

At penpoint

Hardline opportunism

BY M.A. NIAZI

With the whole focus of the country on the impending composite dialogue with India, perhaps even the PPP has failed to pay heed to the undeniable fact that, among all the country's major political forces, it has given the most consistent reaction to the developing situation by welcoming the government's steps.

The Army, through its surrogate the PML(Q), is about to realise that it is in tangles over this issue. It is moving, perhaps even hurtling, towards a peace based on a Kashmir solution less advantageous than was available in 1999 to Mian Nawaz Sharif, which it refused to accept and overturned through Kargil. The MMA's two major components, the JUI and the Jamaat Islami, have differing approaches to the Kashmir issue, and so the alliance is unable to develop a coherent stand, posturings aside. The PML(N) is claiming vindication for its own policies while in government, but is also attacking the new developments. Only the PPP can claim to have stuck to its original stand.

Part of the reason is that the Kashmir issue is extremely emotive for Pakistanis. The sense of being hard done by, which was generated by the events of 1947-9, has been strengthened by the post-1989 Kashmiri freedom struggle, which has been to take recourse to arms, and which so far has not compromised with the Indian leadership. Because Kashmir is so close to Pakistani hearts, it has so often been used by political parties against each other that governments quite often adopt public stances which are clearly not in accordance with what they are actually going to do at the negotiating table.

This would explain the repeated claims by the government's various spokesmen that there will be 'no compromise' on the Kashmir issue. If there is to be no compromise, what is the point of including this issue in the dialogue? A peaceful dialogue by its very nature implies that the various parties will put across their points of view, which project their own individual interests, and to then try and find a middle ground. This middle ground is ideally a point at which everyone's interests are served, the so-called win-win situation. However, more often than not, it is the point at which each party feels that the cost of maintaining its original claim is higher than that of accepting whatever is on offer, and giving away whatever it is itself offering.

Between states, this involves relative measures of power, and of what one can get away with. The patriotic statesman is the one who tries to get as much out of a situation for his country as is possible, and give away as little. Patriotic, yes, but not necessarily wise. If India overplays its hand at this juncture, under the impression that Pakistan is too weak to do anything about it, it will be poor statesmanship. This is not because Pakistan is actually stronger than it seems (though this might well be the case), but because India has to realise that while there is a Kashmir dispute on both sides, it is India which has a Kashmir problem, not Pakistan. India has a huge military and paramilitary force in Kashmir for internal security duties (which is military jargon for occu-



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pying the place by force); Pakistan's military presence in Azad Kashmir is purely oriented to external defence. Pakistan may have a grievance and a claim, but it is India which actually has to deal with a state which refuses to accept the Indian Union.

Under the circumstances, Pakistan cannot say that there will be no compromise. That is a hardline stance. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with a hard line, or a soft line for that matter, so long as it is followed consistently. The hard line postulates that India is Pakistan's permanent enemy, and has still not accepted the reality of the Partition. This leads to the conclusion that Pakistan must not be fooled into thinking it can serve its interests by negotiating with India. Therefore, these are the people who opposed or supported the composite dialogue in 1999, and do so now as well. The inconsistency arises in supporting the composite dialogue then, and opposing it now, or opposing it then, and supporting it now.

The PPP was not virulently opposed in 1999, claiming vindication for its own policies while in government, and is cautiously welcoming it now. The JUI can take Kashmir or leave it; its primary concern are the Taliban and their place in the new Afghanistan. The Jamaat was virulently opposed in 1999, going to the extent of rioting in Lahore and attacking diplomats' vehicles; but while it pays lip service to opposing the process now, it has kept its toughs off the streets, thereby allowing the new policy a free run. The PML(N) was responsible for the 1999 process, but it is trying to discredit the present process. The PML(Q) clearly has no opinion of its own, but is parroting a brief handed down to it, and the signals it is sending would do credit to the most peacenik liberal.

Without going into details, suffice it to say that the Lahore Process was broken off by Kargil and then the October 1999 coup represented a reversal of policy. At that time, according to a source with first-hand knowledge, the deal was for India to keep Jammu and Ladakh, and Pakistan Azad Kashmir and the Northern Areas, with the Valley to go independent, but with its defence and foreign affairs dealt with by a 10-year Pak-India condominium, following which the Kashmiris would determine their future. This is hardly an ideal solution from Pakistan's point of view, and it faced strenuous opposition within the establishment. The Army went ahead and pre-empted it by Kargil, and launched an aggressive policy which did lead to Agra, which turned out to be an opportunity lost. Twice Pakistan thought it had India over a barrel, on both occasions India refused to play ball.

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which might be the case. Unlike Pakistan, India has lined up international opinion on its side. After 9/11, the military government jumped at the chance of getting back into the USA's good books by selling the Taliban down the river in exchange for its good offices in Kashmir. This proved a serious miscalculation, as was shown by the year-long pressure on Pakistan to 'do more.' There is every possibility that coming to the negotiating table at this juncture might be counterproductive for Pakistan, especially with American facilitation. This time, it has been disclosed by another unexceptionable source, the 'deal' is the same as in 1999, but the Valley will be given to India permanently, though with 'maximum autonomy.' In short, where Pakistan had a role in 1999, now it will have none. The 1999 deal was branded treason by the same people who will accept much less in 2004 in the supreme national interest.

The hard line on Kashmir has split. There remains the 'genuine' hard line, which is based on an objective analysis of Pakistan's best interests, and also rests on the principle of consistent strategy and flexible tactics. But now the 'opportunist' hard line has also emerged, in which Pakistan's national interests pale into insignificance when petty corporate interests are at stake. The present regime has been given a democratic façade, but it does not reflect the will of the people, which was cynically manipulated before the 2002 election, and blatantly subverted afterwards. It is driven by the decisions of one man, taken on behalf of a single institution. To maintain that grip, the regime needs outside support.

It is often touted about that Pakistan is under grave threat: its fragile economy, its nuclear programme, its involvement in spreading international terrorism. Actually, it is a particular institution which is under threat. A genuinely representative government, without the baggage of the past, and in full control of all national institutions, would not find it as difficult to alleviate these pressures as a self-imposed regime which has people to protect. More important, a government rooted in the people needs no outside support, but a self-imposed regime does, and as such is more vulnerable to outside pressure.

China is known to have advised Pakistan to show patience, just as it has done with Hong Kong, and is doing with Taiwan. That implies accepting the Indian approach of the 1980s and 1990s: normalisation of relations, particularly economic, and leaving aside contentious issues. Mian Shahbaz Sharif, in an expansive moment in a private conversation soon after Kargil, but before the October 12 coup, once remarked: "If Pakistan makes more economic progress than India, there is no way that Kashmir can be kept from joining us. That's the real solution of the Kashmir problem." This reflects the Chinese approach.

To be fair, the Pakistani establishment also realises that it should avoid signing on any dotted lines at this point. However, pressure is building on a vulnerable regime, which has a track record of following the balance of convenience rather than the long-term national interest. There is also the temptation being dangled of Nobel Prizes all around. Any Pakistani leader, before even thinking about this bait, should look at the fate of another pair of Nobel Prize winners who signed on a US-brokered peace accord: Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin.

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