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# The image deficit

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In the current spurt of near-euphoric feelings generated by the rapid exchange of give and take between the governments of Pakistan and India one may well overlook certain vital facts and developments.

The first of these relates to the strategies adopted by India. It has most successfully capitalised on the terrorism factor putting Pakistan in the dock and lining up the world opinion against it for infiltration or so-called terrorism across the Line of Control. Under pressure, Pakistan was forced to put a stop to such support though a little of it may have continued because of the sympathetic response from hundreds of thousands of Kashmiris living in Pakistan (and 'Azad' Kashmir) as also from certain *Jihadi* groups. More than that the cause of the Kashmiris' right to struggle for self-determination has suffered considerably as increasingly such action has come to be equated with acts of terrorism, internationally — thanks to Nine-Eleven. Add to this reverse, India's remarkable strides in forging close relations, rather a strategic partnership, with USA and Israel as also strengthening ties with western Europe, Russia and Iran as well as mending fences with China. These strides need to be seen in the context of impressive economic and military-capability advances. No wonder India was invited both at the G8 and Asean meetings. India's size, democracy and its pre-eminent role in terms of its large presence in the Indian Ocean has further served to heighten its image as an emerging regional power.

How is Pakistan viewed internationally? While its services to help USA to take care of the remnants of al-Qaeda and Taliban in Pakistan are lauded and for this it receives pats on the back fairly frequently, it is seen as a terrorists-stricken place with fundamentalists gaining

strength politically. This is then linked to a possible scenario where the extremists may come to wield power in Pakistan and thus acquire control over the nuclear weapons. India of course has been stoking the anti-Pakistan propaganda fires and using diplomacy to subvert Pakistan's efforts to move ahead internationally and to strengthen itself in various ways. A recent example is the official paper circulated by the External Affairs State Minister in Washington advising the US State Department to desist from supplying arms to Pakistan (whatever little reluctantly is being promised). Doing so at a time when New Delhi is taking credit for initiating confidence-building measures, is to say the least, quite surprising. But unsurprising it is for discerning India watchers. In addition to India we now have the Afghanistan government accusing Pakistan of not doing enough to control the Taliban taking refuge in Pakistan and making preparations for stirring up trouble in Afghanistan. Thus we have become a punch bag for 'not doing enough'. And such exhortations (and denunciations) not only come from our two eastern and western neighbours but also from USA and Europe.

How an influential group of strategic thinkers in USA, constituted by the Council on Foreign Relations and the Asia Society, including two ex-American ambassadors to the sub-continent, looks at India and Pakistan is indeed an eye-opener for present rulers who keep on harping on their economic, political and diplomatic achievements.

First the initial observations about India: "Democratic India, with its political stability and decade of steady economic advance, has the potential for a long-term political and security partnership and substantially expanded trade and economic relations with the United States. Unlike during the Cold War years, US and Indian interests broadly coincide. The medium-term policy challenge is to complete the

transition from past estrangement through constructive engagement on to genuine partnership." And their assessment of Pakistan is: "Pakistan presents one of the most complex and difficult challenges facing US diplomacy. Its political instability, entrenched Islamist extremism, economic and social weaknesses, and dangerous hostility toward India have cast dark shadows over this nuclear-armed nation. Even though Pakistan offers valuable help in rooting out the remnants of al-Qaeda, it has failed to prevent the use of its territory by Islamist terrorists as a base for armed attacks on Kashmir and Afghanistan. The United States has a major stake in a stable Pakistan at peace with itself and its neighbours and should be prepared to provide substantial assistance toward this end. The extent of US assistance, however should be calibrated with Islamabad's own performance and conduct."

Certain specific recommendations with respect to India are: Ease restrictions on cooperation with India in the civilian satellite sector; treat India as a 'friendly' country in granting export licenses for transfers of defence equipment; ease restrictions on the export to India of dual-use items that have civilian and military uses; and encourage US foundations, businesses, and scientific and educational institutions to expand efforts to develop cooperative programmes with Indian counterpart. As for Pakistan the report is emphatic on making assistance conditional as indicated above: Condition release of aid above a baseline level (\$1.5 billion over five years or \$200 million of economic assistance annually) on Pakistan's progress in implementation of a political, economic and social reform agenda; its cooperation in the war on terrorism and its prevention of leakage of sensitive nuclear technology and material.

The report also proposes that the US should urge publicly as well as

privately an enhanced civilian and a reduced army role in governance, oppose continued involvement of the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI) in the electoral process and provide increased assistance in bolstering civil society. And to promote regional stability, the United States should: press President Musharraf not to permit the use of Pakistani territory as a base for neo-Taliban attacks on Afghanistan and make clear that Pakistan's failure to do a better job of preventing the use of its territory by terrorists will reduce US assistance levels.

Our government may not attach much importance to the Commonwealth decision to keep Pakistan's membership suspended because of the army's continued intervention in political affairs and not bringing the changes in the Constitution before the Parliament for discussion but the fact remains that Pakistan's image continues to suffer especially in comparison with India.

There is an urgent need for taking cognisance seriously of the impression the leading influential powers have of Pakistan to analyse the relevant causes, factors and forces at work and take steps to remedy the deficiencies and drawbacks. Merely to keep leaning on a super power for support for doing its bidding for sometime is impolitic and short-sighted. No single individual however competent can be all-wise and knowledgeable enough to adequately deal with weighty national and international issues in this day and age. It is time a national debate is initiated in the parliament, in various civil society forums and specialised think tanks to deliberate at length on the external and internal conditions and circumstances, to arrive at a consensus agenda to put our house in order as also to evolve strategies to work for giving Pakistan a credible place in the comity of nations.

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