

Carrot and stick game

23.11.03 News Pak & rel India

After a week or so of increasing bellicosity from the Indian leadership, Pakistan saw Prime Minister Vajpayee offer "friendship" to Pakistan and call for the resolution of all issues "through talks". Pakistan, of course, immediately welcomed this apparent shift in India's Pakistan policy because Pakistan has always advocated unconditional talks "anywhere" and at any place, "anytime". Pakistan also chose to play down the major conditionality that was attached to the Vajpayee offer of talks and friendship - that nothing can happen until Pakistan "stops encouraging militants". This constant refrain from the Indian side really undermines the genuine-ness of the Indian intent to move beyond belligerency. In fact, Vajpayee himself undermined his own intent the very next day when he declared in the same belligerent mode as his External Affairs Minister, Mr Sinha, that India "will not allow Pakistan to succeed in its designs" (*Hindustan Times.com* April 20, 2003). In a carefully orchestrated media campaign this follow-up to the offer of friendship was hardly exposed or reported - even in the Pakistan media!



Shireen M Mazari

The writer is Director General of the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad
smnews80@hotmail.com

such tirades remains muted.

Take the case of one-time UNOCOL (oil company), now US government official Zalmay Khalilzad (originally of Afghan descent whose family sheltered in Islamabad for many years during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan). Last week, on April 19, 2003, Khalilzad had the gall to "warn" Pakistan, after talks on clashes along the Pak-Afghan border, that anything that "undermined" the Afghan government's stability was a challenge to US interests. And what of Pakistan's stability being undermined by Afghan and US forces trying to cross the Durand Line? Should Pakistan renounce its national security to pander to the trigger-happy American soldiers? Surely the Afghan government's stability - such as it is - is being undermined by the US inability to establish credibility for this government outside of Kabul, given that the Karzai government continues to be wholly dependent on the US and its allies. In any event, unless all Afghan factions feel part of the structures of the state, there cannot be much stability.

Pakistan did well to ignore the accompanying belligerency from India, to even the conditional offer of talks from India, but it must not let the world ignore this factor. Meanwhile, it needs to move ahead - as it seems to be doing - on this little glimmer of hope and be more aggressive in its demand that international observers be accepted by India along the LoC to ascertain the veracity or otherwise of India's claims regarding infiltration. After all, that is the only way to resolve the issue one way or the other so that talks can begin. In any case, why should India be so consistently hostile to such verification, given that it refuses to believe Pakistan's claims on the issue?

Beyond calling for international monitors to decide on the issue of infiltration across the LoC, both Pakistan and India will need to restore proper diplomatic relations and move towards setting in motion the process and structure for dialogue. Unless India is prepared to move on all these fronts, it is clear that the Vajpayee statement was merely a propaganda ploy as so many earlier ones on the part of India.

In fact, the game that is being played out here is one of a "carrot and stick" approach towards Pakistan - an approach that is jointly being employed by India and its strategic ally the US. It was certainly not a coincidence that the Vajpayee offer of friendship came in the wake of the US announcement of the visit of Armacost and Rocca to the region. After all, if India had continued with its belligerency, what would the two have done here? Now they have something to go on and something with which to pressurise Pakistan with.

After all, it was again no coincidence that the Vajpayee offer followed in the wake of a US State Department claim that "infiltration still continues". Richard Haass, presently Director for policy planning at the State Department went on an Indian television channel to declare that the US had not succeeded in getting the Pakistan government to "stop cross-border terrorism". Haass has had close links to Indian lobbies in the US and earlier, on January 7, 2003, he addressed the Confederation of Indian Industries in Hyderabad, India, where he had the usual tirade against Pakistan on the issue of infiltration even as he declared the need for the US-India relationship to become a "cornerstone" of the US' "global network of partnerships". His pro-India tilt has been rather overt. Now, not only was the timing of his latest statement important - undermining chances of a Pakistan-India dialogue - but the wording used was also significant. Reference to the LoC as a "border" shows the built-in bias to the US approach on the Kashmir issue. Therefore any expectation that the US can play a useful, intermediary role on this issue should be put aside if one is to have a good grasp of the reality on the ground.

While the US may have put some pressure on India to move away from its belligerency, especially the threat to use the pre-emptive doctrine against Pakistan, it has primarily focused its pressure on Pakistan - despite Pakistan's continuing support in the US-led War on Terrorism. After all, to date, it has been the help of Pakistan that has allowed the US to nab members of al-Qaeda. Yet the Pakistanis continue to be subject to pressure and criticism from the US. It seems as if anyone representing the US government feels free to threaten Pakistan with hostile rhetoric - and for some strange reason Pakistan's response to

or is the Afghan situation separate from what is happening on the India front, given the new Indian intrusion into Afghanistan - especially in the security field. India's opening of a Consulate in Kandahar and the close links between leaders of the Northern Alliance and India should be a source of concern for Pakistan. In addition, if the report on an Indian website (believed to be closely linked to RAW), *Rediff.com*, is true then Pakistan's security concerns will become more acute in the growing strategic cooperation between the US and India. According to *Rediff.com* the US is seeking access to Indian bases and military infrastructure. Given the transfer of missile defence systems from the US and Israel to India as well as the agreement between India and the US to jointly patrol the Indian Ocean from the Red Sea to the Malacca Straits, Pakistan is going to find itself - along with Iran - totally sandwiched between US forces in Central Asia and the Indian Ocean region and Indo-US forces within India itself.

Of course, the US is trying to soften the stick against Pakistan - given that it feels it still needs Pakistan in the war against al-Qaeda - by giving some loan write-offs but the question for Pakistan should be: What is the non-economic cost of these limited economic concessions, especially given that the US is still unable to fulfill its commitment on the opening up of its textile markets to Pakistan? After all, in the long run it is trade that we need, not aid, if we are to move forward substantively towards economic development.

And Pakistan also needs to take heed of a psychological dimension to the overall aggressive US approach towards Pakistan. Given the US leadership's - especially Mr Bush, but also Congress - refusal to tolerate what they see as "defiance" of US wishes by smaller, less-developed states, Pakistan's nuclear development has been a singular failure of US policy. After all, it was Pakistan that the US sought to target with multiple Pakistan-specific sanctions through Congress and yet Pakistan was able to counter the Indian nuclear threat with the development of its own nuclear programme. Pakistan is a constant reminder of the failure of US pressure and coercive diplomacy. If Bush could envisage attacking Iraq because of the excess baggage of his father, imagine what Pakistan constantly does to the US imperialist psyche! It is a critical point when one tries to understand why the US leadership and opinion makers are inherently hostile to Pakistan. After all, India was never targeted for coercive diplomacy - so India's nuclear development is no thorn in the US flesh.

So while Pakistan needs to take up any sign of an olive branch from India, it needs to do so keeping in mind the US-India strategic partnership and the US approach towards Pakistan which will allow India to push for a similar "carrot and stick" policy towards Pakistan.

Tailpiece: Things are surely becoming ever more absurd within the Pakistani polity when the US ambassador gives herself the task to addressing Pakistani legislators on democracy! What part of foreign policy is this? Or is the US now overtly being interventionist in Pakistan's domestic affairs? As Alice would say, "curiouser and curiouser..."

The views expressed by the writer are her own