



US playing a double game

Pakistan can't be caught unaware

While Pakistan is salivating and trying everything that it possibly could to promote process of reconciliation in Afghanistan and bring stability to the region, which needless to emphasise, is in its own supreme interest, there are credible signs that the US which claims to be the biggest stakeholder in resolving the Afghan conundrum, is playing a double game in the region.

The US Congress move to torpedo F-16 deal to Pakistan, passage of the National Defence Authorisation Act that would block \$450 million in aid to Pakistan unless it did more to fight the Haqqani network and the droning of the Taliban leader Mullah Mansour Akhtar in Balochistan are indeed very ominous portents for Pakistan. The mindset of the US Congress on F-16 deal was amply reflected by the statement of Congressman Matt Salmon who opposing the deal expressed the apprehension that the planes could be used against India instead of the terrorists. These steps clearly suggest that the US was undermining Pakistan's ability to fight the menace of terrorism and showing a discernible tilt towards India, whom it is trying to prop up as a regional super power to act as a counter-balance against China as well as fomenting instability in both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The killing of Mullah Mansoor Akhtar has effectively hamstrung the efforts to promote peace in Afghanistan. The QCG and Pakistan would find it very difficult to play an effective role in organising an interface between the Afghan government and the Taliban in the backdrop of this new development, which is likely to strengthen the resolve of the Taliban to continue fighting against the Afghan regime and the US-NATO forces, besides acting as a catalyst for reunion of the breakaway factions. There are already indications of this eventuality emerging during the process of choosing a new leader for the Taliban movement. The fact that the US took the liberty of using drones in Baluchistan for the first time has also created difficulties for Pakistan. Unfortunately it could not do anything except usual protestations by calling the US ambassador to the foreign office. No wonder President Obama has unequivocally declared US intentions to pursue such targets anywhere in Pakistan.

It is pertinent to point out that the US, notwithstanding its verbal exhortations for supporting the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned solution to the Afghan problem and helping Pakistan in fighting the scourge of terrorism, has actually acted to sabotage the prospects of peace in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Afghan regime – which is totally dependent on US for its survival – has remained a helpless on-looker and instead of standing up to US for its indiscretions and has found it convenient to use Pakistan as a fall guy to vent its frustrations over its own failures.

The US has particularly undermined peace talks between TTP and Pakistan government beginning from 2004. The US drones killed TTP commander Nek Muhammad in South Waziristan that destroyed the peace agreement orchestrated by Pakistan Army with the TTP local militants in Shakai. Similarly the peace initiatives with Maulana Faqir Muhammad in Bajaur agency and with Hakimullah Mehsud in Waziristan were also undermined through drone attacks.

The way the things are unfurling and playing out at the moment, there are growing fears among the watchers of US global policies and in this region, that US is not going to get out of Afghanistan and all the foregoing steps are meant to create a justification for that eventuality. We have already heard echoes of this possibility by the US military commanders in Afghanistan. The US Presidential hopeful Donald Trump in one of his speeches made no bones about it when he said that it was imperative to keep US troops in Afghanistan to achieve US strategic interest in the region and also to keep watch on nuclear Pakistan next door. He may or may not win the elections but there is no doubt about the Fact that there is a bi-partisan agreement on US staying put in the region. The US has all along been trying its best to forestall Pakistan's efforts to achieve nuclear parity with India; a threat which is real and could only be ignored by the latter at its own peril. The US has also been expressing doubts about the safety of nuclear assets of Pakistan and there has been a persistent campaign in the US administrative circles and US media to rub in the notion that there was a possibility of these weapons falling into the hands of the terrorists, notwithstanding the fact that Pakistan has a fool-proof command and control arrangement in place to ensure their safety.

Another big determinant of US maintaining its continued presence in Afghanistan and stir instability in Pakistan is the CPEC factor. Both the US and India are wary of this historic and game changing mega economic initiative. While India has openly demonstrated its opposition to the project and has been engaged in overt and covert operations to sabotage it by fomenting insurgency in Balochistan and sponsoring acts of terrorism in Pakistan through RAW agents like Kal Bhushan Yadav, the US has reportedly been doing it clandestinely. The US-India nexus designed to sabotage CPEC, foment instability in Pakistan and keep the things boiling in Afghanistan are indeed not friendly acts. They are inimical to economic and strategic interests of Pakistan in the region.

The US clearly is a hostile power in the garb of a friend. It can go to any extent to protect and serve its own self-defined interests in this region and at the global level. India unfortunately remains a staunch enemy of Pakistan and there is no possibility of this enmity coming to an end in the foreseeable future, in spite of the fact that the continuation of this hostility will keep hurting both of them. The Indians blinded by and inebriated by their rising military power supported by US and its allies, are absolutely oblivious to seeing things in their true perspective and are hell-bent to establish their hegemony in the region.

Pakistan therefore has to be on guard against these ominous developments. The architects of our foreign policy must be mindful of these lurking dangers and firm up their responses to these challenges carefully. While commitment to peace must remain the top priority, simultaneous resolute steps should also continue to deter aggressive Indian designs and the machinations of the ill-wishers of the country. With US trying to up the ante against China in the South Asian Sea, South Asia and attempts to undermine the implementation of CPEC in connivance with India, Pakistan and China might need to further upgrade their cooperation in the domain of defence to ensure security in the region and implementation of CPEC in a secure environment.