

Another ludicrous suggestion

Pak. F. Rel - India Tlc News 1-6-03

Some Indian leaders never cease to churn out ludicrous ideas. Ideas like joint patrolling, Pakistan a fit case for attack on similar basis as was done by the US in Iraq, and the most recent one is revolving around sharing intelligence — all reflect either a well thought out strategy aimed to attain evasion and side tracking of the real issues or appear to be making continuous efforts for normalisation with a cleverly hidden effective mechanism indulging in adverse propaganda against Pakistan. This means that ostensibly you appear to be making efforts but in real terms to seek out a permanent solution is intended.

Both the Americans and the Soviets have practiced such double-edged pursuits in the past. A close scrutiny of the Americans and the Soviet proposals during the Cold War, aimed to attain the much-desired disarmament, clearly revealed that both sides wanted to appear in indulging in peace pursuit while both wanted agreement on their own terms. There is nothing wrong in this type of policy. Both used to give detailed disarmament proposals but almost all of these proposals contained what I call 'a joker clause'. Joker clause means that the party A which has advanced the proposal knows it well that the party B is unlikely to accept the joker clause but party A would insist that either to accept the whole package or there is no deal. With this approach both the Americans and the Soviets killed many good proposals effectively.

Learning from the Cold War sword crossing bouts of the Americans and the Soviets and capitalising on the past practices, the current ruling group in India seemed to have gone far ahead of the above mentioned methods that were frequently employed to kill the disarmament proposals as well as simultaneously appearing to be an ardent pursuer of peace. It only offers what can, at best, be termed as 'Joker Proposal'; meaning that they are nei-

ther feasible nor practicable nor intended to be implemented. One such proposal has recently been advanced by no less than an Indian Foreign Minister. On May 24th the Indian Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha proposed a joint mechanism with Pakistan to share intelligence to fight militants — presumably Islamic militants operating in the Indian Held Kashmir (IHK).

While on the face of it the proposal may appear useful but could it really be viewed as feasible in view of the adversarial relations experienced in the recent past especially during the BJP's rule in India. Given the state of relationships that have been experienced between the two governments during last few years, to ascertain the practicability of this latest proposal one needs to undertake a short review of BJP's policy pursuits towards Pakistan since 1998 and Pakistan's response to Indian moves. One need not dwell too heavily upon the threats issued by the Indian deputy Prime Minister Mr LK Advani soon after India exploded the bomb. However, it needs to be highlighted here that the first country that was subjected to threats following the enhanced Indian capabilities was Pakistan.

Most Pakistanis view that Pakistan has been the focal point of BJP's aggressive policies. However, one has to admit that BJP's policy towards Pakistan has been, in fact, a mixture of peaceful overtures and punitive threats. At times peace overtures were made but most of the times the Indian stick were being waved somewhat continuously. Once the Pakistanis also acquired the nuclear weapon status, the BJP attitude towards Pakistan became relatively more realistic.

In February 1999 Vajpayee visited Lahore in response to Pakistani invitation and amid bouts of optimism signed the Lahore Declaration, which was indeed hailed as a positive development. But it did not take long when the spirit that was aired at Lahore was



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severely damaged by the Indian interpretation of the clause dealing with the resolution of Kashmir. On his return from Lahore, an Indian reporter reminded the Indian Prime Minister that he had agreed to resolve all disputes including Kashmir. To which Mr Vajpayee responded that he only meant Azad Kashmir. The entire world interpreted the inclusion of Kashmir in the declaration as an agreement to resolve the main Kashmir dispute. At no stage he specified that by the inclusion of the Kashmir dispute in the final declaration he only meant Azad Kashmir.

Having struck the first major blow to Lahore declaration that was universally hailed as a positive development, the Indians did not remain satisfied. At Lahore the Indians had promised that they would support Pakistan's application for the membership of Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation but when the time came India opposed it rather than supporting it as was promised. Besides, the supporters of the BJP attacked the bus that was plying from Delhi to Lahore. Another development that also caused considerable damage was the Kargil border clash. All these developments took place within few months of the signing of the Lahore Declaration.

