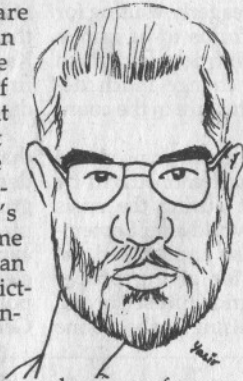


At penpoint

A bad bargain

BY M.A. NIAZI

The peace trumpets are much more muted than they were before Lahore or Agra, precisely because of the residue of disappointment that these two events have left over. Then there is also the unreality of Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's April 18 initiative, which came with little preparation of Indian public opinion. Are the conflicting signals emerging from India, blowing hot one day and cold the next, due to an imperfectly prepared public opinion, or because of an underlying lack of sincerity?



And what role has the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq played? It has certainly led to a softening up of Pakistan's national will. At Lahore and Agra, India's main concern was somehow to bring to an end to the freedom struggle in Kashmir which was draining it, and almost as a side-effect to settle all issues with Pakistan. The only route to ending the freedom struggle was to talk to Pakistan, which believed that it could sustain its support for the freedom struggle.

However, after 9/11, India managed to get the rest of the world to declare the freedom struggle 'terrorism,' and force Pakistan to lower its support levels. By putting troops on the border for a year, India managed to obtain some of the credit for itself, enhancing its psychological advantage. The relative positions of the two countries have changed in approaching talks, and Pakistan is clearly disadvantaged. The set of settlement options available at Lahore have narrowed, excluding the more favourable outcomes for Pakistan, retaining those more favourable for India. Already depressed about the weakness of the Muslims in general, and about its own craven (if pragmatic) behaviour in the Afghan and Iraq crises, Pakistan's government and people both realise that negotiations will lead to a settlement disadvantageous to Pakistan, and probably to the Kashmiri people.

However, despite the lack of enthusiasm, it seems that this time round, there may be a settlement. The pressure for this is external to South Asia, coming from the USA. The Bush administration, having settled Afghanistan and Iraq, is now clearing up other business neglected for too long by its predecessors. Among the immediate major agenda items are Palestine and Kashmir. Palestine is a clear-cut problem: it has to be settled before the USA's most reliable outpost in the

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cares, India could hand over the whole of Kashmir to Pakistan, or vice versa; there has to be a settlement. Second, it is not interested in the justness of the solution, or its permanence. It just has to give the USA a window of opportunity long enough to denuclearise Pakistan. Third, it is free to provide India as much support as it can, while it maintains the pressure on Pakistan. Fourth, it may provide a rough-edged solution as in Palestine, such as a Kashmiri entity, over which India might exercise suzerainty, or any other permutation. The US is perfectly happy to sweep the issue under the carpet somehow.

Of course, the above is only one analysis. It is possible to suspect America of more sinister motives. One of them is to hive off an independent Kashmir, which it would face no difficulty in making its satellite in the region, another link in a chain that would be completed when it gets hold of a foothold in one of the smaller Central Asian Republics (if Afghanistan proves unsatisfactory). One motive, not commonly mentioned, is that international finance need a regional headquarters to replace Beirut and Hong Kong, with Kashmir a convenient midway. Another analysis forsee America using Pakistan's denuclearisation as a step towards denuclearising India as well.

However, it is a safe assumption that these may be preferred outcomes for the USA, but they are not the bottom line. The bottom line is to defang Pakistan. There are too many reasons for the USA not to tolerate Pakistan as a nuclear state if it can help it. First, general principle: nonproliferation is a primary US national security goal, anywhere by anybody outside the Nuclear Club (and even within the Club, restricting arsenals of potential rival members like China). Second, with reference to South Asia: it is

and Jamali governments will not harm US security interests, they cannot be sure about their (possibly fundamentalist) successors. Instead of a permanent source of tension, why not sort out the issue once for all?

But what is the hurry? The hurry is from India. Vajpayee is in his last tenure, and will be retiring after the next election, due in September 2004. It is even possible that he might resign and hand over to a successor before the polls. Who else has sufficient stature in Indian politics to be able to resist L.K. Advani and the Saffron Brigade, if not Vajpayee? A Congress government would be hamstrung by Advani in the Opposition. A BJP government, whether or not headed by Advani, would not be able to deliver a settlement short of the LoC being converted into the international border. That is unlikely to be acceptable to Pakistan, so the Americans have to work within the constraints.

