

FROM UNIPOLARITY TO MULTIPOLARITY: CHARTING A STRATEGY FOR PAKISTAN

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The bipolar system premised on permanent opposing blocs was the unique feature of the post-WWII international system. The system was reflected in the notion of the Cold War where the nuclear deterrence ensured that the main rivals never fought a direct military conflict with each other. So the system was dominated by a range of conflictual relationships from economic warfare to psychological war to proxy wars – all intended to avoid a direct military confrontation between the two main protagonists. The destructive quality of nuclear weapons shifted the focus to their political use – and deterrence reformulated the traditional notion of defence. So politics really became a continuation of war by other means – thereby standing the Clausewitzian dictum on its head. The system was a bipolar system with two clear poles rather than a multipolar system with a number of poles of power and influence.

Post the disintegration of the Soviet Union two major developments have taken place:

One – there is no balance at the systemic level anymore Two – the sole super power has shifted from being a status quo power to a unipolar imperial power – in Morgenthau's definitional framework of types of states. A status quo power being one which aims at keeping its power level and shows no interest in changing the distribution of power; an imperialist power aims at acquiring more power.

So the present world order shows no balance anymore and there is a dialectic that is operational right now in the system between unipolarity and a slowly emerging rather weak challenge of multipolarity. In fact, the US continues to see itself as a unipolar power that needs to establish global strategic structures attuned to its policy goals – and there is little room for hostile states in this new design.

The nature of this unipolarity is premised upon the following:

- **A Preemptive doctrine with a global reach.** In order to understand the implications of this doctrine, which underlies the US design for a new global order, we need to look at the three dimensions that broadly comprise the operational sphere of the doctrine – political, economic and military. A common principle underlines all these three dimensions – that of preemptive interventionism.

The political dimension includes regime change and restructuring of states. In other words, the internal dynamics of states are the concern of the US and its allies – that is, the US now feels it has the power and influence to shape the world, including the internal dynamics of states. Muslim states are particular targets of this, under the guise of spreading democracy – (‘guise’ because where democracy brings up results unfavourable to the US or its allies, then these results are not accepted) – and, as is now becoming more overt, Pakistan is a specific target, in terms of restructuring, of this new preemptive doctrine.

As for the economic dimension, the US has demonstrated clearly that it will use economic means to further its security agenda. Included here are both positive and coercive tactics. These range from the promotion of economic growth and economic freedom to the traditional use of aid and international institutions like the World Bank and the IMF to impact on the economic well-being of states to the new concept of freezing of assets of states and groups found threatening to the security of the US. And all this is encompassed within an overall policy of seeking control of strategic resources like energy.

The military dimension of unipolarity is premised on the US argument, given clearly in its National Security Strategy paper of 2002, that international law recognizes the legitimacy of preemptive strikes and that the US has for a long time “*maintained the option of preemptive actions to counter a sufficient threat to our national security.*” It refers to the need to take “*anticipatory action to defend*

ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy's attack. To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively." This doctrine implies an open-ended framework for preemptive military action and the extensive reach of this doctrine is clear when, in the context of weapons of mass destruction, the US has declared its intent of taking "proactive counter proliferation efforts": "*We must deter and defend against the threat before it is unleashed.*"

- **Containment.** The US sees it as a necessary goal of sustaining its unipolarity of power to contain the threat of rising powers – primarily China – and states that are suspect in the eyes of the US, primarily Muslim states. Here again, a nuclear Pakistan comes under particular US attention.

The principles of geopolitics have been revived in a new policy of Containment - where it creates security linkages under multiple alliance-forms, cooperative structures and treaties.

- **End of deterrence at the global level.** Deterrence had been premised on mutual vulnerability and an acceptance that nuclear weapons had no military value *per se* in terms of war fighting. But now the US is committed to the development and deployment of Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD). BMD comprises two components – NMD and TMD. (*While the NMD is a fixed, land-based, non-nuclear missile defence system with a space-based detection system – the envisaged TMD focuses on rapid deployment and with an element of high manoeuvrability.*) With the US now adamant on deploying its BMD system, it is also signing agreements with states like India and Japan to help them develop their missile defence systems which are being seen as TMD systems for the US.

Thus, the notion of deterrence, which was the mainstay of strategic stability within the bipolar world, has been sidelined on the grounds that deterrence was effective only against a "risk-averse

adversary” – which is no longer the case in the context of terrorists and failing and rogue states.

In this context, for the first time the US is seeking to establish the military viability of nuclear weapons – as well as declaring a first use nuclear policy against non-nuclear states that are seen as threats to the US and may possess other WMD. So, with deterrence having been relegated to backstage, the strategic stability established over decades has been undermined.

