



Pakistan is not Isolated | Imtiaz Gul

Some recent events and statements originating in Washington, Warsaw (NATO summit) and Kabul, seemed to have created a triumphant, though largely misplaced impression that both India and Afghanistan have managed to encircle Pakistan. An appended perception was that of Islamabad's international isolation. But these noises beg some reflection. Is Pakistan really isolated? Let us look around for an answer.

China has stuck its neck out for a mutually beneficial multi-billion dollar China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Russia too, is embarking on a new phase of relations with Pakistan, particularly after the latter's entry into the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

The World Bank has loaned some \$5.5 billion to the country in the last three years, which wouldn't be possible without a nod by Washington, which holds majority shares in the Bank.

And what about power brokers in Washington DC itself?

Well, one finds a lot of cockcrows, trying to belittle Pakistan; among them, Balochistan-fame congressmen like Dana Rohrabachar, or the Afghan-American Zalmay Khalilzad; although he has served as the US ambassador in Afghanistan, but in Washington he sounds more like the Afghan ambassador. During the July 12 proceedings of a sub-panel of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Khalilzad and Bill Roggio, senior editor of the publication Long War Journal, accused the Pakistan military of maintaining ties with the Taliban and Haqqani militants.

This is the time to increase the pressure by suspending all assistance to Pakistan — military and civilian — and move towards isolating Pakistan internationally, including not supporting IMF renewal of financial support, Khalilzad argued in his testimony, which was vociferously shared with the media by Indian and Afghan officials in Washington.

Unlike these noises by presumably directly or otherwise paid lobbyists, remarks by Senator John McCain and other members of a bipartisan congressional delegation to Pakistan and Afghanistan after their Islamabad visit, offered an interesting read — contrary to the demands of isolating Pakistan.

"They have cleared out that part of Pakistan... they are looking at securing the Pakistan border in a more substantial way... I would acknowledge it a step in the right direction", Senator Lindsey Graham said in Kabul, according to a Voice of America report. Graham also spoke of "a new attitude [under General Sharif] that is beginning to show some progress.

"The COAS says I hope you leave your troops here — he told us that — because if you withdraw too quickly the place is going to fall apart and it will hurt us," Graham recalled during a press talk.

Senator McCain, too, acknowledged the progress made in Waziristan and underscored the importance of good relation among US, Pakistan and Afghanistan, but spoke of the Haqqani

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network as the “major impediment” in relations that required serious action.

True that the Haqqani Network represents a major hurdle in the trilateral relations and that nearly 40 per cent of the US security assistance is now tied to action against this entity, but this certainly doesn't indicate a break or a tool to isolation, something acknowledged by spokespersons of the State Department and the Pentagon.

Both Mark Toner and the Pentagon Press Secretary, Peter Cook, for instance, made it clear that the that TTP terrorist Umar Khalifa Mansoor (responsible for the murder of over 130 children at APS, Peshawar) and “four other enemy combatants” were killed in a July 9 strike in view of “the specific relevance... and the common security interests shared by all three nations.”

In an obvious reference to the Zarb-e-Azb operation, the Senators as well as the spokespersons acknowledged “the progress in shutting down terrorist safe havens”, and restoration of government control in many parts of Fata and elsewhere Pakistan.

No doubt, both India and Afghanistan have managed to paint Pakistan black in and outside of the United States.

Both may feel they have encircled and isolated Pakistan through people like Khalilzad and Rohrabacher. That is why many within Congress wouldn't want to touch anything that has anything to do with Pakistan.

But observations by important US Congressmen and officials, including their national security advisor Susan Rice, reflected a more pragmatic approach anchored in realpolitik. This also underscored the necessity, if not inevitability, of US relations with Pakistan. The latter, nevertheless, must keep in mind that New Delhi is now to Washington what Islamabad is to Beijing. This division is likely to determine the entire regional geo-politics in future. This places enormous responsibility on Pakistani ruling elites; set and keep the house in order and match Chinese expectations for a friction-free completion of CPEC projects.

Published in The Express Tribune, July 20th, 2016.

Source: <http://tribune.com.pk/story/1145063/pakistan-not-isolated/>