

The Pakistan-India crisis

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In my last column, I highlighted the inadequacy of our Kashmir policy and the need for reviewing and redesigning it. I drew attention to the centrality of the Kashmir issue in our foreign policy and how this single factor coloured and shaped our external relations over the years. The Kashmir question in fact came to emerge as the determinant of our search for security and our decision to align ourselves with the United States of America. A quick look was also cast at how India first internationalised the issue, then made an attempt to backtrack and later bilateralised it (using Pakistan's vulnerability after its break up, to make it agree to settle all disputes initially at least, bilaterally). After the Simla Agreement, India assumed that Pakistan would no longer take up the Kashmir dispute at the international level. This assumption appeared to be well-conceived in India's reckoning, as except for rhetoric on the part of the Pakistan's leaders, the question remained consigned to the backburner.

The Kashmiri uprising, as a last resort act of desperation, rekindled Pakistan's active interest and involvement. India unleashed brutal state terrorism. The world took notice. In 1991 the Human Rights Watch (USA) came up with a blistering denunciation of India's barbarism and released a report of the atrocities perpetrated by its security forces. A similar report was released by the Amnesty International. By 1993, USA started taking serious notice of Indian violation of human rights and international codes of conduct. It may come as surprise to some of the readers of this column that in that very year US Assistant Secretary of State visited India and made highly critical statements about the Indian behaviour and went to the length of questioning the very basis of New Delhi's claim of Kashmir's "accession" to India. A look at the Indian press of that period shows how such statements unnerved the Indian government and how Robin Raphel found herself subjected to strong criticism during her next visit. A piece of advice also came from another State

Department official, John Mallot who counselled New Delhi to "clean-up its act in Kashmir".

How did we capitalise on this favourable turn of international opinion? Believe it or not, all that we did was to withdraw our Kashmir resolution at a UN General Assembly committee, India having successfully convinced Washington that it was willing to talk to Pakistan on Kashmir. The first of January 1994 saw the Indian Foreign Secretary visit Islamabad to meet his counterpart. Pakistan failed to realise that it was a mere ruse to lower pressure on India. The meeting lasted for a few minutes only. With the Indian official declaring that Kashmiri was an integral part of India, there was little left to discuss. This was followed intermittently by a few more get-togethers, the farce of negotiation petering out after an exchange of lists of issues. India thereafter, massively increased its military presence in the occupied state and launched a revamped diplomatic campaign against Pakistan's involvement in the Kashmiris' struggle for self-determination.

Pakistan failed to build diplomatically on the opportunity arising from the Kashmiris' revolt. It forgot to educate the international opinion that as a UN recognised party to the dispute, it had every right to be involved in Kashmir when the other party had thrown in hundreds of thousands of troops to suppress the freedom movement. It also squandered its most valuable human rights card at the UN Human Rights Commission meetings in Geneva. So inept and unsuccessful were its efforts, in this respect, that with every passing year, it kept losing support till soon it found that it hardly had any country left even in the Muslim world to co-sponsor a resolution. This performance was in sharp contrast to the unending eloquence on the subject by official and political bigwigs, within the country.

Signs of a change surfaced after the two countries went nuclear but the goodwill generated by Vajpayee's visit to Lahore was lost in the sound and fury of the exchange of fire at Kargil. Kargil indeed was turned into a watershed by Indians. A better diplomatic performer, India was able to persuade USA and other western countries to view Pakistan as an "in-

truder" thus securing acceptance from the international community of "LoC" being considered as a recognised international border. It further made gains in Pakistan itself formally agreeing to respect the "sanctity" of the Line of Control when its Prime Minister signed the warrant of withdrawal of "intruders" at White House's behest.

The ditching of democracy and the military coup in Pakistan further distanced the Americans from Islamabad and Clinton who had promised to take "personal" interest in settling the Kashmir question, wouldn't even like to visit Pakistan. All he relented to do was administer a stern sermon to the people of Pakistan over the head of the military government.

Nine Eleven transformed USA and the world. It was a wind-fall. Musharraf overnight ceased to be a *persona non-grata*. He in fact became a good friend. India, which had been building up a case of cross-border terrorism against Pakistan (Jaswant Singh having most ingeniously and diligently done the necessary spadework), influenced the mind of the US State Department, forging joint working groups with major western powers, now upped the ante. It demanded action against Pakistan. As US was busy in Afghanistan with Islamabad's unqualified support, New Delhi bided its time. The internationally-uninvestigated attack on its parliament became the excuse to post Indian troops on the border. Along with this move it successfully persuaded US to press Pakistan to stop support to the Kashmiris. Musharraf was coerced to fall in line. The Kashmiris' struggle however has continued and so has India's war cries tom-tommed by Advani and more stridently his handpicked BJP extremist Yashwant Sinha. All incidents of violence in India are immediately heaped on Pakistan. Nobody listens to Islamabad's protestations and explanations.

American attack on Iraq — a demonstration of the preemptive doctrine as enunciated by Washington, has stirred up Advani's imagination. His firebrand external affair's minister invoking the Iraq precedent, has hurled a crude though an unambigu-

ous threat to Pakistan. If US can do it, why not us? In Pakistan, there has been the usual sharp reaction. And India's explosive language has brought in US advice to New Delhi to hold its horses and as a corrective to Sinha's misconceived thinking of drawing a parallel from the Iraq war.

"Any attempts to draw parallels between the Iraq and Kashmir situations are wrong and overwhelmed by the difference between them. The circumstances that made coalition military action necessary in Iraq do not apply in the subcontinent and should not be considered a precedent," said State Department's spokesperson Joanne Prokopowicz. Islamabad need not sit complacent with this American snub to India. New Delhi has strong lobby connections in Washington. It is bound to persist with and step up its anti-Pakistan propaganda. There are receptive ears in the western capitals and Russia to pay heed to its well-designed diplomatic thrusts. US "tactical" support to Pakistan may well be short-lived. Pakistan's pleas of innocence and good behaviour unaccompanied by a redesigned approach to the Kashmir question and unbacked by an imaginative and sustained public diplomacy drive, will not cut much ice. Formal and virile statements by Musharraf, Kasuri, Rashid and our UN rep without a back-up emanating from the international think-tanks, the media and civil society organisations, political caucuses and lobbies will continue to fall short of securing the desired results. The foreign minister did respond to this crucial lack in our foreign policy strategy, as expressed in an earlier column but there is little sign of the urgency of taking up the required initiatives.

Finally the latest diplomatic crisis must shake our government to undertake a ruthless review of our approach to the Kashmir question and as said earlier, redesign its policy and strategy. Merely harping on denial of support to the Kashmiri freedom fighters parrot-like making appeals for a dialogue and issuing brave reactive statements only erodes the sinews of our stand and credibility.

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