All these trends of course were already developing post-bipolarity, but 9/11 allowed greater opportunity for these trends to take hold. However, as US power is being stretched to test its limits, one is seeing a dialectic between the US and its allies supporting unilateralism - and the rest of the international community which is trying to reassert the primacy of multilateralism. In many ways the focus is centred on the UN and the challenges to it through the new notion being favoured by the unilateralists – the notion of “coalitions of the willing”.

UN reform is a part of the struggle between differing approaches towards the building of a new international consensus just as the growing penchant for the US and its allies to act outside of the UNSC framework through coalitions of the willing.

How is the notion of coalitions of the willing being operationalised beyond the purely military? Through agreements like the PSI, ITER, etc. This latter framework does have some organisational underpinnings – especially NATO. While the UN Charter sees a subsidiary role for collective defence organisations like NATO, the US wants to push NATO as an alternative to the UNSC collective security system – and a major move in this direction has been the presence of NATO in Afghanistan.

So, to build up a picture of the new global environment and the world order being created therein:

- There is emerging a new international framework devised by the sole superpower which is premised upon a

system of core states, which will then ally with semi-core states and so on. This will see new strategic alliance systems, while old ones like NATO will be expanded. The politico-military reflection of the core states alliance will be on coalitions of the willing, prepared to act outside of the framework of Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

Central to this development of core states, is the post-9/11 US National Security Strategy, first brought out in 2002 and later updated. Clearly the core states include Britain, India, Israel, Japan and Australia and states like Poland in the “New Europe” of Bush. The strategic criticality of India had not only been stressed in the 2006 updated Security Strategy Paper of the US, which declared that: *“India is now poised to shoulder global obligations in cooperation with the United States in a way befitting a major power.”* This perspective is also reflected in the 123 Indo-US nuclear agreements and the manner in which the US has pushed it through the IAEA and NSG. The latest regional reflection of this is the US effort to bring in the Indian military into Afghanistan and the push to force Pakistan into giving India land trade access through Wagah.

- Also, new strategic notions are being pushed forward that challenge traditional security notions. e.g. the rejection of deterrence & the efforts to rationalise military use of nuclear weapons; notions of preemption and regime change; the democracy agenda.

In this context, we are seeing the nuclear nonproliferation global agenda also being altered with only the nuclear programmes of some states now being a matter of concern for the coalitions of the willing, while other states’ nuclear programmes, like those of Israel and India, are being accepted as kosher despite the nonproliferation regime.

However, there is also an interesting pull coming in against unipolarity that is now becoming more evident. While the sole super power has shown its willingness to resort to military power and

other non-violent punitive measures to deal with states not falling in line with its agenda, this excessive use of a non-accommodative approach is resulting in also showing the limitations of such an approach. The Iran nuclear issue has shown these limitations with the US now realizing that its own allies may not be prepared to opt for punitive measures against Iran for their own interests. Some Latin American states are also challenging the psyche of the Monroe Doctrine for that region.

So, there is going to be room for manoeuvre for smaller states. But this would require the smaller states to develop an ability to sustain their position over a period of time by knowing their strengths and weaknesses in unambiguous terms.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to US unipolarity is going to come from Russia, which has seen its position in its own neighbourhood erode especially post-9/11 with US intrusions into the CAS and the so-called coloured revolutions in the old Soviet territories of Ukraine etc. A more assertive Russia is now seeking to regain lost ground and one reflection of this was the 2008 Russian move into Ossetia, challenging a West-leaning Georgia. It was ironic to hear the US leadership refer to the UN norms and declare that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations must be rigorously honoured – given how the US is doing exactly the opposite in Iraq and Pakistan! Also, having undermined the UN itself, it is interesting to note that now the US needed to fall back on that organization to try and show the Russian action in Ossetia as having no legitimacy! Yet, when Russia called an emergency session of the UNSC, no consensus could occur because the US, UK and its allies rejected a phrase that called on both sides “to renounce the use of force”. Equally ironic is how the US wants Stalin’s directives to be respected vis a vis South Ossetia and Abkhazia, both regions having enjoyed autonomy till the collapse of the SU.¹

Crucial issues between the US and Russia include, one, energy and the control of pipelines to Azerbaijan and Central Asia.²

The second factor is NATO’s eastward expansion – thereby directly threatening Russian security. It is in this context that the Five-point Medvedev Doctrine was significant since it stated that:

One, Russia recognised the primacy of the fundamental principles of international law for interstate relations. Second, the world should be multipolar as a single-pole world is unacceptable (clear rejection of US primacy) and domination will not be allowed. A unipolar world is unstable and conflict ridden. Third, Russia is not seeking a confrontation with any other country and has no intention of isolating itself. Fourth, protecting the lives and dignity of Russian citizens wherever they may be is an unquestionable priority for the country (sounds similar to US preemptive doctrine though not as all-encompassing). Russia's foreign policy will be based on this need and Russia will also protect the interests of its business community abroad. Medvedev also stated that it should be clear to all that Russia will respond to any aggressive acts committed against it. Fifth, as with other countries, there are regions in which Russia has privileged interests – these regions are home to countries with which Russia shares special historical relations and are bound together as friends and good neighbours.