Pakistan's government has enthusiastically responded to Mr Vajpayee's rather lukewarm offer. This is something of a compulsion, because it is getting what it asked for. It has been declaring its willingness to talk anywhere, anytime, at any level, for so long, that it cannot be less than enthusiastic. However, it too must be contemplating the context in which this development is coming. In 1999, with the Kashmiri freedom struggle a decade old, and Pakistan resisting all efforts to cut back its support, and in 2001, when it had resisted even harder, its negotiating position was better. Now, it is being held over a barrel by the Americans to do a deal that it knows is bad for the country.

The basic problem with an unfair settlement of Kashmir (and any settlement under duress will be unfair) is that it leaves the Kashmiris out of the equation. India is betting that, if the Kashmiris are deprived of Pakistani support, they will be despondent enough to come to terms with the Indian Union, and thereby settle the issue. But if the Indian gamble fails, the Kashmiri Resistance will continue, this time without any Pakistani role. If India at that point chooses to blame Pakistan, there will be trouble. And if the US has succeeded in denuclearising Pakistan, that trouble will be of epic proportions. Denuclearising Pakistan on the basis of a half-baked Kashmir solution is a recipe for destabilising the region in a way that cannot be remedied.

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and force Pakistan to lower its support levels. By putting troops on the border for a year, India managed to obtain some of the credit for itself, enhancing its psychological advantage. The relative positions of the two countries have changed in approaching talks, and Pakistan is clearly disadvantaged. The set of settlement options available at Lahore have narrowed, excluding the more favourable outcomes for Pakistan, retaining those more favourable for India. Already depressed about the weakness of the Muslims in general, and about its own craven (if pragmatic) behaviour in the Afghan and Iraq crises, Pakistan's government and people both realise that negotiations will lead to a settlement disadvantageous to Pakistan, and probably to the Kashmiri people.

However, despite the lack of enthusiasm, it seems that this time round, there may be a settlement. The pressure for this is external to South Asia, coming from the USA. The Bush administration, having settled Afghanistan and Iraq, is now clearing up other business neglected for too long by its predecessors. Among the immediate major agenda items are Palestine and Kashmir. Palestine is a clear-cut problem: it has to be settled before the USA's most reliable outpost in the oil-rich Middle East can be considered secure. The Palestinians are weak and without much backing, so settling that issue would not represent such a balancing act as would settling Kashmir.

The primary American consideration in settling the Kashmir issue is to eliminate a nuclear flashpoint. The process would be to have Pakistan settle the Kashmir issue, and then turn around and ask it why it needs nuclear weapons, now that its only possible target is now a friend rather than a hostile power. This American stance has certain clear implications. First, it is not interested in the nature of the settlement. For all it

issue under the carpet somehow.

Of course, the above is only one analysis. It is possible to suspect America of more sinister motives. One of them is to hive off an independent Kashmir, which it would face no difficulty in making its satellite in the region, another link in a chain that would be completed when it gets hold of a foothold in one of the smaller Central Asian Republics (if Afghanistan proves unsatisfactory). One motive, not commonly mentioned, is that international finance need a regional headquarters to replace Beirut and Hong Kong, with Kashmir a convenient midway. Another analysis foresees America using Pakistan's denuclearisation as a step towards denuclearising India as well.

However, it is a safe assumption that these may be preferred outcomes for the USA, but they are not the bottom line. The bottom line is to defang Pakistan. There are too many reasons for the USA not to tolerate Pakistan as a nuclear state if it can help it. First, general principle: nonproliferation is a primary US national security goal, anywhere by anybody outside the Nuclear Club (and even within the Club, restricting arsenals of potential rival members like China). Second, with reference to South Asia: it is easier to accommodate India within the global nuclear architecture than Pakistan. Conversely and third, it is easier to disarm Pakistan than India. (This perception is directly related to Pakistan's reaction to 9/11, and its behaviour onwards. The Americans have apparently come to the conclusion that the Musharraf government scares easily, and can ultimately be forced to do anything the Americans want, provided that the threats are sweetened with a little money.) There are also jitters about Pakistan's 'safety' as a nuclear state. While the Bush Administration is reasonably sure that the Musharraf

stan resisting all efforts to cut back its support, and in 2001, when it had resisted even harder, its negotiating position was better. Now, it is being held over a barrel by the Americans to do a deal that it knows is bad for the country.

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Pakistan is known to have been advised by China to be both patient and principled. This involves not giving up on our principled stand that the only solution to the Kashmir problem is through the UN Resolutions, and to bide our time, even if it is for 50 years. The danger is that the quid pro quo that the Americans will extract is to force Pakistan to 'normalise' relations with India, to completely end support for the Kashmiri Resistance, and to take up trade and other issues. The idea would be to so integrate Pakistan into the Indian regional system, that the Kashmir issue would fade out. This was the Narasimha Rao formula of the early 1990s. However, it may represent the best way out of a nasty situation for Pakistan.

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