

US-Pakistan relations in perspective

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The US under-secretary of state, Thomas Pickering, is scheduled to visit Pakistan shortly. This would be the second high-level official contact after President Bill Clinton's visit to the country. Earlier, Pakistani officials and government representatives made a bee-line for the US.

Finance Minister Shaukat Aziz, Interior Minister Moinuddin Haider and the adviser to the Chief Executive, Javed Jabbar, as well as the ISI chief all have been to the US recently. These visits suggest that something 'curious' is going on and its taking place in the wake of Clinton's visit makes it more meaningful. It is imperative that we analyze these developments, the message of the US President's visit, and what the future holds for us both in case we toe the line given from outside or chart a strategy on our own that we consider best suited to the interest of the nation.

President Clinton's visit to India and Pakistan is of great significance in highlighting the outlines of the US role in the future not only in the subcontinent but also in the politics of whole of Asia. It would not be wrong to say that this visit was indicative of basic changes in the half-a-century-old US policy for region. This is an open challenge to Pakistan and its leadership.

There is no option for us but to examine with all honesty and objectivity our relations with the US - the past episode, the present stage and the future prospects. We should come out of the world of dreams and pious wishes, and in the light of the new situation, keeping in view the ground realities, draw a clear and sustainable strategy for the protection of our interests and the realization of our ideological, political, economic and civilizational objectives and ideals. The real message of the Clinton visit, if any, was that it was time we understood the reality of friendship and affinity of the "friendliest of the friends" and the "most allied ally" and then determined our policy and objectives without any delay. Delaying and dawdling is fatal. Fresh resolve and clear policy befitting a dignified nation that knows well the value of independence is the need of the hour.

The task lying ahead can neither be accomplished by an individual nor can it be left to the so-called intellectuals, civil servants, generals or representatives of the NGOs. The decision is to be taken by the nation, after open discussion and with consensus and rising above expedient considerations. It is the duty of the incumbent military government to take the nation into confidence and reconstruct anew a foreign policy that is truly reflective of its historical aspirations, sentiments and national security and that is based on real national solidarity and consensus.

While the central issue is our relations with the US, discussion on this with India and other world powers is also inevitable and as this is to be done in the backdrop of the global political map that is being drawn these days, it is necessary to think anew all the aspects of the foreign policy. The issue is not one of adhere or cosmetic measures; it is about policy formulation by keeping in view the long-term requirements. This cannot be done in closed doors. Any course taken in indifference to the wishes of the people is a recipe for disaster. In this respect, it is to be noted that: The foremost need is to examine Pak-US relation with complete objectivity and to formulate a clear and sustainable policy with respect to national aspirations and requirements of independence. Evading the challenge presents no solution.

What is needed is to face it boldly and squarely. This requires the ability to recognize ground realities, maturity and to see the long- term imperatives.

The nation is to be taken into confidence and policy is formulated with its participation. Merely the foreign office or the Chief Executive's secretariat cannot do this. Only that decision can stand the test of time that is based on national thinking and consensus. This is the essence of Islam and democracy.

The era of our relations with America began in 1950 with the Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan's US visit, and ended with President Clinton's visit to India in March this year. For the first four years (1950-54). America tried that Pakistan, India and Afghanistan adopt the same pol- icy, and that all the three side with America in the post-Second World War politics. It wished and tried to have India stand by its side and help it in laying There is no option for us but to examine with all honesty and objectivity our relations with the US the past episode, the present stage and the future prospects. We should come out of the world of dreams and pious wishes, and in the light of the new situation, keeping in view the ground realities, draw a clear and sustainable strategy for the protection of our interests and the realization of our ideological, political, economic and civilizational objectives and ideals.

something of a siege around the Socialist world. But Pundit Nehru never showed interest in becoming a part of this system and tried instead to strengthen the non-aligned movement. This was contrary to the US policy.

Pakistan, according to its own strategy, considered itself as belonging more to Central Asia and the Middle East than to South Asia and was perceiving a role for itself among these very countries. In such circumstances, Pakistan became a member of the US defense pacts like SEATO and CENTO and America's closest ally during the cold war. American democracy saw no wrong in General Ayub's military dictatorship and the two developed great affinity. General Ayub addressed the American Congress and eternal bonds of friendship were pledged. But America turned to India in the very first trial in 1962 (Sino-Indian armed conflict in NEFA), armed two divisions of the Indian army, gave it sophisticated arms and nuclear technology, and prevented Pakistan by coercion from taking any step in Kashmir and thus we lost a historic opportunity. Then, when India attacked Pakistan in 1965, emboldened by American military and economic aid, instead of helping its ally, Washington cut off military supplies to Pakistan in the name of 'even-handedness', though Pakistan almost completely depended on American arms, whereas India's main supplies came from Russia. The US opposition was at its rudest with respect to our nuclear policy. In spite of all the assistance that Pakistan had rendered to America in establishing contacts with China, exposing itself to great risks, Henry Kissinger, the US secretary of state, warned to make a "horrible example" of Pakistan. Then, President Carter felt no hesitation about downgrading relations with Pakistan. It was the Russian invasion of Afghanistan that later compelled America to renew friendship with Pakistan. But, as soon as there appeared signs of Russian military withdrawal from Afghanistan, both Afghanistan and Pakistan were abandoned once again.

In none of the accords America and Pakistan have entered into with each other, has Washington honored its commitments. Many US presidents and secretaries of state and defense held out verbal assurances of help but these were never considered binding. Addressing the joint session of the American Congress on July 12, 1961, General Ayub had said: "The only people who will stand by you are the people of Pakistan provided you are pre- pared to stand by them."

President Kennedy thus responded: "Pakistan was a friend of immediacy and constancy. Americans in private and -in their public life appreciate the value of friendship and the 1 constancy of friends."

This was exposed in 1962. The then US Secretary of State Dean Rusk astounded not only Pakistan but the entire world by stating: "The commitments do not bind us to any particular course of action. Most of them state that in the event of aggression we would act to meet the common danger in accordance with our constitutional process. How we act in fulfilment of these processes will depend upon the facts of the situation. Some situations require less participation on our part than others."

When Senator Symington compelled the State Department in 1966 for explanation of 'commitment', a senior official came up with this Machiavellian principle, saying that: "The president could make a statement one day and disavow it, if he chooses, the following day. No commitment devolved on the United States because of a statement made by the President."

The story of 50 years of Pak- US relations is replete with such betrayals and is a living proof of the principle that was expounded by the founder of American democracy, George Washington, in his farewell address: "An attachment of a small or weak towards a great and powerful nation dooms the former to be the satellite of the latter. It is a folly on the part of a nation to look for disinterested favor from another... It must pay with portion of its independence for whatever it may accept under that character."

To put all the blame on America's self-serving policy alone would, however, be on oversimplification and unjustified. It did what it deemed fit for its own interests, but our civil and military leadership, and our politicians, failed to evolve policies suited to our national interests and thus are responsible for our plight.

In this respect, we should be thankful to Clinton that he, though with haughtiness and arrogance, has awakened us from our slumber and gave a shake to our conscience. His visit has provided the nudge needed for Pakistan's leadership to assess the situation anew, move out of dependence on America or other foreign powers and chart out a policy befitting a truly independent nation. This task has to be undertaken immediately. Any slackness in this respect, will prove gravely dangerous. One hopes that the country's leadership would rise to the occasion and give the nation a respectable place in the comity of nations.

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