

Kashmir policy revisited

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THE radical changes in the global security environment at the start of the 21st century call for a re-examination of Pakistan's half a century old Kashmir policy. There has been a gradual deterioration in Pakistan's position on the issue vis-a-vis India. There is a real danger that if this policy is not subjected to a thorough overhaul, it may cause irreparable damage to Pakistan's security and well-being.

For the realization of its objectives in Kashmir, Pakistan has primarily relied on UN Security Council resolutions and the military, while neglecting, or assigning low priority to, the political and economic dimensions of the policy. Successive governments have also put a premium on short-term considerations at the expense of long-term ones. Lack of realism and wishful thinking have been the other hallmarks of our Kashmir policy.

In the process, Pakistan's polity has been destabilized, its economy has failed to take off (recent claims to the contrary notwithstanding) and the country was dismembered during the 1971 crisis. The overemphasis on immediate and transient considerations has robbed our Kashmir policy of the qualities of continuity and stability. As for the future, there is little prospect of success if we continue to tread the well-trodden course.

There is no denying the fact that the genesis of the Kashmir dispute lies in the denial of the right of self-determination of the Kashmiri people as recognized by the relevant UN Security Council resolutions. It goes without saying that the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir at the time of Partition should not have acceded to India against the known wishes of the Kashmiri people even if one assumes that the Indian version of the events of the time is true. The legal, political and moral arguments in support of Pakistan's case on Kashmir arise from these assertions.

From a realpolitik point of view, however, Pakistan has been engaged in changing in its favour the status quo, which has existed in Kashmir for more than five decades. In the prevalent power-based international system, this objective can be achieved only if Pakistan mobilizes sufficient power in support of its cause at national, regional and global levels to persuade India to modify its stand that Kashmir is its integral part and come to a mutually satisfactory settlement of the dispute taking into account the wishes of the Kashmiri people. International law and morality, can, at best, play a marginal role in overcoming Indian intransigence.

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sobering effect on Pakistan's policymakers. As a result of the radical transformation of the international environment in the aftermath of 9/11, issues of terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction have been raised to the top of the international agenda. Promotion of democracy, safeguarding of human rights and development of a market economy constitute other important objectives of the international community.

The focus on the issue of terrorism has undermined the freedom movements in the Islamic world as the armed struggle here is increasingly portrayed by the West as terrorism. The reduced relevance of the United Nations to global and regional issues of strategic importance, as in the case of the US invasion of Iraq, has correspondingly reduced the significance of UN

show from the Indian side.

Our historical experience and the present situation call for a radical revision of our Kashmir policy which should be based on a long-term strategy. We need to recognize that a peaceful settlement of the Kashmir dispute, which is satisfactory from Pakistan's point of view, is not attainable in the short-term as Pakistan is in a much weaker position compared with India nationally, regionally and internationally.

Further, such a settlement would require painful compromises by both India and Pakistan. The fact of the matter is that there is no national consensus on the necessary concessions either in India or in Pakistan. The statements by the Indian prime minister and foreign secretary reflect this reality as far as India is concerned. The situation is not much different

in Pakistan. Both sides, therefore, need more time to prepare their respective public opinions for the necessary flexibility in dealing with the Kashmir issue. It would be a long-term process whose outcome cannot be predicted with certainty at this time.

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Security Council resolutions for the peaceful settlement of international disputes. Increasingly now, decisions on important strategic issues are taken elsewhere by the major powers and then taken to the Security Council to give them a cloak of legitimacy. This trend has had a negative impact on the UN Security Council resolutions relevant to Kashmir. Pakistan, then, lacks the power to compel or persuade India to agree to a change in the status quo in Kashmir.

It is not surprising that Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh declared unequivocally at Srinagar on November 17, 2004: "Let me say that I have made it quite clear to President Musharraf that any redrawing of international borders is something which is not going to be acceptable to us. Any proposal which smacks of further division of our country on the basis of religion is not going to be acceptable to us."

The point was reiterated by him in Lok Sabha on December 21. Later in Rajya Sabha, Dr Singh added that he had emphasized to President Musharraf the criticality of his fulfilling the reassurance of January 6, 2004, that any territory under Pakistan's control would not be used to support terrorism in any manner. He went on to declare that "If this does not happen, all other confidence-building measures would have no meaning."

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the process of economic development to be at a more advantageous position vis-a-vis India when the time for a settlement of the Kashmir dispute arrives. The dialogue with India should aim in the short-term at the amelioration of the human rights situation of the Kashmiris in Indian-held Kashmir, demilitarization of the territory, autonomy for the Kashmiris in Indian-held Kashmir and an improved climate of relations between India and Pakistan while safeguarding our essential political, security and economic interests.

Political stability in Pakistan would come about through evolving a national consensus on the Constitution and the building up democratic institutions along sound lines. Faster economic growth and increased focus on human resource development, particularly education, would require a much higher allocation of national resources to economic development than is the case at present. This, in turn, would require tight control on our military expenditure.

