

including the Muslim states. General Musharraf did exactly the same thing two decades later, borrowing from Zia-ul-Haq's book, chapter and verse, to bring his own isolation in the comity of nations to an end. George Bush's much-heralded, so-called 'war on terror', became Musharraf's ticket to international stardom and legitimacy in a copycat reprise of Zia-ul-Haq's instant camaraderie with Ronald Reagan's undeclared war against the 'evil empire.'

For Zia-ul-Haq, involvement in Afghanistan may have meant allegiance to faith and affirmation of Pakistan's pan-Islamic identity, as far as support for the Afghan victims of Soviet aggrandizement was concerned. However, he negated its Islamic component by agreeing to become a conduit for one superpower battling another with the sole intent of bleeding it to death. Becoming complicit with the US did nothing to augment Zia-ul-Haq's religious credentials. On the contrary, he abused and undermined the pan-Islamist passion of his countrymen who felt genuinely repelled by the naked aggression of a non-believing communist superpower against a poor and defenceless Muslim neighbour of Pakistan.

Donning the mantle of an American agent-state, Pakistan under Zia-ul-Haq did a terrible disservice to its national and foreign policy interest. The US had no brief for Zia-ul-Haq's Islamic faith or fervour. Nor did it feel particularly moved by the plight of the oppressed Afghans whose freedom had been snuffed out by the Russian invaders. It was using Pakistan to reach the Soviets' jugular in Afghanistan, and the Afghans fighting the Soviets for their freedom were only pawns on the chessboard of a proxy war.

The American credentials vis-à-vis Pakistan's pivotal interest in acquiring nuclear parity with India were known to be suspect up to that point. The US had brazenly targeted Pakistan's nuclear programme ever since it had been commissioned under Bhutto. Zia-ul-Haq, to give him credit, had stuck by the national pursuit to access nuclear power to match rival India. However, by giving the Americans a free run of Pakistan, in the name of facilitating the Afghan jihad against the Soviets, Zia-ul-Haq was taking a huge risk and could have, unwittingly, exposed it to sabotage by the Americans.

In the process of pulling the American chestnut out of the fire of Afghanistan, Zia-ul-Haq also allowed the Afghans to run berserk all over Pakistan. It was a hospitality bordering on self-destruction. The Afghans abused Pakistan's hospitality with impunity. A rampant drug and gun

culture in Pakistan was an immediate and direct blowback of Pakistan's fervent patronage of the Afghan resistance against the Soviets.

An even bigger scourge were the Taliban, whose rise in Afghanistan after the defeat of the Soviets, was perhaps the biggest blunder of a Pakistan policy conceived and implemented by its intelligence agencies. Even if one were to give the benefit of doubt to Pakistan's overarching and ubiquitous intelligence agencies for not directly bringing the Taliban into power in Afghanistan, it is an incontrovertible fact that it was the ISI that pampered the Taliban and smoothed their way to get a stranglehold over Afghanistan. Extending official recognition to the Taliban as the *de jure* government of Afghanistan was a decision of the Pakistani intelligence outfit and not that of the Foreign Office.

The dubious argument of Afghanistan providing the much-needed strategic depth to Pakistan was the alibi used to justify Pakistan being friendly and more than business-like with the Taliban. But this justification lost all its logic and relevance with both India and Pakistan becoming nuclear powers, soon after. The cover of Afghanistan's much-touted strategic depth was punctured the moment India acquired an atomic bomb. Pakistan's military geniuses could no longer wield the Afghan card to buttress their 'strategic depth' mantra in the context of conventional warfare. Sadly, the ruling oligarchy of Pakistan never seems to have realized that 'strategic depth,' in the real sense of the word, comes to a country in two ways: by building national institutions that would be resilient enough to flourish on their own strength and not be dependent on this or that personality or 'strongman'; and by cultivating neighbours to have the best of relations with them, thus eliminating the need for inordinate reliance on military parity or a balance of terror, vis-à-vis the neighbours.

