

Tackling the 'Four Dangerous Perceptions': another view

In his January 17 speech to the joint parliament President Pervez Musharraf put forward a list of four "dangerous perceptions" about Pakistan. Putting the entire onus of altering those perceptions on Pakistan the President briefly spelt out the steps Pakistan should take. Here is another view on how Pakistan should respond to the "four dangerous perceptions," one that factors in the broader realities linked to all the four "perceptions."

Firstly, the president said "we are being held responsible for giving rise to terrorism in Afghanistan from our tribal areas." Pakistan's comprehensive response in word and action should be the following. In Afghanistan there is political upheaval as President Karzai is trying to establish himself. It is in Pakistan's national interest that there is a politically stable Afghanistan. Pakistan is second only to the Afghans in paying a heavy price in security and political terms for the Soviet invasion and subsequently the US's support of covert operation against the Soviets. Pakistan's federal and provincial governments therefore remain committed, on the basis of reciprocity, to the principles of good neighbourly relations with Afghanistan. Likewise we expect the Karzai government to remain committed to Pakistan's territorial integrity. Pakistan has continuously and concretely demonstrated its willingness to hold talks to iron out problem areas in the relations. Pakistan is a member of the Tripartite Commission in which Afghan, US and Pakistani representatives work together to sort out border related matters. Pakistan and Afghan trade ties are also on the mend.

Pakistan has reinforced presence of its forces along the Afghan-Pakistan border to check illegal cross-border movement. Pakistan government however hopes that the remaining Afghan refugees from the 3.2 million, who crossed over into Pakistan, will soon return to their homes.

Meanwhile, for over a year Pakistan has launched military operations with 70,000 security forces to take action against all those foreigners who are illegally residing in Pakistan. This action is needed to enhance security within Pakistan. Simultaneously it has enabled Pakistan to handover 450 al-Qaeda suspects to countries of their origin and to the US authorities. Given that the Karzai government has been the target of al-Qaeda operatives, Pakistan's action against them has reduced threats to the Karzai government. Ultimate security of the Karzai regime is directly linked to internal political stability. We hope that his success in the *Loi Jirga* leads to greater internal stability.

We in Pakistan expect the international community to appreciate steps taken by Pakistan to curtail lawlessness which was greatly promoted by the Soviet invasion and the subsequent internationally financed and supported "jihad" against the Soviet supported regimes.

Secondly, the President said, "We are being alleged for terrorism on Line of Control in Kashmir." We should respond by saying that the question of terrorism related to the LoC or to the Kashmiri freedom struggle is broader than just finger-pointing at Pakistan. The question of the future of the Kashmiris is at the root of this issue. Violence, while not justified, becomes an inevitability when political and diplomatic channels for resolving disputes are repeatedly blocked. When repression replaces dialogue as a tool for resolving disputes. Until January 6, India had repeatedly rejected Pakistan's offer for dialogue despite Pakistan's assurance that it was willing to opt for unilateral ceasefire and



Nasim Zehra

The writer is a fellow at the Harvard University Asia Center
nasimzehra@hotmail.com

use its influence to call for reduced guerrilla activities inside the Valley. We in Pakistan welcome the January 6 agreement and hope that sincerity from both sides will help to resolve a dispute which involves the future of 10.06 million and the future of South Asia where 25% of the world population resides. Unresolved Kashmir issue will spawn off myriads of deterrents to peace and cooperation between two nuclear-armed states. Pakistan expects the international community to remain as vigilant about Indian and Pakistani commitment to resolving the Kashmir issue as it has been about the question of cross-LoC infiltration.

Thirdly, the President said, "We are also being alleged for nuclear proliferation." Our response should be that the world has suddenly been confronted with incontrovertible evidence of nuclear proliferation. Dangerously and deviously, governments and individuals across continents have for long been involved in spreading the forbidden nuclear know-how. The kosher practice adopted by governments in the fifties, sixties and seventies, banned in the eighties but continued by individuals subsequently, requires transparent and stringent controls. According to western media reports (*Guardian* of January 17 and the *Independent* of January 19) international black market in nuclear weapons technology has flourished with European, Asian, and North American companies, middle-men from Germany and Sri Lanka, Israel and scientists from Germany, Pakistan and India. Obviously a 'spring time' of nuclear proliferation continued unnoticed.

