



## US policy of containment

### **Time for a foreign policy revamp**

US foreign policy has used containment twice in last 50 years. First time it was used was against the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) which was the predecessor of Russia. In that struggle Pakistan was a front line ally of America especially after Soviet forces entered Afghanistan. The policy was adopted by a military dictator General Zia ul Haq. The country suffered a lot of because of that as it introduced drugs, weapons, extremism and fundamentalism in the country. Second time US has adopted policy of containment against China but in this scenario the front line state is India. One price America has agreed to pay for this alignment with India is to drop Pakistan as an ally. I have written many times over last three years that US is dropping Pakistan to alleviate Indian anxiety about its Western borders. China has understood this policy shift and has decided to develop Pakistan as a front line ally to counter this strategy of containment. We have to realise this reality and recalibrate our foreign policy. Our failure to reorient will be costly both in lives, economy and even statehood.

When we look at the map it is quite clear that Pakistan has been increasingly isolated. In the East we have India and on the West we have Iran and Afghanistan. We have tensions with all these neighbours. In the front across gulf of Oman we have Oman where US has a military base. The only regional support we are getting is in the North in the form of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). In a recent One Belt One Road (OBOR) summit in Hong Kong, Chinese third ranking decision maker highlighted that OBOR has two key routes. One going through Russia and Central Asia to Europe while the other going through Pakistan to Middle East. But it will not be that easy especially if US supports Iran-India-Afghanistan Chah Bahar route that will link with Chinese-Russian route. Tension between Iran and Pakistan would mean that Iranian oil and gas will not be part of CPEC which will be disincentive for China which needs energy. Choking of Persian Gulf would mean that Saudi oil will reach China through a longer expensive route. Chinese interests in CPEC so far are more related to security than economy if Pakistan does not improve relations with his Western neighbours.

Both government and opposition are showing lack of interest in foreign policy. There has been complete silence from both politicians and military after recent US drone strikes in which at least

one Pakistani citizen lost his life. Opposition has refrained from demanding the government to elaborate its policy position except few lone voices. They should have huddled together and issued a joint statement demanding from the government an explanation as well as appointment of a full time foreign minister. Prime Minister did not bother to cancel his London visit and made a one line statement after landing there. There was no meeting between PM, Defence Minister, Interior Minister, National Security Adviser and military chiefs to evaluate the situation and decide on a correction course.

Traditionally military has dominated our foreign policy which creates a turf war between civilian-military leaders. This tension existed during PPP tenure and has increased since PML – N started its tenure. This turf war has seriously damaged our interests. One recent example was military accusation of Iran facilitating RAW agents to infiltrate Pakistan during the official visit of Iranian President. Even after the US drone strike a narrative has emerged that Mullah Mansour visited Iran and was targeted upon his return from there. Opposition parties instead of supporting civilian government have usually sided with military to exacerbate the situation and exploit it for their own narrow political gains.

While we are showing our ineptitude, Iran-India-Afghanistan signed an agreement to develop port, road and transit trade. Indian PM Narendra Modi, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani held summit meeting to discuss regional trade and security inking 12 MOUs. This does not mean all is lost. For this initiative to succeed, these three countries will need cooperation with Pakistan.

Our usual foreign policy is driven by zero sum philosophy where loss of our neighbor is gain for us and vice versa. This is a wrong concept, shows lack of depth and immaturity of our diplomats. For instance, we have to snub Iran to maintain good relations with Saudi Arabia. We have not learned the art to balance relationship between two competing powers. Same is the situation when it comes to dealing with China and USA. The point I am trying to emphasize is that our current foreign policy is failing if not completely failed yet. Traditionally military planners have dominated foreign policy because of our designation as a security state. We need to change that. The track record of soldier's as diplomats especially in uniform have not been very encouraging around the world. It is important that we allocate sufficient budget for the development of our diplomatic capability. We have to attract best talent to join foreign services and weed out incapable and corrupt officials. We need to also develop some region specific think tanks that can engage with parliament, its committees and policy planners for the development of a workable policy.

Pakistan has a diplomatic crisis but all crisis's come with an opportunity. It is upon us to capitalize on it and preserve our national interest. Sovereignty in international relations is protected by diplomats not soldiers. We must appreciate this and develop it.