Whether one may like it or not, the most important neighbour to Pakistan is India, in relation to which Pakistan has consistently had an adversarial relationship. The legacy of strained, and at times overtly hostile, relations with India is, no doubt, a two-way process in which the input from India has been as much negative and counterproductive as from Pakistan. However, there is a qualitative difference in the two inputs. India, the bigger component of the equation, has never suffered from the fear factor that has routinely blighted Pakistan's policy and posture against India. The vested interest in Pakistan, with deliberate design, has allowed enmity with India to simmer on the front burner. The fear card, of an India determined to overrun Pakistan and snuff out its independence and sovereignty, has been wielded so that no questions should be asked about Pakistan's bloated military and defence

establishment. The same card has also been played over and over again to trump the country's democratic culture and its evolution in the name of augmenting order and security, both internally and externally.

That the military oligarchy of Pakistan did not favour the country's politicians pursuing a course vis-à-vis India outside the military-okayed box was in full evidence in the manner the army brass literally pulled the rug from under Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's initiative to turn a corner in the tortuous course of relations with India. The Pakistani top brass, led by the newly-appointed Chief of the Army Staff, General Pervez Musharraf, boycotted the Prime Minister's reception for his Indian guest, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, in Lahore in February 1999.

General Musharraf's defiance of the civilian government's peace initiative was in keeping with the oligarchic ambitions of the army generals who must always cry wolf or India in order to have justification for maintaining the large army that Pakistan can ill-afford at the cost of badly needed inputs into social infrastructure, like public health and education. Pakistan's Human Development Index (HDI) is one of the lowest in the world—lower even than some of the poor countries of Africa—largely because of the heavy disparity between expenditure on defence and that on socio-economic indices. In the 2006 HDI report of the UN, Pakistan ranked 134 out of 175 member states of the UN surveyed, ranking below Laos, Comoros, Botswana, and even a cloistered country like Myanmar (Burma); it ranked only above countries like Bhutan and Papua New Guinea.

The cataclysm of 9/11 may have caused distress to many. To General Musharraf, however, it was a heavenly intervention to put an end to his diplomatic isolation. Literally overnight, he was bestowed the title of a front line soldier in George W. Bush's open-ended 'war against terror.' No doubt, this was a remarkable change of fortune for a general who, until that moment, was shunned by the world to such an extent that President Clinton would not agree to have himself photographed with him during a four-hour hectoring halt in Islamabad. George Bush's memory of the general was so weak that, at a widely reported television interview during the 2000 presidential campaign, he could not recall the Pakistani leader's name and famously sufficed to refer to him as 'the general.'

Without a modicum of doubt, General Musharraf's rise to international stardom was a reprise of General Zia-ul-Haq breaking loose from his isolation in 1979. But in equally identical fashion, the change of status remained entirely personal, and almost totally devoid of a national consensus backing the transformation of a leader's fortunes. Just as Zia-

ul-Haq had cast the die in favour of joining America's war against the rival superpower of his own bat, Musharraf, too, took the plunge into George Bush's 'crusade' entirely on his own. If one goes by the account of the sequence of events following the apocalypse of 9/11, as recorded in his book, *Bush At War*, the Watergate-famed Bob Woodward argues that General Musharraf relented, then and there, to each one of the US demands catalogued by Secretary of State Colin Powell in his telephone call, the third day after 9/11.¹

Did Musharraf try to ascertain the wishes of the people of Pakistan on the sea change he was going to bring about in the country's policy on Afghanistan? Were any representatives of the people consulted before the seismic volte-face in Pakistan's international posture was made? Was any thought given to what impact Pakistan's role reversal in Afghanistan will have on its standing in the global community, especially in the Muslim world to which Pakistan paid so much lip service? The answers to all these questions must be in the negative.

The only light guiding General Musharraf's path was his own status and stature. His sole concern, before 9/11, was rivetted on seeking the legitimacy and recognition he lacked in the comity of nations, especially in the West. Joining Bush's crusade was going to make him a 'legitimate' player on the global stage. That feeling was enough to sway him off his feet and drive him into the waiting arms of the US war lobby.

Let us, briefly, see what 'rewards' General Musharraf's decision has brought to Pakistan? He may have become, briefly, the toast of the town in Washington, given the patina of a front line soldier vital for the success of the war against terrorism. But his charm offensive soon turned into an open offensive against his policy in regard to Afghanistan. As the US got caught up in the bog of Afghanistan and the Taliban's counter-offensive punctured the American facade of a 'quick fix' in that war ravaged country, Musharraf's image in the American media changed. The General has since been routinely pilloried in the establishment media, which now rules the roost in Washington, as 'not doing enough' and 'playing on both sides of the street.'

