

Our foreign policy concerns

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By Anwar Syed

Pak. F. Relations

THE foreign policy of Pakistan has been focused on its problems with India since its very inception. India's occupation of Kashmir, and its perceived threat to Pakistan's security, figured prominently in the latter's dialogue with other nations.

There are indications at this time that some of the issues between the two countries may be resolved in the foreseeable future and the way opened for cooperative relations. It will take a few more years to devise, and then consolidate, new patterns of mutually advantageous interaction. If and when that has been done, what will our major policy concerns be?

Pakistan is evidently not a great power. If states like Germany and Italy are ranked as major powers, Pakistan does not belong to that category either. Is it then a "small" state? Such a state may be defined as one that recognizes, as do others, that it cannot safeguard its security primarily by the use of its own capabilities, and that it must rely on the aid of other states or institutions to do so.

Until recently, the perceived threat to Pakistan's security came from India. American military aid (given to resist possible communist danger), and later Chinese support, enabled Pakistan to counter the Indian threat. This threat appears to have receded. It could conceivably resur-

face, but Pakistan's acquisition of nuclear weapons, and its willingness to use them as a last resort, make an Indian war of aggression and conquest highly improbable.

None of Pakistan's other neighbours has the capability of posing a serious threat to its security. The United States, Britain, and some of the European nations do have it, and they are beyond the reach of Pakistan's nuclear weapons. They have no reason at this time to use force against Pakistan but, with Mr Bush's doctrine of pre-emption still in vogue, the emergence of such a reason at some future date cannot be ruled out.

Pakistan is a small state in relation to these powers. One way of dealing with them, especially the United States, may be to set aside areas where interests of the two sides are irreconcilable, and to offer cooperation in those where they are compatible. Great powers will be inclined, in the first instance, to reject this kind of selectivity. But if the smaller state has the will and internal cohesion to persevere, the great power concerned will probably relent.

The history of Pakistan's relations with the great powers shows that, with the possible exception of America's recent demand for assistance in the war against terrorism, none of them has ever coerced it to follow a certain line. They have sought Pakistan's cooperation in the pursuit of certain goals in return for suitable compensation, and our successive governments have been happy to take it and do the needful.

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Mr Ayaz Amir has advised us repeatedly, we must not sell ourselves cheap; we must learn to be hard bargainers.

Old habits die hard. But let us assume for a moment that our rulers somehow discover that independence is one of God's gifts, and that it is to be cherished and preserved. In that event, they may learn to offer outside powers cooperation, when interests coincide, but not subservience. Great powers do sometimes use military force to coerce small states. But more often, they bring a variety of pressures to bear upon an uncooperative party.

We have seen also that these pressures can be, and are, resisted or evaded often enough. China flourished in spite of nearly 25 years of American sanctions. Cuba, Iran, and Syria have survived American disapproval and constraints. Pakistan too has had

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A smaller state is better able to resist external pressures if its own house is in reasonably good order. But if it is afflicted with unusually deep internal divisions, alienation and disaffection, ethnic or sectarian violence, persistent insecurity of life and property, widespread political and bureaucratic corruption and incompetence, its government, such as it may be, is in no position to resist the pressures of a great power, especially the one to which it is constantly looking for aid. It does not have the inner strength to stand up to negotiate or bargain.

Governments in Pakistan will do well to drop the pretence of dedication to the Muslim "ummah." The ummah is best regarded as a devotional association and, beyond that, as a civilization like Christendom. It is not a political entity. Efforts to convert it into one have got nowhere: the OIC is a do-nothing organization. Muslims have waged war against Muslims through history almost as often as Christians have fought one another.

References to the ummah in our official statements are essentially ritualistic, intended to cause the impression of activity where in fact there is none. Considering that our conduct, both personal and public, has little to do with Islamic righteousness, we should also quit the hypocritical projection of Pakistan as the chief standard bearer of Islam.

What are the objectives of a nation's foreign policy beyond the preservation of its territorial integrity and security? Some nations when they have the requisite means

imperial and anti-colonial Arab leaders, beginning with Gamal Abdul Nasser in Egypt.