Medvedev concluded by stating that: “As for the future, it depends not only on us but also on our friends and partners in the international community. They have a choice”.

Thus, presently, the global environment is in a state of flux and the emerging picture is far from clear. Russia has realized that the US is stretched and off-balance especially in the Muslim World. In the Greater Middle East idea (and Pakistan is now seen as part of the ME!) the US is attempting to restructure the entire region, but it may not get the restructuring it seeks. Amid the new US strategic designs which in West Asia rely heavily on Russian cooperation or at least Russian restraint, there is now a Russian challenge in its traditional area of influence – especially in Central Asia and Iran – also extending to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

As for the war on terror, it also seems to be in a state of flux – it began with a war against terrorism and then degenerated into the invasion of Iraq and then reaching a new low point within the context of “collective responsibility” being exercised by Israel supported by the Bush-Blair combine to kill innocent Arabs in Lebanon – and even in definitional terms the US had altered the

paradigm of the war against terror to a war against “Islamic fascists”.³

In the context of South Asian region itself – its strategic dynamics began altering when the US began evolving its strategic partnership with India. But with the presence of Extra Regional Forces (ERFs) and with the inclusion of Afghanistan into South Asia through SAARC, is there a clearly demarcated South Asian entity now in strategic terms - especially given missile ranges in the region and the external players?

In any event, what we traditionally refer to as South Asia is at the crossroads of the new global architecture, where the focus on the ME merges and shifts towards a focus on China. Also, with the new centrality of the energy issue, South Asia has the potential to be the hub of new energy corridors. Perhaps most critical for Pakistan has been the emergence of a strong Indo-US strategic partnership with a vital military component including nuclear.

Charting a strategy for Pakistan

Given the altered regional dynamics and global structural fluidity with unipolarity still dominating but multipolarity beginning to resurface, Pakistan has to ensure that it cannot only sustain but increase its relevancy regionally and globally – as well as in the context of its bilateral relations. There are also two types of multipolarity that are going to confront each other: One is the UN-based multipolarity with consensus norms and principles for governing international relations; and the other is the US-sponsored multipolarity premised on coalitions of the willing which challenges all existing international norms. For Pakistan the former alternative holds greater possibilities since the latter is untenable given its underlying premise of India as a core state.

So what is required is a new strategy that extricates Pakistan from its present debilitating “alliance” with the US which has increased the threat dynamics for Pakistan. More than ever before there is a need to formulate a home-grown foreign and security policy which focuses not only on internal cohesion but also on an

external policy that is in synch with internal dynamics and allows a broader vision of the world – beyond merely a US-centric approach.

One thing should be clear to our decision makers – a strategic partnership with the US is neither a possibility nor is it desirable in the long run given our divergent world views – especially in terms of China, India and the Muslim World. But we can have issue specific cooperation – and that should be the focus in our interaction with the US – with clear quid pro quos and greater transparency.

In fact, given the present problem of terrorism, Pakistan is increasingly facing a two-pronged terrorist threat – one from within emanating from the militants/extremists from among its own people, and two, from state terrorism At the hands of the US, both psychological in terms of verbal threats and physical in terms of drone attacks.

Both threats have to be dealt with in differing ways. With the US, it is more straightforward – create space between us and the US in the context of the so-called war on terror now renamed by Obama as the war against Al-Qaeda. Can we extricate ourselves from the US grip, given the economic and other aid issues? Yes, because it will be too costly for this country if we do not, although the US has, as in the fifties and sixties, made strong inroads into the elite segments of our society – especially in the bureaucratic structures (civil and military; serving and retired) as well as the political elites who continue to pose the “either-or” alternative. But the fact of the matter is that we still have some space to renegotiate our relationship with the US, rather than continuing to give them more access internally. For instance, on the drone issue, simply close the drone base at Bandari, 87 kilometres south of Kharan in Balochistan. Stop NATO logistics supplies as this is a source of great instability and violence within Pakistan. As for military assistance, we have done quite well without it at the strategic level and our nuclear deterrence with all its components is totally independent of the US. Let us not forget the costs of acquiring US weapon systems even at the tactical level – especially in terms of supplies of spares.

But the issue of the US goes far beyond, because it undermines our ability fight our own war with extremists at home. The US has successfully shifted the centre of gravity of the war against Al Qaeda to Pakistan and has pushed our leaders into a situation where violence, polarisation and now the massive movement of IDPs has destroyed the social fabric in this country.