Historically, nations that have prospered in the world have accorded higher priority to economic growth than to military strength at the initial stages of development. This is because sustainable military power can be built up only on the foundation of political stability and economic strength. Unfortunately, we have put the cart before the horse by building up military power at the expense of political stability and economic development. We need to reorder our priorities if we are to have any chance of success in competing with

military, while neglecting, or assigning low priority to, the political and economic dimensions of the policy. Successive governments have also put a premium on short-term considerations at the expense of long-term ones. Lack of realism and wishful thinking have been the other hallmarks of our Kashmir policy.

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Let us see how Pakistan compares with India in terms of national power. India is not only eight times bigger than Pakistan in population terms, it has consistently outperformed Pakistan in the economic field during the past decade.

The situation on the military side is no different despite the high proportion of the national resources that Pakistan has allocated to defence. India also enjoys the advantage of a stable democratic setup which has taken deep roots in its body-politic, as against Pakistan which has suffered from political instability marked by controversies about the Constitution, stunted growth of political institutions, repeated experiments with military and authoritarian governments and a low level of political maturity.

The situation at the regional and global levels is also not reassuring from Pakistan's point of view. At the regional level, Pakistan managed to isolate itself primarily because of its flawed Afghanistan policy, particularly during the period from 1997 to September 2001. Without going into details, it is sufficient to say that we are still living both internally and externally with the adverse consequences of that shortsighted policy.

At the global level again, Pakistan is faced with heavy odds as far as the Kashmir dispute is concerned. Even if we ignore the lingering misgivings of the international community because of our pre-9/11 support to the Taliban, a quick survey of the international scene should have a

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The Indian foreign secretary was equally blunt while talking to a group of Pakistani journalists in New Delhi last month. If there was any doubt left in the minds of our policymakers, the Indian foreign secretary removed it by stressing in Islamabad at a press conference on December 27 that "legally entire Jammu and Kashmir is part of India." Little wonder that the latest round of Pakistan-India foreign secretary-level talks ended without any progress on the Kashmir issue.

Our recent pronouncements reflecting our willingness, or rather eagerness, to show flexibility if India would do the same is an example of our mistaken belief that such a gesture would be reciprocated by India. In the process, while we have declared our willingness to set aside the UN Security Council resolutions on which Pakistan's legal case for Kashmir primarily rests, India has stuck to its guns by reiterating that Kashmir is its integral part and any redrawing of the LoC is out of the question. The net result, despite some later backtracking on our part, is that while we have revealed our cards even before the process of substantive negotiations on Kashmir has begun, the Indian hand remains unknown to us.

The essence of strategy is to bring one's opponent to the point of decision at the time and place of one's choice. Unfortunately, our establishment believes in doing exactly the opposite as reflected in the current rush to reach a settlement of the Kashmir dispute which has merely produced a series of unilateral concessions on our part without anything worthwhile to

therefore, need more time to prepare their respective public opinions for the necessary flexibility in dealing with the Kashmir issue. It would be a long-term process whose outcome cannot be predicted with certainty at this time.

Meanwhile, Pakistan should, while maintaining its declared position on Kashmir and continuing to engage India in dialogue, concentrate on strengthening political stability and accelerating

the process of economic development to be at a more advantageous position vis-a-vis India when the time for a settlement of the Kashmir dispute arrives. The dialogue with India should aim in the short-term at the amelioration of the human rights situation of the Kashmiris in Indian-held Kashmir, demilitarization of the territory, autonomy for the Kashmiris in Indian-held Kashmir and an improved climate of relations between India and Pakistan while safeguarding our essential political, security and economic interests.

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Historically, nations that have prospered in the world have accorded higher priority to economic growth than to military strength at the initial stages of development. This is because sustainable military power can be built up only on the foundation of political stability and economic strength. Unfortunately, we have put the cart before the horse by building up military power at the expense of political stability and economic development. We need to reorder our priorities if we are to have any chance of success in competing with India in the economic field, which while being desirable in itself, is a sine qua non for a successful long-term Kashmir strategy.

Finally, we need to remind ourselves that the Kashmiris are at the centre of the dispute. Any settlement of the Kashmir dispute which runs contrary to the wishes of the Kashmiri people cannot be viable or sustainable. We must, therefore, develop a deep understanding of their aspirations, maintaining close political links with their political leadership and avoid taking steps which would alienate them. Above all, we should make Pakistan so attractive from the points of view of political stability, economic development and cultural growth that it should act as a magnet for Kashmiri people.

In the long run, our ability to reach a satisfactory settlement of the Kashmir dispute with India would be directly proportional to our success in strengthening our internal political stability and outperforming India in the field of economic development while maintaining a credible military deterrent at the lowest possible cost. Our inability to perform well in these areas would make the prospects of a satisfactory settlement of the Kashmir dispute extremely bleak, if not non-existent.

The writer is a former ambassador to Pakistan.