

To roll back or forward?

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The progressively dissolving foreign policy of Pakistan had three legs: Support for Taliban, militant stand on Kashmir and development of nuclear deterrent. The first two have undergone fundamental revision and the mechanics of new directions are in play. The third leg has been splintered with exposure of proliferation evidence, followed by confessions of guarded nature. This issue remains to be revised at a major policy level, in spite of the valiant claims to proceed undeterred as before. Behind this boyish bravado, questions lurk in every sensible person's mind that belie a serious concern. The three questions are: One how did the mess-up happen? Two, did the government manage the damage control effectively? And three, what are the options open in the future.

The mess-up began the day Mr Bhutto decided to sponsor a covert nuclear development plan in 1974, and the whole nation stood behind the initiative with a militant zeal. Unlike cold mathematical rules where multiplication of resilient, in moral terms, a negative always negates anything that it relates to. Independent sovereign states are based on assumptions of irreconcilable adherence to rule of law at least on face value and in technicalities. That is why governments find it hard to deal with outlaws who are not obliged to follow morals and rules. And whenever an authority cuts corners in dispensation of justice, there is an outcry from world opinion. The fundamental rights of worst criminals are supposed to be protected; only then can an authority assume rights to prosecute. The fate of al-Qaeda prisoners held at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, is a case in point where the world opinion is castigating the US.

The future nuclear development

program compromised Pakistan's moral chastity. The whole initiative slipped into the murky shadows of international criminal underworld, out of the realm of sovereign rights. It is always a slippery downward path to step across the line of legitimacy whether it is a matter of conjugal fidelity or violation of official rules. Entering the darkness of lies and deception has no return; to hide one lie many other have to be spoken and the one sinks deeper into the quicksand. In case of an authority, there is another caveat. When the officials at the top compromise legitimacy, the subordinates are relieved of such obligations; even towards the authority. Moral discipline becomes impossible to maintain. For that reason, criminal and terrorist organisations rely on violent force to keep members in line. A legitimate authority cannot resort to such methods.

This is exactly what happened in Pakistan. Abdicating official control of the uranium enrichment facility at Kahuta to Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan in 1975 and giving him a carte blanche authority to smuggle components for nuclear technology through underworld connections set the rot in from day one. After that, it is pointless raising questions as to why his high profile arrogance and sinfully lavish life style were not questioned. It was exactly as if the lady of the house were to connive with the cook to abet her clandestine activities. She compromises both, her reputation and control over the cook.

Now to say that there was no other way is very questionable. In trying to match India's nuclear capability we threw moral cautions to the wind. India's nuclear program had totally different genesis. India had set up infrastructure early in the fifties for producing nuclear energy, which could lead to



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Quo Vadis, whither are you going?

development of weapons. In 1954, India defined International Atomic Energy Agency by rejecting oversight safeguards. In 1964, it had set-up the first plutonium reprocessing plant at Trombay. In 1966 after the withdrawal of US military aid, India announced that it could produce nuclear weapons in 18 months. In 1968 India refused to sign the NPT. In 1974 India tests a nuclear device as a peaceful nuclear explosion. Finally, in 1998 India exploded the bomb. In the beginning, India's nuclear program was assisted by the US and Canada, a support that was withdrawn subsequently but all along there was more of an element of defiance than clandestine shadows to the Indian program.

In contrast, Pakistan's programme was spooky from the start; we denied its very existence for many decades, although default postal address for Kahuta plant came to be 'atom bomb factory'. It was the worst kept secret in the world. The world suspected but could not confront for one reason or another. In 1976, Canada stopped providing fuel for Karachi plant. In 1978, France concealed the deal to supply plutonium-reprocessing plant at Chashma. In 1979 US imposed economic sanctions after Pakistan is caught importing parts for Kahuta plant. There is a long story of cat and mouse games that Pakistan played through 80s and 90s before going open in 1998, in response to India's nuclear tests. The

point is that both countries had arrived at the same point through different routes. The route Pakistan had taken was full of pitfalls that were exposed in 2003 by western intelligence agencies. In the mess that followed, it became impossible to sift through the culpability of individuals and that of the State.

Next, did Pakistan Government handle the crisis adequately? Polish thinker, Ryszard Kapuscinski said that, "When is a crisis reached? When questions arise that can't be answered." This crisis had been reached in case of Pakistan. Balancing between appeasing the international pressures and placating domestic outrage was not an easy task. In my opinion, largely, General Pervez Musharraf did the best that was possible under the circumstances. His candid confession of ground realities to international press and clemency for Dr Khan was the best possible solution. Of course, there are opinions that he could have involved the politicians, special committees of the legislature to fudge a compromise rather than face the world alone but that would have complicated issues further, and Pakistan's credibility could have suffered more with such feet dragging.

The most consequential questions are about the future options for Pakistan now. There is no point in hiding from the fact that Pakistan's credibility for securing its nuclear assets has been damaged badly. Few in the world believe that Dr Khan is alone responsible for such a scale of proliferation. And the matter has not been closed forever, as we would like to believe. There will be many interests and concerns that will keep trying to reopen the issue, especially as International Atomic Energy Agency chief Mohamed ElBaradei told reporters, "Dr (Abdul Qadeer) Khan was

not working alone," saying he had helped people in many different countries. "Dr Khan is the tip of an iceberg for us."

Pakistan will have to do far more than a confession and promises of future vigil. Let us not forget that the US and its allies did not find any WMDs in Iraq and Syria. They have turned their concerns to nuclear weapons now. Libya and Iran have been coerced into compliance. In his speech on Policy for non-proliferation, George Bush did not implicate Pakistan government but he spent a good fifteen minutes playing prosecutor general to A Q Khan. The impositions are quite clear. In the proposed scheme of things countries suspect of proliferation will not get any assistance for nuclear technology, even for peaceful purposes, neither will they deserve a seat in International Atomic Energy Agency. The noose is tightening around Pakistan.

In these circumstances, Pakistan can take two initiatives to placate international suspicions. We can sign a bilateral treaty with India against use of nuclear weapons and some form of limitation on weapons. Like SAARC treaties between previous USSR and US. Following that Pakistan can sign the NPT, since having achieved a nuclear state status, and the proclaimed nuclear deterrent, Pakistan can afford to invest in international confidence building measures. This line of action would harmonize with the revision of the other legs of the foreign policy mentioned earlier.

We are fortunate, until now, to have the opportunity of living down past sins and taking a new path to global integration with respect. Obscurity at this stage would have very unforgiving consequences. The greatest boxer of all time, Muhammad Ali once said, "He who hits and runs away lives to fight another day." This way we can roll forward and not call it a roll back.