but they have been wasted. Pakistan is a country blessed with all seasons and terrains. The agriculture potential is huge and home grown. Instead of giving subsidies and relief to fertilizer and sugar industry, the government can give a kick start to modern agriculture that shall result in self-sufficiency and high grade exportable. The federal and provincial governments need to take this action on war footing with a deaf ear to fertilizer and sugar cartels.

The indigenous potential indicates that within a year, Pakistan can become a world leader in natural products. What affect this would have on GDP? From the experience of 1999-2001 (include olive oil), it can be anything from 3-5% expansion in 18 months. Profitability of farmers will range from 200-300%. People will return to farms. Unemployment will reduce. Exports will boost and Pakistan will once again become leader in wheat, cotton, maize, fruits and textiles. The entire rant of deficits, balance of payments, discount and interest rates will be eclipsed. In addition, the cost input hikes will be thrown out of the window forever.

The agriculture initiative will also set the ball rolling for small and medium enterprises. Local innovations in agriculture equipment manufacturing and automations will give boost to small industries and diversification of applications. Cost inputs will be recoverable in a short span. Within a year the dormant SMEs will start becoming productive. Technology innovators will occupy the first rows in this resurgence and benefit every sinew of the country. All upstream and downstream industries will benefit. Fertilizer and agro-chemical industries will become export juggernauts.

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What does this translate to? It means making Pakistan truly sovereign through an overall surplus that shall in due course wash away swaps and IMF strings. Pakistan will be up and ready on its own feet and no more be vulnerable to purrs from across Hormuz. A stage for a proactive pivot would have been set.

This is how the next battle has to be fought. Let not our future generations complain that ‘for the want of a nail, a country was lost’.