

Afghan-Pak-US relations

(Iftikhar Ahmad)

Pakistan's history is a case study in survival, making progressively effective adjustment between needs and resources and preparing to meet the ever-emerging challenges and to avail of opportunities in an environment of dynamics of domestic circumstances and foreign policy essentials. It is important to understand the manner and method in which matters are handled by government functionaries at various levels. Equally important is the understanding of political processes and diplomatic initiatives in given circumstances. An objective analysis has to consider that politics and administration involve a group process and there are a number of complex interacting forces that shape decisions.

A sound base for empirical investigation has to be developed, directed towards the testing and development of existing and new theories. Only valid assumptions and proper identification of issues based on a body of organized data could lead to valid conclusions.

Reflecting on Pakistan's current economic status, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has emphasized the need for developing a strong base for exports to earn foreign exchange and thus reduce the imports and exports gap to improve the balance of payments situation. Better late than never. Investment friendly culture has to be developed. Without gas and electricity industrial and agricultural development is unthinkable. Tax structure has to be rationalized.

Farmers and small businesses need government support. An affirmative export policy is needed facilitating exporters. It is not a simple matter in today's competitive international market economy and in face of trade barriers. Export promotion bureau should stop being an export preventing bureau. Multiple taxes accompanied by coercive and threatening police approach not only escalates the cost of doing business but also results in psychological and physical tensions. The harassment of the business community, especially small business enterprises, is not a good reflection on behaviours of public officials concerned. The same goes for commercialization policy of development agencies that are instrumental in developing corruption.

Where as Pakistan's history is a case study of survival, all sectors of society and economy in Pakistan are fighting for survival, our institutions are in shambles. Basic institutions of family and education are off the track. Reforming these two institutions will make significant difference because

improving the super-structure brings about real change. Simply slogans of 'New Pakistan' will not take us anywhere to actualize our dreams of enlightenment and aspirations for better future. Thinking of necessity and ground realities our policy cannot be other than India specific. We are a nuclear power because fundamentalists and extremists in Hindu India have wanted to wipe us out of the world map.

Indian policies and action has always been Pakistan specific, as it has not acknowledged the historic fact of the creation of the state of Pakistan in 1947. It denies the reality of the United Nations resolutions on Kashmir which gives Kashmiris their right of self-determination. Pakistan is willing to sign a no-war agreement with India if the Indian leadership sincerely wants peace and prosperity in the region.

Both countries are plunged in poverty and ignorance. For the sake of peace India should give up its hostile attitude towards Pakistan, stop Line of control (LOC) violations, rethink its arms race and consider people as people and not as religious entities. Once India changes its anti-Muslim policy and its support to terrorism in Pakistan, (directly and indirectly) situation will improve.

Pakistan is determined to cut terrorism at its roots. Terrorists are tarnishing Islam's image. Pakistan and Afghanistan need to work together to wipe out terrorists and improve bilateral relationship for the sake of security of both countries. It is good that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has reiterated Pakistan's desire to have good relations with all its neighbours. He expressed his resolve for peace in his meeting in London with British Prime Minister David Cameron. Nawaz Sharif had a stop over in London on his way to New York to attend the 70th session of the UN General Assembly.

It is good to talk of 'Trade not Aid'. But the need is to recognize the ground reality that even many years after independence we are not in a strong state of economy as the basic infrastructure and the needed superstructure for social and economic development is not available. Friends of Pakistan have come to our rescue in keeping our economy in healthy and happy state. 'We want friends not masters' of course. But those who call Pakistan a 'Client state' are at fault. They fail to admit the fact that what Pakistan has achieved in its relationship with the United States of America and Western Powers since 1950 has been possible on the basis of equality and not in a subservient status. Pakistan has never put its sovereignty at stake nor will it ever.

Wherever we got civilian and military assistance from the United States it was a situation involving Pakistan's national interests as well. But this scenario spreading over decades has to be viewed separate from the question of our governments' failures in not keeping up building infrastructure and superstructure for short-term and long-term plans and policies for economic development. This is not to say that it was a complete failure. Pakistan had produced finest 5-years plans and policies and also built

institutions which proved to be guidelines for many other countries to follow. Because of short of funds Pakistan could not vigorously continue to reap the fruits of development which Pakistan's Third 5-year plan and perspective plan had promised. Financial position had forced the country to resort to yearly plans and corresponding machinery for implementation.

Although there was no threat to Pakistan from communism, President Eisenhower had decided in the beginning of 1950s, to align Pakistan (a member of CENTO and SEATO) to better contain communism in Asia. This opportunity of friendship with Washington allowed Pakistan to buy from the United States Sophisticated weapons. Americans gave Pakistan economic aid to achieve modernization. President Ayub Khan had then admitted the need for external assistance to build up the social overheads and provide the initial capital investment. He said, 'we have to ensure that we do not incur such liabilities as would compromise or damage our national interests'. The two countries' relationship would be mutually beneficial.

The war of 1965, which provoked American sanctions, was followed by a decline, later reversed by the war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan during which the United States funded Pakistan for ten years (Military and Civilian assistance from 57 million dollars in 1981 to 302 million in 1985 and 351 million in 1990). New sanctions were imposed when Pakistan became nuclear power to counter Indian threats. After becoming nuclear power earlier, India had made things difficult with its threatening attitude towards Pakistan. So, Pakistan did the right thing at the right time.

11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States opened a new chapter of Pak-US relations. It was a turbulent and difficult period till such time that NATO forces and the United States decided to draw down in 2014. Pakistan participated in the war on terror and is still fighting terror with commitment to cut terrorism at its roots. We are offering sacrifices today to secure our tomorrow. It is a war for survival.

Our ownership of the war on terror is real guarantee of Pakistan's strength and survival. More specifically it is in our Army's success in Operation Zarb-e-Azab and in removing difficulties in implementation of National Action Plan (NAP). Kabul must plug terrorists' escape route as they could flee to Afghanistan to avoid operation Zarb-e-Azab. General Raheel Sharif's second visit to the United States aims to discuss Afghanistan and bilateral cooperation with US leadership at highest level. Afghanistan and Pakistan need to be on the same page with renewed cooperation of the United States. There should be an end to terrorism to ensure human survival and respect.