

A new foreign policy?

Fears of Pakistan becoming the next target in the Terror war notwithstanding, the fierce missiles race between India and Pakistan has gone on, with one missile testified by each recently. The context was yet another incident of grisly murder of 24 Hindu men, women and children in Doda district, with familiar mutual accusations. Independently, religious parties are demanding a new foreign policy. Their case is simple: it was wrong to dump Taliban and actively side with the US. That apparently made the Iraq War possible. Ergo, let's stop pro-US policy and get the four air bases, now in US use, vacated. On Iraq, Pakistan must take a more forthright stance and denounce the War. Details of the desired change are not clear.

This Musharraf-Jamali government is, on the contrary, proud of what it has achieved with its 'Pakistan First' notion: Americans are constructively engaged in restraining India from an adventurist course; they have arranged for nearly \$1.6 billion grants or concessional aid and have been helpful in persuading the Paris Club and IFIs (international financial institutions) to be far more forthcoming in debt rescheduling, acceptance of new aid programmes from IMF and other poverty reduction loans from ADP and WB. The economy is, as usual, ready to takeoff. Meantime, Pakistan has built up \$10 billion in Monetary Reserves — an all time record.

Few outsiders agree that the economy has actually turned the corner or that America's remaining engaged can be relied upon to produce the results that the government fondly imagines. While carrying on an anti-American campaign based on the hoary pan-Islamist sentiment, the divines remain paranoid that one-day the Bush, or his successor's, Administration will turn on Pakistan. They know the basis: Pakistan has WMDs with means of delivering them; it is intensely pan-Islamist; it is equally anti-Israel; it is veritably the world headquarters of Taliban-al-Qaeda kind of Islamic Revolution; all the al Qaeda boys arrested anywhere display Pakistan Pakistan; and its militant Islamists mean to bleed India white by their Jihad. The US will not like all that. Ergo, it will move against them.

Well, Islamists are not alone in this fear. The government too can see these facts. Observers with no rightwing sympathies who realise that grounds for such a fear do exist. They also realise that the government's eyes and ears might have been vitiated by less than wholly objective perceptions. At any rate, it has to depend on its own machinery and agencies for implementing changes, with possible risks of distortion or even failure. Moreover, it is also not free from all illusions and tendencies that had led to the policies of nurturing and supporting Taliban. Its ability to shed all those illusions can be doubted. But a change has certainly become necessary because the present policy is going nowhere.

What precisely is the government doing today? It goes along as much with the US as it dares, does not say too harsh things about its War on Iraq and is carrying on a high trapeze balancing act in PR terms: firm declarations of not participating in the War while soothing American nerves. And yet Prime Minister Zafarullah Jamali had to postpone his US and UK visits. He has however rushed to Beijing where he was sure to be received warmly. He has promises of eternal Chinese friendship. Less than a \$100 million aid for Gwadar Port development and many big promises besides the description of Sino-Pak relationship being strategic in nature, with clear dimensions of continued military cooperation. Pretty solid it seems. But aren't there any limits to this friendship?



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PLAIN WORDS

Sino-Pakistan friendship has especially helpful features. It is one sided; China does not expect much in exchange, not even doing as Beijing may desire. Pakistan has regularly ignored the Chinese advice in every major crisis — the Chinese usually advise against adventurism and political means — but that has neither impacted on economic or military aid that Beijing gives. Pakistanis get this aid for being who they are and where they are. It is for balance of power in South Asia and even the Americans do not look askance at it. But for all that, the Chinese will never fight Pak-

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istan's wars on its presumptions and purposes. It advises against Jihad in Kashmir and a resolution of Kashmir problem by amicable negotiations. We have seen that in 1971. Pakistanis can certainly have some aid; but cannot hope to seriously influence the extra-prudent Chinese policies. Thus if it helps the Pakistani rulers' morale, such visits are useful.