The year 2000 saw a ceasefire initiative undertaken by the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen but was soon cut short. Soon another carrot appeared on the scene when Vajpayee announced Ramazan ceasefire. Pakistan once again responded rather positively and announced not only maximum restraint but following the extension of ceasefire withdrew a sizable portion of its troops from the border. The congenial atmo-

sphere created by positive moves from both sides eventually culminated into Vajpayee's invitation to Musharraf to Agra Summit. Unfortunately the Agra Summit became the victim of concerted efforts of the BJP hardliners who successfully wrecked it. Once again the failure of Agra initiated a period of vilification campaign against President Musharraf who was hailed as the 'Great son of Delhi'; only a few weeks earlier.

During the next few months Indian strategy revolved around blaming Pakistan for almost all the incidents whether relating to terrorist acts or developments that were the product of internal dynamics. The loss of various state elections, inability to resolve the Babri Masjid issue, inability to influence Pakistan to modify its Kashmir policy ostensibly seemed to have convinced many BJP stalwarts to put the blame for every adverse development on Pakistan. Following the attack on Indian parliament on 13th Dec 2001, the Indians once again decided to wave their stick and moved large number of forces on Pakistan's borders forcing the Pakistanis to respond in somewhat similar manner. Although India blamed Pakistan for the attack on its parliament but their own court awarded death sentences to Indians in connection with the attack which implied that the attack was planned and executed by the Indians — may be disgruntled Indians but nevertheless Indians. Twice the two countries came very close to war during the ten months of eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation. Realisation of the futility of coercive diplomacy along with concerted external pressures eventually resulted into the much-awaited withdrawal of forces from the borders.

It needs to be pointed out that throughout the periods of tension the BJP continuously accused Pakistan of encouraging cross border terrorism. Despite Musharraf regime's tough actions against many terrorist outfits and excellent performance within the in-

ternational coalition to combat terrorism, the Indians maintained their total dissatisfaction with the Pakistani efforts and regularly called on the international community to impress on Pakistan to undertake even more stringent measures. But when Pakistan suggested to have neutral international observers or UN observers to monitor the LoC in order to find out what level of cross-border infiltration was taking place, the Indian flatly refused the presence of a third party. For a Pakistani it is not all that surprising or even somewhat intriguing that why the Indians seek the help of a third party or third parties to pressurise Pakistan but are unwilling to have third party verifying the alleged cross-border infiltrations. The presence of a third party is likely to expose the grossly exaggerated Indian claims of the cross-border infiltrations.

Given the incumbent edifice of distrust between the two countries, which was further strengthened during the massive troops concentrations on the borders, it is somewhat amazing to suggest the sharing of the most sensitive intelligence information. Even ordinary information is shared when a certain level of trust exists between the two parties. The proposal is not just unrealistic but downright ludicrous. The Pakistani Foreign Minister's assertion that such type of intelligence is only possible if there exists enough trust certainly appears rational and much more realistic than his counterpart's proposal. Many steps needs to be undertaken before the minimum requisite level of trust is established including return of the High Commissioners, resumption of communication links, easing of visa facilities, increased activities of Track II diplomacy along with people to people contact, effective application of CBMs etc. These measures could indeed create an atmosphere conducive to a meaningful dialogue. Unrealistic proposals or statements aimed to score points should be avoided.

Time for reconciliation

By Talat Masood

Pak. f. fela - India
Dawn 26.03

EXTERNAL factors and domestic imperatives have brought about a sudden but welcome shift in India's policy towards Pakistan — from confrontation to talking peace. After the terrorist attack on the parliament India applied intense political and military pressure for nearly 16 months to achieve its political and strategic objectives of trying to isolate and compel Pakistan to stop support to the Kashmiri freedom struggle.

