

## Stuck with Rebalancing?

IN 2010, THE UNITED STATES ADOPTED A POLICY OF RETURNING to Asia while making a visible strategic shift to remedy past mistakes. Thus observed in a recent discourse one of the leading foreign policy experts of China at Renmin University. But the US never left Asia. No doubt mass uprisings in the Middle East have given renewed hope to many. The US despite its reduced military presence in Iraq continues to rain down death on the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan, seeking with its European allies to dominate Libya through military intervention. And the Chinese themselves think their growing influence in Asia is due to America's pre-occupation with counter-terrorism and wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. America's renewed strategic offensive in Asia to rebuild a regional security order with a realignment of Asian powers to further US interests coincides as Beijing visualises the scenario, with the sentiments of China's neighbouring countries who feel pressured by China's economic and military growth and expect to restrain China with US strength. This way or that the implied reference is aimed at Indian hawks who are, otherwise once bitten twice shy, jubilant at the moment because of the on-going stand off between Washington and Islamabad on a number of contentious issues. The hawks in New Delhi are doubly encouraged to see America is visibly worried about its most trusted ally Pakistan since the days of CENTO (a strategic partnership covering the Middle East and South Asia) is swinging between Washington and Beijing, sending wrong signals to the policy-makers in the White House. The ruling elites of India are determined to prove before the world that they can play the role of America's natural ally in this volatile region. But military economies too are volatile. While the 'war cycle' is different from the 'business cycle', it also has booms and busts. And New Delhi may have to repent for extending unconditional support to Uncle Sam's misdeeds. Not much is reported in the Indian media on how the people of Pakistan, particularly in the conflict zone of North West have been demonstrating against America since April 23, demanding an end to drone attacks by US troops. What is reported in this part of the globe is how Gilani and Kyani are reacting to this events or that. Islamic fundamentalism—the political face of jihadi terrorism—presenting itself as an alternative to American domination, is now a force to reckon with, notwithstanding the Pakistani military's assertions to the contrary. Caught in a cross-fire Pakistan's Generals and Civilian rulers are unlikely to go beyond a certain stage to defy American diktas. After all they get their bread and butter from America. There is no Saddam Hussein in Pakistani politics. Nor is there any Gaddafi to show guts to challenge American unilateralism in Pakistan's internal affairs.

With the rise of Pakistani Taliban and America's secret dealing with a section of Afghan Taliban, the prospects of Pakistan getting further fragmented seem bright. Yugoslavia has vanished from world atlas. And now Bosnia faces further division. As the strength gap between China and America narrows down the United States' China policy too is at a cross-roads. The same is true of Pakistan. For more than one reason China now attaches more importance to neighbouring countries, particularly Pakistan in its diplomatic offensive to offset India-US strategic axis. It was weapons of mass destruction that was the major issue of anti-Saddam propaganda in the western media before Iraq war. And it is their calculated move to spread panic by occasionally publishing sensational reports about how terrorists might, given the present state of anarchy as Pakistani garrisons are being systematically attacked by jihadists, have access to Pakistan's nuclear arsenals. In other words it won't be difficult to find out Pakistan's Saddam Hussein in due season.

If the growing influence of China in Islamabad continues unabated—indications are that it will—a radical shift in America's South Asia policy may be more pronounced than ever before. Or Balkanisation of Pakistan-Afghan region seems to be the logical option for Washington to exercise its unchallenging supremacy over its traditional sphere of influence.

It's an open secret. Everybody knows it. The CIA through Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) played a central role in training and funding today's jihadists while ideologically equipped them with the Wahhahi version of Islam to fight the Soviets. This was the time when the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, now a prominent constituent of anti-Gaddafi opposition and, in the frontline of rebellion in Libya, was founded in Afghanistan. For all practical purposes America's broad anti-Soviet islamic project has boomeranged and the White House administration is in a dilemma as to how to handle their servile flunkey—Pakistan—as Islama-bad is seriously trying to enter into the Chinese orbit as a way out to get rid of Ameican unilateralism. If Pakistan goes the Yugoslav way, India would be next to feel the pinch because balkanisation cannot be anything but regional. □□□