Pakistan is really engaged today with three powers: the US (to which it has given all it wanted), India and China. Look closely. Pakistan's basic business is with India. The latter holds Kashmir in its military grip while Pakistan wants Kashmiris' accession to Pakistan, if possible. Otherwise — what? It is wholly unclear. Maybe Pakistan might settle for the third option as once or twice indicated. Maybe it will even accept Kashmiris' Azadi whatever is meant by Kashmiris or Azadi.

Since Kashmir's Jihad has lasted 12 years and more, India has repeatedly threatened war; it had in fact served notice even in 1986-87 (Brass Tacks) because of Pakistan's nuclear programme and its implications for Kashmir. Since Jan 1, 2002 India has refused to talk altogether and has cut off all communications as in actual war. It is a total deadlock and a flare up is still possible, though it remains rather unlikely. Why? Because the reasons that made India desist in 2002 will continue to operate in 2003 and perhaps subsequently also. Nevertheless, a near war situation does obtain and the possibility of an almighty clash remains.

Why war has to be avoided at all costs need not to be argued at length. Wars are fought for a purpose; they are politics by mil-

itary means. In this case, nuclear weapons' mischief is that they destroy trust and peace and in a possible nuclear war would lead to what would in fact be defeat for both sides. It has become totally senseless. No cause is worth a nuclear war, not even Kashmir. The fact is that military means can achieve nothing positive for either country — except to lead to each other's devastation.

A hint recently dropped by Shaikh Rashid Ahmed, the Information Minister, that a solution of the Kashmir problem looks likely within two to three years but it will satisfy the wishes of neither India nor Pakistan assumes some significance. The ferment in the Pakistani mind is shown by the recent advice of Jamaat-e-Islami's Qazi Hussain Ahmed to Pakistan's Foreign Office. He correctly assumed that America is benefiting from the Indo-Pak hostility and that the best way to tackle the US now is for Pakistan to talk to India — implicitly by doing what it takes. What will it take is clear: Jihad has to be ended for good; only then Indo-Pak talks would proceed. Remember Hizbul Mujahideen, the main Jihadi group in Kashmir associated with Qazi Hussain Ahmed's Jamaat-e-Islami. It once offered a unilateral cease-fire to India. Talks were to follow. That the talks did not come through was because of Indian politics. Qazi did tour major capitals of the world and was received at the highest levels; he was obviously lobbying for something definite. Good that he has revived the idea.

To think that India would not negotiate is silly. It has to. There are issues that require discussion and give and take. War is not an option for India too. But it also wants a price; it looks it has to be paid for various reasons: The Jihad is going nowhere; Kashmiris, after sacrificing 70,000 young men and 14 years of penury, are not an inch nearer to their Azadi. Pakistan also remains helplessly caught in the coils of international crises because of that fruitless Jihad, with no initiative. These are too good reasons for change.

Let's admit Pakistan is not in a position to force a desired Kashmir solution on India. Nor can India make Pakistan forget its stand, though it can deny a reasonable solution of the problem because war is not an option. Therefore, it is much better to accept the advice given to non-official Pakistanis — though perhaps intended for Islamabad — by India's former Naval Chief Admiral Ramu Ramdas two weeks ago. It is an opening.

What he said was that both countries are still committed to the Lahore Process and documents exist that bear the signatures of two elected Prime Ministers. India cannot, in reason, refuse to talk on the basis of those documents. Why not use this opening — of course with a flexible mind that is free from adventurism — and Islamabad will probably see that both Beijing and Washington, not to mention others, would support and may ensure that the dice is not unnecessarily loaded against Pakistan in the ensuing talks. India too needs to get off the hook just as much as Pakistan does.

Pakistan-India relations need not only normalisation but also improvement, if we all have to grow up into adult citizens of free countries living cheek by jowl in a rich natural region. There is no reason why the region cannot be normalised and harmonised to make economic progress and achieve some political harmonisation. Let's anchor the originally-visualised Indo-Pak friendship, based on a true people-to-people rapprochement, in the integration of a freely and preferentially trading region — Saarc.