The mantra of "cross-border terrorism" had partial success as it drew international support and sympathy from the US and other major powers and put Pakistan on the defensive and compelled it to exercise more effective control on movement of militants. India taking advantage of 9/11 was also able to reducing the centrality of the freedom struggle in Kashmir to an issue of terrorism.

For a while, it worked and even allowed New Delhi to proceed with the state elections in Kashmir, creating some real and part illusory effect of progress on the domestic front. But the confrontational policy had run its course and reached a stage where it was becoming counterproductive for India to pursue it any further. The world powers realizing that the problem of cross-border infiltration was as much of a symptom as the cause and that Kashmir could become a flashpoint of a future conventional or even a nuclear conflict between India and Pakistan, were insisting on India to shift to diplomatic and political means of conciliation and settlement. The foremost, of course, was the U.S. role in nudging India and Pakistan to creating conditions for reducing tension so that a place dialogue could commence.

Secondly, New Delhi had expected that significant increases in its de-

acter of India was changing and a reappraisal was necessary.

Besides, saner elements in both countries seem to be realizing that the existing pattern of relationship is fraught with serious dangers and that neither a limited war nor militancy would resolve the Kashmir dispute. Also, occasional sabre-rattling apart, nuclear capabilities of both states was also a major factor in deterring military adventurism. Above all, it goes to the credit of Prime Minister Vajpayee that despite setbacks to his earlier peace initiatives, he has shown a commendable capacity for persistence in a statesman-like approach to Indo-Pakistan issues and problem.

Recent diplomatic overtures by Indian and Pakistani leaders are encouraging, yet deep down there exists extreme mistrust between the two sides. The gulf on the core

activities are feasible propositions, as part of a structured peace process provided the political will for it exists on both sides. India may be ready for normalization of relations in which trade, commerce and cultural activities are taken up first as the composite dialogue moves forward.

Opinion in Pakistan on the question of moving fast on economic and cultural exchanges without corresponding progress on Kashmir is evenly divided. Studies conducted by eminent economists and business houses have come to the conclusion that it is in Pakistan interests more than India's to engage in normal commercial activity with each other. However, there is another group in both India and Pakistan to whom economic considerations occupy a low priority as compared to the political aspect of relations.

In any case, the inability to resolve

Kashmir in the near future should not stand in the way of making progress on other issues, which have their own importance. Cooperation in any area that benefits the people of both countries will surely contribute towards reducing hostility and the proposal for a nuclear free-zone in the present circumstances is too ambitious and, therefore, a non-starter.

To expect that India and Pakistan will give up their nuclear capability or stop its further development and agree to denuclearization of South Asian is far-fetched.

India is already working on its ambitious nuclear doctrine based on the triad. And then there is the China factor in the Indian nuclear calculus. For Pakistan's military planners reliance on the nuclear deterrence to offset India's conventional superiority and growing military power is a central part of its military strategy.

There is, nonetheless, an urgent need for nuclear dialogue aimed at creating a nuclear risk reduction regime and nuclear security and stability. The nuclear issue could be tackled as a part of the integrated peace process or kept out of it and dealt with separately.

Ironically, each country's top leadership thinks that what the other side wants in the context of Kashmir would destabilize its society. No wonder then that both countries perceive each other as potential destabilizers. This is where political acumen and wisdom not only of Indian and Pakistani leadership, but also of the international community and particularly of the US, should come into play.

issue of Kashmir remains wide and not easily bridgeable. India remains inflexible on Kashmir and merely shows willingness for peaceful coexistence with Pakistan provided it stops "cross border infiltration". Meanwhile, it attempts to manage the turbulent state through improved governance and tight security. Pakistan naturally wants to move fast on the question of Kashmir and maintain pressure on India to engage in substantive negotiations on its future status because this is where the problem lies.

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