The Bush administration, for its sake and with an eye on its campaign against the Afghans, may still hail Musharraf as a steadfast ally and front line soldier but the media and Washington's think tank-based intelligentsia holds a different opinion and subscribes to the myth,

¹ Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2002), p. 59.

wholeheartedly, that Musharraf's heart is not in the US and NATO-led campaign in Afghanistan.

While Musharraf may take some satisfaction from what he might regard as his still intact rapport with the American government, especially with the incumbent of the White House, this has not been the fortune of the Pakistani people or the Pakistani nation. Pakistanis in the US became a favourite target of America's Islamophobia in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. Tens of thousands of them were rounded up on charges of immigration law violations; thousands were deported peremptorily and unceremoniously to Pakistan; thousands others made a beeline to the Canadian border to seek asylum.

Nobody knows how many Pakistani nationals were taken to the American Gulag, the notorious Guantanamo internment camp in Cuba. According to Pakistan's Home Minister, Aftab Ahmed Khan Sherpao, at least 35 of them are still held there without any charges against them, despite five years of rigorous imprisonment. Human rights groups throughout the world have catalogued the inhuman treatment of these prisoners caught in the limbo of America's blatant disregard of the rights of POWs under the Geneva Conventions and its persistent violations of the norms of international law and convention.

Pakistan's image in general in the US, and among its European allies, is that of a country rife with religious fundamentalism. The US media has been in the forefront of painting this picture of Pakistan, with the tacit endorsement of the Bush administration. Pakistan is still a pariah as far as its credibility as a responsible nuclear power is concerned. Dr. Qadeer Khan has become a punching bag for those who cannot bring themselves to accept a Muslim state entering the exclusive nuclear club. Pakistan is being ruthlessly demonized as a purveyor of nuclear technology and knowhow to 'rogue' states.

No doubt Pakistan's foreign policy, over the last six decades, has meandered and followed a tortuous course. And yet there is one creditable success story: the lone 'silver star', so to speak, on its scorecard. The framers of Pakistan's foreign policy, both civilians and generals have, so far, successfully parried the enormous and crude American pressure and blandishments to cap off the country's nuclear capability and power. This is one creditable example of Pakistan standing up to an international bully in the defence of its national interest.

There is neither reason nor incentive for Pakistan to succumb to American arm-twisting to sign on to NPT or CTBT, especially in the face

of Western reluctance to ask any questions about Israel's well-known nuclear arsenal or India's, now American-sanctified nuclear expansion. The Bush administration simply would not countenance treating Pakistan, a front line 'ally' in the 'war against terror,' at par with India in the 'nuclear club.'

NPT, in any case, has been used by the Western nuclear powers to augment their nuclear monopoly at the expense of the legitimate and peaceful, civil-oriented, programmes of the developing countries. What is being done to Iran, a signatory to NPT, is fully illustrative of this cartel mentality and hegemonic syndrome dictating terms to the non-nuclear world. Pakistan cannot, and should not, barter away its nuclear autarky and make it a prisoner to Indian whims or American pressure. This is one foreign policy card that must not be squandered. At stake is our credibility as a sovereign state.

The Bush administration has showered India with the status of a most favoured nation for the transfer of nuclear technology; it is not prepared to share even a shred of that with its 'front line ally,' Pakistan. It has been told, in so many words, that it should not expect to be on the same pedestal with India. In spite of so much denigration being heaped on Pakistan, General Musharraf has remained as steadfast a soldier of the US global imperial interests as General Ayub was in his days, or General Zia-ul-Haq in his.

On Musharraf's watch, and under relentless prodding from Washington, the Pakistan Army has been engaged, on a regular footing, in the tribal areas of Pakistan—the *prickly hedge* of the heyday of British imperialism in this part of the world. To date, the casualty toll of this adventure in the frontier land is a stiff 700 Pakistani military personnel, soldiers and officers, killed, according to the official tally; the actual toll could be considerably higher. But irrespective of how many lives may have been lost in the process of pleasing General Musharraf's neo-imperialist mentors, it has never been deemed 'enough' or sufficient by the power that be; the goalpost of expectations of Pakistan has been shifting all the time and Pakistan is being lambasted for 'not doing enough.'

