

'The Enemy'

Pakistan is under siege. finally the Pakistani military looks serious about the threat that jihadists pose to its country. What actually makes Pakistan *Pakistan*? The answer is far from obvious and yet, assumptions about the traditional polity affect everything in Pakistani society from what gets taught in schools to what is considered legitimate in Kashmir. There is every reason to believe that President Asif Ali Zardari is echoing American President Obama's stance that 'India is not a threat to Pakistan'. But the very idea of Pakistan nation state rests on a world view that the country is surrounded by the permanent foe India, remains central to Pakistan's strategy. The policy of the past six decades has suddenly changed. It's unbelievable. All Pakistani Governments, civilian or military, despite public claims to the contrary, had all along treated India as its only enemy while encouraging 'terrorists', financially, materially and morally, to do their guerilla warfare in Kashmir. No amount of peace jugglery and age-old threat perception can hide the reality that Taliban take-over of Islamabad is no longer a distant possibility.

Faced with the prospects of de-stabilisation from within the authorities in Pakistan had no option but to move troops from Indian border in the east to the troubled tribal areas of north-western Pakistan to execute Pakistan's very own 'war on terror' agenda and "out-terrorise the terrorist". Far from being condemned as terrorists, they were showered with billions of rupees and tons of ordnance by successive Islamabad governments in their pursuit of liberating Kashmir and to extend influence in Afghanistan. Militants are hailed as freedom fighters and the people of Pakistan are paying the price for their government's double game. Not very long ago Musharraf played it nicely by promoting the jihadists and helping the remnants of Afghan Taliban in their efforts to regroup while indulging in tokenism in America's campaign against the Afghan insurgents to exact maximum monetary benefits from Washington. Fortunately or unfortunately, President Zardari was candid enough to admit the well-debated fact that CIA and ISI were instrumental in creating the monster called Taliban to fight the Soviets. He even went a step further in describing the Taliban as part of their past. How he is going to disown their past so easily is open to question.

Not that Pakistan has initiated a radical shift in its strategic policy orientation. After allowing the Taliban to get within 60 miles of Islamabad the Pakistani army reluctantly deployed only a few thousand troops to combat the militants in the Swat Valley. And that too under severe American pressure. America cannot afford the luxury of dismembering of its trusted valet—Pakistan at this juncture for more than one reason. After all Pakistan has nukes, maybe, the movement of the Taliban so close to Islamabad is a wake-up call for the ruling elites of Pakistan. Maybe not. Even if the army succeeds in crushing the Taliban advance for the time being, a civil war like situation is unfolding affecting the toilers of Pakistan most. And America otherwise dangerously bogged down in the quagmire of Afghanistan is finding it increasingly difficult to destroy Taliban resistance.

In Afghanistan history is not in favour America, notwithstanding their superior fire power. America lacks the most powerful weapon the Afghans have—

national spirit and self-respect. No one has ever conquered Afghanistan. The history of British humiliation is simply bone-chilling. Even Alexander the great failed to subdue the Afghan people completely though his campaign lasted for three years. America is already facing fiercest battles there and grave loss to American and NATO forces, physically, mentally and financially.

One reason Pakistan's hostility to-wards India persists despite ups and downs in Indo-Pak relations is absence of democratic space there for building progressive movement. Those who talk of making peace deals with India and maintaining good neighbourly relations are immediately branded as Indian agents and there ends the matter. Peace initiatives organised occasionally by voluntary organisations, human rights bodies and independent democrats on both sides of the fence are not enough to create an atmosphere conducive to lasting peace in the region.

So long as the rulers of Pakistan, military or civilian, continue to think Pakistan is an incomplete country without Kashmir, India-centric enemy perception that dominates the Pakistani psyche, is unlikely to die. Given mounting social unrest throughout the sub-continent, peace in this part of the globe counts as another twentieth century illusion. □□□