In Pakistan's own neighbourhood, India and China are much larger powers. Looking to the west, Iran during the last decade of the Shah's rule, was more on the giving, than receiving, end in its relations with Pakistan. At present, the ayatollahs in Tehran are more demanding than yielding, and at times, even condescending.

During the late 1990s, Pakistani policy makers, especially those in the ISI, had hopes of making Afghanistan into a client state. But the Taliban regime in that country took a lot from Pakistan and gave nothing in return. It did not even agree to accept the Durand Line as the frontier between the two countries. There was talk in Pakistan of securing a dominant position in the newly

independent Central Asian Muslim republics. This has not happened because, as compared to other aspirants for dominance in the area, Pakistan has little to offer these republics. The fact that Pakistanis are Muslim has done nothing to endear them to the latter. It follows that building spheres of influence abroad cannot be one of the rationally chosen Pakistani goals.

Next in line are relations of buying and selling, borrowing and lending, between nations. Pakistan does not have much to lend, but it is a regular borrower from foreign governments and lending institu-

tions. Its foreign debt at this time exceeds \$35 billion. Service charges on this debt, plus those on the domestic debt, claim more than one fourth of the government's revenues. It is agreed on all hands that Pakistan must reduce its debt-servicing obligation if it is to have resources urgently needed for modernization.

The assumption that loans taken for economic development will increase the country's revenue generating capacity, and thus its ability to repay them, has somehow not worked in Pakistan. Instead of diminishing, its foreign debt has increased over the years without bringing about correspondingly substantial accomplishments in economic development that one can see.

Coming to the exchange of goods and services, we see that skilled and semi-skilled manpower is one of Pakistan's important exports. Pakistani expatriates living and working abroad send money home, currently amounting to about \$3.5 billion each year, which is a significant proportion of the country's foreign exchange earnings. This happens, however, in spite of, not because of, whatever our policy makers in the foreign office do.

Trade in goods between Pakistan and other nations proceeds on a modest scale. Pakistan is not a significant actor in the global economy, and its transactions in that area are not large enough to bring it political influence.

Two of the foremost among America's founding fathers, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, counselled their young nation to have "honest commerce with all, entangling alliances with none," and to stay out of the politics of Europe, "that field of slaughter." This advice has had no takers in

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Where do we go from here? If we are satisfied with being subservient, and if the mutterings of protest are only mutterings, nothing needs to be changed. We can continue to offer subservience in return for a fee but, as

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What are the objectives of a nation's foreign policy beyond the preservation of its territorial integrity and security? Some nations, when they have the requisite means, seek to control the human and material resources of other nations. This quest used to be known as imperialism and colonialism, and it has now taken modified forms of the same drive.

Pakistan, at independence, was the most advanced country in the Muslim world with regard to political, bureaucratic, and military organization, and exposure to modern education. Its leaders at the time expected that their country would be accepted as the leader of the Muslim world. But they were soon rebuffed by a new generation of anti-

imperialist, especially Afghanistans in the ISI, and hopes of making Afghanistan into a client state. But the Taliban regime in that country took a lot from Pakistan and gave nothing in return. It did not even agree to accept the Durand Line as the frontier between the two countries. There was talk in Pakistan of securing a dominant position in the newly independent Central Asian Muslim republics. This has not happened because, as compared to other aspirants for dominance in the area, Pakistan has little to offer these republics. The fact that Pakistanis are Muslim has done nothing to endear them to the latter. It follows that building spheres of influence abroad cannot be one of the rationally chosen Pakistani goals.

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Two of the foremost among America's founding fathers, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, counselled their young nation to have "honest commerce with all, entangling alliances with none," and to stay out of the politics of Europe, "that field of slaughter." This advice has had no takers in America itself for more than a hundred years, but I think it is eminently sensible for us in Pakistan. As we reduce our tensions with India and our dependence on the United States, we should de-emphasize foreign policy and place a much higher priority on putting our internal house in order. In other words, we should mind our own business and let the world go where it will.

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