



Using diplomacy as a tool

Uri Dubinin, Professor of the Department of Diplomacy of MGIMO-University of the RF MFA, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation defines the role of diplomacy beautifully, “What is the art of diplomacy? While the art of war lies in the ability to claim victory through the force of arms, the art of diplomacy aims to achieve the goals set through peaceful means. It is, therefore, the antithesis of using force to solve international problems. In the art of diplomacy, it is the international community’s accumulated experience that serves as a weapon, as does – and herein lies the essence of it – an innovative, creative approach to problems arising. It is on the basis of this that one acts to provide a solution.”

The first step to successful diplomacy is information gathering. Talks with representatives of other nations must be based on effective information gathering. Only with reliable information can a situation be intelligently assessed and a practical narrative developed for discussions on any emerging situation or area of mutual interest. Smart diplomacy intelligently evaluates the extent to which the concession another may be willing to give in negotiations of any nature. It needs shrewd deductions.

Pakistan lacks a coherent, long-term view on issues that reflects in its poor diplomatic efforts-if any. Governments come and governments go, the thrust towards issues involving nations remains even- of course needing periodic assessment based on emerging situations. War in neighboring Afghanistan is weakening Pakistan as a modern state, policies that are more India-centric than focusing on using diplomacy as a tool to develop better relations in the region as well as internationally makes her muddle her way through emergency situations more on ad hoc basis than based on any long- term strategy.

“Pakistan needs to get out of its in-depth strategic cliché vis-à-vis Afghanistan that has at long last proved to be neither here nor there. How fallacious it was can be seen by the fact that first the Taliban terrorists used Pakistan as their strategic depth and now India has found its strategic depth in Afghanistan to negate Pakistan’s regional importance.” (Wajid Shamsul Hasan, June 15, 2016)

International relations must be based on national interests. There are no permanent friends or permanent enemies. With Afghanistan, Pakistan has been unable to step out of the paradigm of Cold War era. The ground realities now are different. Different policies or a combination of policies are needed to redefine the relationship.

Pakistan's lack of strong policies are pushing her in a cocoon where she stands regionally and internationally isolated. This is an unhappy situation. Signing of Chahbahar Port Agreement by Afghanistan, Iran and India indicates the frustration by the three neighbors towards achieving success in having trade and business with Pakistan. 'The development of the port of Chahbahar expands a trade route for the land-locked countries of central Asia that bypasses Pakistan.' (Local newspaper May 23, 2016)

Sir Ernest Satow, author of well-known Guide to Diplomatic Practice, writes, "Diplomacy, is the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between the Governments of independent States, extending sometimes also to other relations with vassal States."

Yet Pakistan has yet to appoint a full-fledged Finance Minister, relying instead on Sartaj Aziz, and trained economist with Tareq Fatemi a former diplomat as a junior de facto foreign minister. The Foreign Minister (as the portfolio is with Nawaz Sharif) with the Prime Minister are on a long leave from the country, often photographed shopping at Harrods. "The inadequacies in the Foreign Office appear to be in sync with Sharif's way of running his government where short-term expediencies continue to dominate long-term interests. Since late last month, Sharif has been in London, where he underwent open-heart surgery and is now recuperating. His absence from Pakistan has triggered uncomfortable questions over exactly how the business of the state ought to be run without the prime minister." (Gulf News, June 28, 2016)

Diplomacy needs to be flexible. It must. One must choose one's battles and every battle is not fought with bullets. Gaining trust of other nations' key figures is mandatory to develop a relationship that leads to more listening than demanding. However, by firing salvos of hate and arrows tipped with vituperative poison, how can such individuals gain the trust of host nations where appointed to represent their country? Hussain Haqqani, Pakistan's former Ambassador to Sri Lanka and United States says, "Diplomacy requires flexibility. If a nation binds itself to ideology, flexibility in diplomacy suffers. Since Ayub era, we have an ideological commitment to determining friends and enemies. There is no pragmatism. The most effective diplomats are those who are deemed friends by other countries. But our discourse marginalizes anyone who is liked by those we describe as enemies (Israel, India) or unreliable superpower (US). How can a diplomat who speaks against others be the one to gain their favor? However, the irony is that the moment a Pakistani diplomat earns the trust and friendship of foreigners; he comes in for attack and abuse at home. Our ideological disposition completely precludes cooperation with India or

Israel and we assume that anyone who is a friend of ‘kuffar’ is not reliable. Moreover, we cannot simply repeat our national narrative to others. They have their own interests and views. Diplomacy requires acknowledging their interests and not denying completely that they know something too. Denial of facts known to all is lying, not diplomacy.”

Talking to a very senior diplomatic friend, I was struck by one thing he said. Pakistan’s government, in his opinion should have cultivated a coterie of intelligent people including diplomats and writers. Each group talking in favor of different countries. An extended arm of the government foreign office aimed at developing relationship with and winning confidence of key people there to gain information and assess that information for Pakistan’s diplomatic efforts to further her national interests.

Pakistan’s foreign policy is unconditionally been formed by the circumstances it came in creation. However, high time the approach and narrative must change with ground realities.