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**Where are we going?**

So much is going on in and around Pakistan that it is difficult to choose any one subject on which to write.

There is unmitigated anti-Pakistan propaganda being unleashed by India and Afghanistan, and in some cases by lost Pakistanis too. One would get the impression that it was Pakistan that had conquered and occupied Afghanistan for twenty years, not the US and Nato.

The US lost the war and, like every earlier occupier, has acknowledged defeat and is running away from Afghanistan with its tail between its legs. And that too without arriving at an agreement that Afghans would accept on how the country is to be ruled and by whom until they agree on a system.

Pakistan is being blamed for the rapid Taliban advance in Afghanistan. I call it a veritable scuttle. At the rate it is going, it would not be too far in the distant future that they occupy Kabul and the entire government of Afghanistan. But Pakistan has handled all this propaganda and abuse maturely and is not taking sides. “We will accept any government in Afghanistan the [Afghan] people have elected”, says Pakistan. This is the most sensible attitude and one that will not lead to conflict.

In all this kerfuffle, India and Israel stand out as the perpetrators of this disinformation. We have to be very careful. Though we have handled India for the last 70-plus years, Israel has a different kind of power and different allies. I believe that we are up to it and can give them a taste of their own medicine. Above all, we will need consensus and unity in our ranks if we are to successfully face this challenge. There is no room now for the Mir Jaffers and the Mir Sadiqs to continue their rot.

Those blaming the Pakistani state and army for anything and everything can only be pitied. And their nightmare will be to be totally ignored and not be given visas to migrate to other countries. They should remember that countries that don’t really like us (like our former and current colonial masters) would love to have such traitors in their ranks who they can then use against us.

Pakistan is not the only country deeply interested in Afghan stability. Other countries also know that instability there would have a deleterious effect on their own country. With the American scuttle in Afghanistan, there is now a temporary vacuum there. Russia, China, the Central Asian Republics, Iran, Turkey and others are looking at who influences and determines Afghanistan’s future. So, we should tread very cautiously.

The only time I have known Afghanistan to have had some form of stability is when King Zahir Shah was in power. Sadly, he was removed in a coup d’etat staged by his errant cousin, Sardar Dawood. And that is when it hit the fan. The Russians intervened and tried to impose a communist system in Afghanistan which was doomed to fail. Then it was the turn of the Americans, who were the last occupiers. They wanted the myth of democracy to prevail in Afghanistan. Now they have run away in ignominious defeat.

We should wait and watch and consult with the Chinese and tread very carefully because Afghanistan is rightly called the ‘graveyard of empires.’ Afghanistan’s attitude has been ungrateful – blaming Pakistan and forgetting what we have done for the country. We have hosted four million of their refugees for more than 20 years and yet when you ask an Afghan spokesperson a question, the first thing that will come out of their mouth is blame for Pakistan for all their ills.

Afghanistan is the only country which worked hard to prevent Pakistan’s entry in the United Nations. We should never forget that for the Afghans their country extends up to Attock. When I went to Kabul many years ago to interview the then president Najeebullah, he asked what he could do for me. I said I’d be grateful for the typical Afghan chapli kebabs. He smiled and said, ‘why do you ask for that when the best chapli kebabs are available in Peshawar?’ Nevertheless, he sent all kinds of Afghan food to my hotel the next day. There was a tinge of longing in his voice; perhaps not so deep down he believed that Afghanistan really should go up to Peshawar.

Come to think of it, virtually all the trouble in South Asia and the Middle East has been caused by the British occupiers of the past. They are the ones who left behind the contention over the Durand Line that separates Pakistan and Afghanistan. They are the ones who left behind the Kashmir problem and problems in other countries including Africa and the Middle East. If you think about it coolly, you would realize that the British come out as the greatest trouble-makers. So what if they built railways and schools and the court system and all the other excuses trotted out by those who miss them? Such people will soon pass into history.

Since I have reached the limit of the words allowed, I will end here but I would urge all my Pakistani compatriots to give these matters some thought.

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