In Pakistan we remain fully committed to non-proliferation. Individuals who have violated Pakistani law against proliferation are being investigated. Pakistan is not a signatory to NPT and therefore individuals from Pakistan have violated national law. In Pakistan's own national interest and as a responsible member of the international community, which is committed to non-proliferation, Pakistan will take severe action against those responsible for violating national law. Additional measures required to tighten controls to prevent leakage of nuclear technology will also be taken.

We hope that like Pakistan all other countries will also take severe action against those who have violated national law and in some cases international law. Fortunately none of the countries who benefited from the black market of nuclear technology were able to develop nuclear weapons. Pakistan, while continuing to develop and improve its own nuclear deterrent for self-defence purposes, will cooperate with the IAEA and the UN to prevent any further nuclear proliferation.

Fourthly, the President repeated his pet theme that "our society is being perceived as intolerant and pro-extremism." We must respond by saying that what Pakistan faces today is a crisis of law and order. Its foundations were laid when we became partners and principal executors of West's international 'jihad' — to "roll back the evil Soviet empire" from Afghanistan. The principal casualty was rule of law and the subsequent 'softening' of the Pakistani state. Alongside it, CIA-ISI dictated anti-Soviet and pro-Islamic jihad ideology was systematically taught in *madrassas*. Leaving

behind their traditional non-violent teachings, the *madrassas* were to produce weapon-toting, hate-mongering and battle-hungry 'prized' individuals. Whatever emerged from these *madrassas*, ranging from sectarian hatred to internationalist anti-state beliefs, was tolerated and encouraged. No state law was to apply to these individuals, as they often ran their own militias linked to sections of foreign and national security agencies. Over time, they outgrew their 'original' objective. As Pakistani law stood in abeyance, their belief and strategy was allowed free play. The 'enabling environment' was made possible since US and its anti-Soviet allies looked the other way too.

It's a changed context now. For its inherent dangers, for Pakistan's own national interest and for the changed global context, the phenomenon of the armed and law violating militias have to be reined in. The state, which in the past encouraged and created militias to promote national security objectives, has to retrace its steps. It is doing that now. In retracing its steps, enforcing law unsparingly, the State and the establishment must resort to ways of bridge-building within a society that it actively and dangerously polarised. For Pakistan, the principle issue is not religious extremism or intolerance. It is the absence of rule of law which has spawned sociological instability in society. As for extremism and intolerance, individuals live by differing belief systems and attitudes. It is the State that must limit the negative impact of any belief system on society. US has extremist and militant groups like Ku Klux Klan and others but the US state, at least in the pre-9/11 period, reined them in through rule.

Major influential powers and international institutions like the UNSC, IAEA, UNCHR and ICJ, not Pakistan is responsible for growing extremist or intolerant ways globally. Throwback to the ways of the powerful who trample the rights of the weak and perpetuate injustice, will always be frustration and violence.

In responding to these "four dangerous perceptions," it would indeed be erroneous to place the entire onus of altering these perceptions on Pakistan. In fact framing these perceptions within the framework of posing external dangers to Pakistan is also ill-advised. Anxiety is no response to challenges that nations face. Fortunately at this juncture there is general convergence between Pakistan's national interest and the expectation from us as a responsible member of the international community.

There is also a broader issue that the leadership must address. In transition times, nations most require from their leadership clarity of objectives and surety of a better tomorrow. Having stumbled into transition, partially by choice and partially by external triggers, Pakistanis require the same. Instead they get official explanations ranging mostly from external pressure and image improvement to unofficial ones critical of transition they claim is triggered by *ummah's* defeatism and a fear-struck weakened Pakistani establishment. At best this enhances long held scepticism that Pakistan's establishment is largely ruled by external diktat. At worst it dangerously polarises the establishment and those sections of society who were emotively and operationally linked to the establishment's pre-transition ways. All this further destabilises Pakistan's unstable political scene. The onus of clear and confident thinking on issues of national interest and locating them effectively in the larger global context rests on the leadership. Pakistan's leadership must coherently, credibly and repeatedly present its case to the people of Pakistan.