**What Biden Says!**

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On October 13, at a Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Reception in Los Angeles, while talking about the changing political dynamics in the broader region of Asia, President of the United States (US) Joe Biden vented his thoughts on Pakistan. Biden said that Pakistan might be “one of the most dangerous nations in the world” as the country had “nuclear weapons without any cohesion.”

The White House’s website published the transcript of Biden’s address. The remarks outraged Pakistan, which not only rejected the assertion but also handed over a demarche to the US Ambassador to Pakistan, Donald Blome.

In Pakistan, most people think that the remarks were off the cuff. However, a deeper analysis reveals something sinister. In his remarks, Biden did not question Pakistan’s command and control of the nukes; he expressed his qualms about something else.

What Biden says is that Pakistan is running more than one nuclear program. One, which is declared and open to inspection by the international nuclear surveillance agency, International Atomic Energy Agency, whereas the other one is undeclared and closed to inspection. The declared one may fall under the category of one command and control, but not the undeclared one. Biden proclaims the presence of disassociation between the two components. The entirety defies the principle of cohesion.

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Pakistan must consider that this is a serious allegation levelled by the US President. Mere demarche cannot resolve the issue. Further, the clarification statement issued by the US State Department merely says that Washington is confident of Pakistan’s determination to protect its nuclear arsenal. In reality, the protection of the nuclear arsenal is one thing and the bifurcation of a nuclear program is a different thing. That is, the clarification statement does not refute Biden’s allegation.

Whether Biden’s allegation is true or not is a point of concern, as Biden’s contention is bound to trigger a debate in the world on Pakistan’s intent and competence to run more than one nuclear program. Countries hostile to Pakistan are bound to cash in on the situation. Soon journals concerned would be found replete with articles banking on Biden’s assertion. Hardly have Pakistan writers to counter any such intellectual or diplomatic onslaught. The defence analysts, ranging from retired brigadiers to generals, vocal on the media are experts on snubbing and intimidating civilians and not competing with international analysts. The international competitive scenario calls for expertise in analysis coupled with a command of English. Mere parroting cannot serve the purpose.

It is high time Pakistan did some introspection. Two main factors should be considered in this regard. First, a couple of months ago, an outspoken minister Sheikh Rasheed was found bragging in the media about tactical nuclear weapons developed by Pakistan. Rasheed, who had nothing to do with the subject of nuclear weapons and the country’s defence, was permitted to peddle the claim of Pakistan’s developing tactical nuclear weapons meant for use against India. His swank must have alerted not only India but also the world. Rasheed is a known representative of Gate number four of the General Head Quarters, Rawalpindi.

Second, for the past few years, on one issue or the other, rowdy religious elements have been found flooding Pakistan’s streets. Certain components from intelligence agencies, including the prime one, have been found backing the raucous complexes and the related sit-ins, thereby expressing a durable and deep association with religious protestors. The backing of the state agencies to ruffle the even tenor of any sitting government has been a point of concern not only for the mindful, democratic Pakistanis but also the world, which is dreadful of Pakistan’s destabilization causing the nukes falling into wrong hands. The first factor has a direct bearing whereas the second one has an indirect influence on the issue of Pakistan’s nuclear reach. Both factors persist side-by-side dictating their terms with the possibility of concurrence and coalescence at any time.

A third factor can also be considered. Pakistan’s former Prime Minister Imran Khan has been found complaining about a lack of independence while running the government. In his recent electoral campaign for by-elections, he has made his complaint public.

If Biden says that Pakistan is “one of the most dangerous nations in the world”, the US also has to do some introspection. Two main factors can be considered in this regard. First, the US preferred a military-to-military alliance to engage with Pakistan. The relevance of civilians hardly mattered. Frequent interference in civilian affairs, directly or indirectly, has spoiled the spirit of the constitution. On the other hand, the US kept raising the flag of democracy in the world. Retrospectively, the US won the war against communism and remained instrumental in extending democracy to East Europe at the cost of democracy in Pakistan.

Second, after assuming power, US Presidents tend to visit India and not Pakistan. Visits to Pakistan would open investment opportunities and enhance democratic trends in the country. Every bit of flagging democracy in Pakistan shifts the balance away from any civilian democratic set-up, which gets dictated by non-democratic elements. All efforts are made to keep the tilt permanent. Under the Afghan jihad project, the Pakistanis paid for democracy in the world but they are still deprived of running their own country democratically.

Instead of declaring Pakistan the most dangerous nation, Biden could do us all a favour. Support democracy, strengthen democratic institutions, and reinforce democratic trends in Pakistan. Pay respect to Pakistan’s civilian representatives, listen to them, and help them against non-democratic ambushes launched through institutions or the streets. Respect the modern democratic times and establish civilian-to-civilian relationships. Adopt the policy of listening to civilians first. Give unflinching support to a civilian set-up. Otherwise, stop blaming Pakistan, which refuses to be a victim of misplaced US policies.

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