**[Ready to plunge yet again?](https://nation.com.pk/23-Jan-2020/ready-to-plunge-yet-again%22%20%5Ct%20%22_new)**

Lt Gen (retd) Naeem Khalid Lodhi January 23, 2020

Principal Under Secretary of State Alice G Wells is around after visiting Sri Lanka and India. She is likely to call on and meet anyone she desires in Pakistan, irrespective of official status. Besides Foreign Minister (if he is around), Prime Minister and COAS are likely to oblige; thanks to our unfettered hospitality. She has met with Interior Minister asking questions that normally self-respecting countries do not necessarily reply. She even commented on the projects of CPEC being given to undesirable contractors; a blatant micromanagement of the affairs of a sovereign state. Probably indicating prolonging of our name in the grey list of FATF. We were also directed earlier to share list of all investors in the National Saving Schemes. What is all this? And why?

Now also link with it the renewed fervour exhibited by President Donald Trump during his meeting with PM Imran Khan. It all overlaps neatly with the Peace Accord likely to be signed between US and Afghan Taliban. Pakistan worked relentlessly for peace in Afghanistan, went out of the way to leverage its influence on Afghan Taliban for bringing them again and again on the negotiating table. We also helped in the release of some important foreign prisoners, and of course the latest ceasefire announced by the Taliban.

And yet the final instrument of peace will be inked at Doha and not Islamabad; says tons about the brilliance of our diplomacy. Now that it seems that US is seriously contemplating moving out of Afghanistan, the million dollar question is that how will they keep their influence in the region? Can US afford to leave the region totally for the aspiring powers like Russia, China, Iran and some CARs? India the only strategic partner in South Asia and Central Asia is not willing to put its neck out in that most dangerous place on earth. Thus once again a newly found love and closeness being exhibited towards Pakistan, by the only Super Power , and hapless, dollar thirsty Pakistan likely to once again fall for it the umpteenth time. They say once you are hungry and thirsty the principles and higher objectives of life are meaningless. Bu a nation may not necessarily behave like individuals. And Pakistani leadership (whosoever is calling the shots) is not mandated by the people to keep taking steps that are not deemed to be honourable in international relations among the comity of nations.

Such serious matters must be debated inside and outside the Parliament. We have long tested and reliable strategic relations with China. CPEC is our future. Kashmir is our jugular vein. Iran and Afghanistan are our neighbors. Russia and CARs are interested to have an access to Indian Ocean.

US-India nexus would like to scuttle all our plans and dreams. America would like to keep its influence in Afghanistan through Pakistan. US presence in Pakistan also serves their ambitions against Iran. Scuttling of CPEC and circumventing of China, Russia, is a combined Indo-US Project. Thus it is foreseen that some big incentives are on their way to attract Pakistan and duping it to play this ominous role of allowing further US ingress in our polity, security and economy. The honey laden olive branch will be difficult to resist, and if initially it fails to work, then sticks of FATF, IMF, retiring of loans, Indian threats and cut in the US, Middle Eastern remittances will be unleashed. This blowing of hot and cold (typical US Strategy) will be applied yet once again.

And if history is any indicator, success of this US Strategy is nearly guaranteed, unless our leadership, both political and military exhibits a change from previous behaviour and refuse to cow down or oblige , citing our own interests and relations with China and other countries in the region. We cannot afford to interfere in Afghan internal dynamics nor can we undertake any action that would annoy Russia, China and Iran. But it would not be an easy path to cut. The Damocles sword of Indian threat may get actually manifested in some military adventure supported by the US intelligence and other means.

So what are our options ? The best diplomacy is to balance relations in a way where friendly relations with countries are maximized and animosities are minimized; the common denominator being national interests. Small compromises at times have to be made. But there comes a time in the National lives of countries to make a choice between one of the two divergent interests. Either once again embraces United States with complete willingness; allow them a foothold to continue exercising their political and economic influence in Afghanistan, CARs and Iran. Get massive economic boost in return as an alternative to CPEC and in the bargain lose Chinese friendship for good. Get into the old folds once again, till the Super Power again throws us away as a used rag, once their interest is fulfilled. And we find ourselves again at square one, as has happened a number of times in the past.

The other option being, getting more closer to China, Russia, Iran, Turkey, Malaysia etc. and face the wrath of India, US, Middle Eastern Friends. Pass through a difficult period but ultimately emerge as an independent self-respecting nation. Now whatever has been said above may or may not crystallize exactly in this form.

Nevertheless we must brace ourselves for the tug a war between some opposing interests in the region. Consult our international friends, debate the issues candidly in the civil society and the Parliament and carve out practicable strategies, and do it NOW. Time is NOT going to wait for our lethargic, piecemeal and non-serious responses. Any procrastination may cost us heavily, my dear PM, COAS and foreign minister.