**Pakistan Vs Pakistan**

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Our experts on South Asian affairs would tend to believe India’s role in hampering Pakistan’s development. Right from the pre-independence conflicting era to wars in 1948, 1965 and 1971 to dismemberment of the country - they would quote several reasons of India’s ‘hegemonistic’ behaviour towards its western neighbour. Encounters at multilateral forums suggest the existence of some inherent animosity. India’s development as an economic rising power would be seen in Pakistan as the enemy’s foremost design to eventually target the country that once was a part of it. Pakistan’s advancement in the nuclear field, primarily to create a sort of balance of power in South Asia, would invariably be construed in India as a direct threat to peace and stability in the region. India’s joining BRICS, SCO, the QUAD or I2U2 are interpreted as ‘designs’ to subdue or isolate Pakistan. Any military deal in both countries would invariably be perceived as a threat by both countries. So much so that India’s aspirations to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council would also be construed as a threat. In addition to all this, Sino-Pakistan relations or the Sino-India border issues and ensuing military tussle, as well as the Indo-Israel bilateral relations would be interpreted in diametrically opposite directions.
For Pakistan, Kashmir remains a fundamental issue whereas India’s concerns revolve around any or all terrorist activities taken place within its territory as well as in the disputed Jammu & Kashmir region. In the process, both countries have not only suffered massive human losses but also the ramifications of this long-standing conflict have adversely affected their economic development. From bilateral trade to cricket, several areas of interest would therefore be made hostage to the eternal enmity that both countries have been ‘enjoying’ for the past several decades. In the SAARC region, India desires to view China as its sole economic and military ‘competitor’. For various existential reasons, India would like to see a ‘compliant’ Pakistan as its progress is somewhat hindered due to this ‘pebble in the shoe.’ India cannot and does not want to conquer Pakistan. Keeping the dream of an Undivided India or Akhand Bharat in mind, its wish is to see a weak and dependent Pakistan.
Experts on both sides of the fence have also tried to understand the true nature of Pak-India hostility. Various successive governments in Islamabad and New Delhi have ‘apparently’ given peace a chance by floating several proposals to address the ‘core dispute’ of Jammu & Kashmir. The past decades have seen substantive debates taking place to conclude whether a political or military solution would suit the region. From autonomy to joint governance to formal partition of Kashmir to independence, all options have been placed on the table. Nothing has worked as any possible solution would meet the same fate. The events of August 2019 practically sealed the fate of Jammu & Kashmir. However, Pakistan remains steadfast in its principled stand on one of its matters of ‘vital national interest’.
Could we then conclude that bilateral issues would never be addressed, or sincere efforts had never been put in to coexist peacefully? In either case, one thing appears most certain. Our experts have not been able to resolve any outstanding bilateral issues. The fact of the matter is that the K-word resonates with the T-word and matters of mutual interest keep awaiting in the abyss. This brings us to a few important observations:
One: India and Pakistan are sworn enemies and despite serious efforts, the issues have not been addressed to the satisfaction of either party.
Two: World powers including the US and China are not interested in bringing the two nuclear states on the table due to reasons best known to them.
Three: Given the intrinsic nature of respective internal predicaments, both countries would wish to avoid even a conventional war. Revisiting the 2003 LoC ceasefire agreement has manifestly shown intentions of both countries in this regard.
Four: For India, Pakistan is ‘irrelevant’ and for Pakistan, India is a necessary evil. Hence, one may expect the relations to go from bad to worse, particularly in view of the ongoing discussions on the Indus Waters Treaty and the future status of AJ&K.
Agreed, we need enemies to better define ourselves. Agreed, a hero is defined by its villain and vice versa. However, it is high time that Pakistan realized that it could not sustain perpetual antipathy in its neighborhood. We understand why India wishes to simply ignore Pakistan. We understand that Pakistan needs to put its house in order first to deal with both friends and enemies. What we do not seem to admit is an obvious fact: India can afford to pursue its hegemonistic policies in the region whereas Pakistan is struggling to stand on its feet. Secondly, Pakistan must stop hoping for anything good coming from India. The two tenures of PM Modi have taken the joke far enough to expect anything positive from India.
If India is not blinking, and under the circumstances, it wouldn’t, what should Pakistan do? Is there any way out? Is there a possibility of any solution whereby Pakistan could take things in its own hands, independent of any outside support? A solution to the rigmarole without India’s direct or indirect involvement? These questions can easily be addressed provided there is a will to do so. But wait a minute…!! Before we delve into such a scenario, one paramount question would have to be answered. Does Pakistan want such a solution or not? Furthermore, how would the stakeholders in Pakistan agree to be on one-page to come up with a collective approach to deal with this animal? Lastly, would anyone in Pakistan like to make India ‘irrelevant’? How about depriving India of an enemy? Georgy Arbatov, a Soviet Union expert on the US affairs said to one of his American counterparts in 1988: ‘We are going to do a terrible thing to you. We are going to deprive you of an enemy.’ The fascinating part? They did it.