~~And what about the people of Pakistan? Are they in accord with what the military regime has been doing in their name? The fact of the matter is that the chasm between the interest of the rulers and that of the people of Pakistan, the so-called silent majority, has never been greater than what it is today. The years-long military operation in the tribal areas has deeply fissured national cohesion and strained the fabric of allegiance to the state, not only in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)~~

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and NWFP but also in Balochistan, where a quasi insurgency against Islamabad's edict is being fuelled by a crisis of confidence between the centre and the province.

Popular disapproval of the policies of the Musharraf regime are finding an echo in the swelling curve of anti-Americanism in the people of Pakistan. Dozens of independent surveys—American, European and Pakistani—have time and again arrived at the same conclusion: that the US, since 9/11, is seen by an overwhelming majority of people in our 'global village' as a dangerous, almost lawless, 'rogue' state, with no regard in its actions for international law or conventions. The negative image of the US is interpolated in the mind of a Pakistani with his government's subservience to Washington's *diktat*. The Musharraf regime, in the common sense of a Pakistani man on the street is nothing but a lackey of American global expansionism and neo-imperialism.

An average Pakistani is not swayed by the official rhetoric of 'enlightened moderation', whatever it may stand for. What he sees with his eyes is that Pakistan is burning its fingers in Afghanistan in trying to pull the American chestnut out of the fire. Pakistan still plays host to at least three million Afghan refugees on its soil, while the government stoutly refuses to bring one-tenth of this number of Pakistanis stranded in Bangladesh for well over three decades—the so-called pariah Pakistanis, derisively named, and consigned to the blind alley of history, as Biharis.

The common man of Pakistan knows that his green passport is not worth much for American immigration, and getting an American visa is the most difficult for not only an ordinary Pakistani but, occasionally, for even the privileged and the powerful. So untrusting is the US government of its front line ally that no PIA aircraft is allowed to fly to a US airport non-stop from Pakistan; it must stop over somewhere in the West in order to qualify for landing rights in America.

Because of this accretion of disconnect between the ruling elite and the man on the street, Pakistan is being consumed by utter frustration and gloom about the direction of the country.

Indeed it would be unrealistic to deny that there is a very serious problem of religious fundamentalism in Pakistan. It is also true that Pakistan has become a crucible of militancy in the post-9/11 period. But the American-friendly policy of the present ruling order in Pakistan is the principal reason for the mushrooming growth of violence and terrorism. Zia-ul-Haq's intoxication with the Afghan jihad against the Soviet Union—

and in cahoots with the US—had spawned for Pakistan the bitter legacy of gun and drug culture that also, in the final analysis, bred the nightmare phenomenon of the Taliban. Pakistan and the Pakistanis are still grappling with the fallout of that shortsighted fervour of a military ruler. Ironically, Afghanistan ultimately became the tripwire for Zia-ul-Haq's tragic death. General Musharraf, in identical fashion, has used Afghanistan to promote his personal fortunes by making a 180-degree turn on his own erstwhile patronage of the Taliban and committing Pakistan on the side of the Bush's 'crusade.' In a re-run of the Zia era, Pakistan is desperately trying to fend off the inevitable blowback of its involvement with a superpower's global interests.

The most ironic element in this dance in a circle foreign policy for more than half a century is that no Pakistani strongman seems ready to see the reality that a foreign policy shorn of popular sanction of the people of Pakistan is unlikely to serve the nation's interests. Likewise, any relationship between a global superpower and a middle rank country, like Pakistan, is bound to be bumpy and uneven. The latest reminder of this is implicit in the American crude pressure on Pakistan to desist from entering into a tripartite deal with Iran and India for importing Iranian natural gas.

The tragedy of the people of Pakistan remains unabated for the simple reason that their interests and aspirations are not reflected in the foreign policy practised and exploited in their name. The bane of Pakistan is not only its feudal and non-democratic culture but also a more dangerous culture of arrogance that has laced its firmly entrenched ruling elite's disdain for the will of the people. Recurring reliance on a distant and alien power, which has no brief for Pakistan's ideological underpinnings, and no empathy for its peculiar genesis, has spread despondency among the people and cursed its rollercoaster foreign policy. The result is a country groping in the dark for its interest and what must be done to secure it on a long-term basis.