We need to be aware of the US eventual aim for Pakistan: To undermine the state – either balkanize it or make it totally dependent upon Indian hegemony (see the recent MoU on trade signed under Washington’s tutelage) but in any event, take control of the nuclear assets. The US knows only too well that as long as the military is strong and cohesive the latter cannot happen – so its tactical aim is to undermine the military from within. That is why the hasty push into military action in Swat and FATA – with all the ensuing instability. There is every danger of civil-military conflict despite the early support of the military action from the major part of civil society.

Perhaps the most positive impact of distancing ourselves from the US will be that it will immediately alter the operational environment favourably for the Pakistani state to fight its internal challenges.

These internal challenges need to be fought on multiple fronts – and with the active involvement of civil society especially our private business sector. With the issue of our own homegrown terrorism that has become more lethal post-9/11, we have to have an overarching political policy within which there is a strong military-law enforcement element. But dialogue and economic/political incentives have to go alongside military action – people have to have a stake in the system and have to feel they are not only protected by the state but also have a better life within the state structures. In other words, the people have to be safely isolated from the militants. It is the failure of the state over the years to be responsive to the people, which has created the space for the militants and continues to do so.

Also, the state has to recognize the external actors lending support to the militants to keep Pakistan destabilized – the Indo-US connection in FATA and Balochistan (why is US-occupied Kabul allowing militant Baloch organizations to have their offices there?). A major question is what sort of linkage is there between the Pakistani Taliban and the US as some newspaper analyses have hinted? Is this why the ISI and CIA have fallen out? Pakistan will have to revisit its strategic assumptions made in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 which have impacted our security negatively.

Beyond the bilateral relationship with the US, we need to bolster our regional relationships – especially with neighbours like China and Iran. The strategic partnership with China has to be given central focus – at present our relationship with China has been neglected and made secondary to the US relationship and this has to be rectified. With Iran, there is always a reluctance and suspicion of Iran but the fact is that it is a neighbour with whom we share a common history and religio-cultural links. With the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan, we should have been able to rework the relationship but the US has been a negative factor here also especially with our allowing it to destabilize Iran from Balochistan through the terrorist group Jundullah. The irony is that while our relations with Iran and the US continue to deteriorate unless we redirect ourselves, the US-Iran relationship will improve and we will be isolated on that front also.

I feel we need to adopt a more proactive external strategy that moves in the direction of multipolarity. For instance, why not a community of power framework with neighbouring Muslim states where there is no conflict, there are common ties and interests and an underlying military and economic capability.

Looking beyond the war on terror, Pakistan should be focusing on an indirect approach to globally increasing our relevancy. This can be done by pushing for a more vital OIC and adopting a more proactive role in multilateral UN-based international forums, such as the CD in Geneva.

In fact, we have a vital stake in the way AC&D norms are charted for the future. Not only do we need to ensure that the altering nonproliferation regime is made nondiscriminatory, we need to protect our vital interests in the CD on the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT). We have to resist the US attempts to push through their draft of the FMCT which will place Pakistan at a permanent imbalance vis a vis nuclear deterrence against India (we lost a golden opportunity in 2008 in the IAEA and NSG forums on the issue of the Indo-US nuclear deal)

There are opportunities in the present fluidity of the international system but if our leadership continues to reduce us to an international beggar we will continue to lose our ability to chart our own future. So most critically we need to put our begging bowl aside and overcome our psychological confidence deficit that has cast its shadow over us post-9/11.

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Notes

¹ In 1990 Georgia's ultranationalist leader abolished the autonomous regions and invaded South Ossetia – bitter war followed with 1000 dead. A Russian force supervised an uneasy truce but in August this year, Georgian president Saakashvili ordered his forces to invade and when Russian peacekeeping base was also pounded, Russia responded. But for the US and its allies what was important was that Georgia was its faithful ally –

Despite bad propaganda, the *Financial Times* helped the Russian case by revealing that the Pentagon had provided combat training to Georgian special forces just before the Georgian attack on August 7 – and perhaps had actually orchestrated the war in the Georgian enclave.

² – The Clinton govt had selected Georgia as an energy corridor to bypass Russia and Iran – that is why Georgia was also given large military assets.

³ This was interesting because fascist, according to the dictionary definition, refers to: “anyone with extreme right wing, nationalistic, etc. views or methods” – and fascism is linked to extreme nationalism, militarism, restrictions on individual freedom, anti-communism”, etc. Of course, religion was not linked to fascism although the role of the Christian Church in Italy and Germany under Mussolini and Hitler was questionable, at the very least. But now Bush has referred to the fight against “Islamic fascists” as opposed to a global war on terror regardless of the religion of the terrorists. Of course, in terms of definitions, Bush could be described as a born-again fascist and Israel is definitely reflecting Zionist fascism – so is the war on terror descending into a war amongst differing brands of fascism?