
Emerging Situation in Pakistan: Implications for India

Kamal Davar

Introduction

Pakistan today stands at a defining moment in its turbulent history of 61 tumultuous years as a nation with the end of nine years of dictatorial rule by Gen Musharraf in mid-August 2008, and the election of Asif Zardari as president of Pakistan in September 2008 heralding the restoration of a semblance of democracy to that hapless country. Ruled for more than half of its existence by military dictatorships or quasi-military governments, Pakistan's future as a nation-state appears to be in near jeopardy with it being heavily besieged by a critically fractured polity, grave economic crisis, a dangerous drift since the days of Gen Zia-ul-Haq to rabid fundamentalism, restive provinces and the alarming ascendancy of Taliban and Al Qaeda elements in its rugged badlands of the northwest straddling the Durand Line where the writ of the Islamabad ceased to exist since some years. Meanwhile, Pakistan's uneasy relationship with its principal mentor, the US, continues to be bedevilled by a lack of mutual trust, especially in its role and an apparent lack of sincerity in the war on terror and its devious role in Afghanistan. Its ties with both its eastern and western neighbours, namely India and Afghanistan, currently need much more mending for Pakistan to breathe freely in the most volatile area of South Asia. It carries among the world's community, the reputation of being the fountainhead and a sponsor of global terrorism, notwithstanding the fact that it itself is grossly suffering from frequent and lethal terrorist attacks from those very outfits and cadres, that, regrettably, its own governmental institutions like the infamous Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) had equipped and trained earlier and to which Pakistani presidents and prime ministers had silently acquiesced. Violence

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attributed to terrorist strikes has become a daily occurrence in Pakistan and, thus, a combination of all these internal and geo-politico-strategic factors makes Pakistan today a “flailing state” if not a failing state.

Institutions, stakeholders and facets which impact Pakistan’s current identity crisis and its future include first and foremost, the formidable Pakistan Army which has always remained deeply entrenched in the internal politics of Pakistan. In addition, the other multiple power centres in Pakistan include the Pakistan president and the prime minister, a vociferous judiciary, the Parliament, the civil society and the all pervasive influence of the eternal four A’s viz, the United States of America, Allah (meaning the influence of the *mullahs* and rabid religionists), Saudi Arabia and, of course, the army, as already mentioned. Thus, as Pakistan endeavours to restore some semblance of order into its polity, its newly elected President, Asif Zardari has to make the most of a very narrow window of opportunity accorded to him by Allah and also America by acting decisively and differently than some of his double-dealing predecessors. To try to unravel the likely future of Pakistan is indeed fraught with a degree of much uncertainty and calls for an in-depth analysis of the workings of the major players and interplay of the factors enunciated above.

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The Pakistan Army and the ISI

Like the Indian Army, the Pakistan Army has the same heritage and roots derived from the same pre-partition British Army which was highly apolitical and thoroughly professional. However, unlike the Indian Army, the Pakistan Army has been intensely enmeshed in its country’s politics since the early 1950s and its influence significantly pervades the largely feudal Pakistani society in its upper echelons of power (also the reason of its acceptability to some extent) in a variety of ways unlike its Indian counterpart. The absence of tall and enlightened political leadership in Pakistan, unlike in India, in their formative years after independence, also overly enhanced the influence of the Pakistan Army in that country. The Pakistan Army has always seen itself as the stabilising factor in that country and, thus, it was not so difficult for four

military dictators to rule Pakistan for the bulk of the time since its independence. Dictatorships usually ruin most civil institutions and Pakistan was no exception. In addition, for their survivability, security organs of the state, especially intelligence organisations, have to be given unfettered powers and that precisely has been the reason for the unchecked and monstrous growth of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) which was, in reality, conceived only as the counter-intelligence agency for the armed forces of Pakistan. But not surprisingly, successive military dictators, for their own vested interests, gave it such unbridled and wide powers that the ISI became a “state within a state”, a rogue elephant answerable only to itself and, at times, acted on its own, unmindful of the compulsions of many Pakistan civilian governments. Even civilian Pakistan presidents and prime ministers have been scared and wary of the ISI but could not rein it in as it always had the backing of successive army chiefs. Nevertheless, enlightened Pakistan society today unmistakably resents the Frankenstein grip of the ISI on the polity and wishes it to be curtailed for the country’s survival. In addition, the growing Islamisation among the middle and junior rungs of the Pakistan Army and the ISI’s continuing patronage of fundamentalist elements is a cause of much concern for Pakistani society. The current Pakistani Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Gen Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, himself an ex-ISI chief and Musharraf protégé, has shown adequate courage and professional conviction in not only the ouster of his previous mentor, but in so far keeping the Pakistan Army from meddling in the country’s politics. His recent wide ranging reshuffle of the top hierarchy of the Pakistan Army, including appointing a new ISI chief (whether under US pressure or not, albeit with the approval of Prime Minister Gilani) displays the fact that some form of civil and democratic control is creeping back to Pakistan which augurs well for them. However, Kayani will do well for his country in ensuring that his forces and the ISI do not patronise militants of any hue or the Taliban or Al Qaeda elements, and in reality, deliver with sincerity in the war on terror against the Taliban and Al Qaeda outfits. Gen Kayani will have to halt the growing Islamisation among the junior rungs in the army and infuse adequate confidence and motivation in the rank and file and the Frontier Corps Constabulary to effectively take on the Taliban and Al Qaeda militants in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), the volatile Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and all along the Pakistan /Afghanistan border areas. In the last one month or so, the army has launched Operation Sherdil in the Bajaur region with some intensity and nearly 2,744 terrorists, including 321 foreigners, have been killed during this operation, according to

the army's briefing to the Parliament on October 8, which was held in camera. Gen Kayani, during his visit to Bajaur on September 28, 2008, stated that the Taliban had destroyed many rural health centres, government offices and schools, especially for girls. After Waziristan, the Bajaur region is the most significant stronghold of the Taliban-Al Qaeda combine and also provides a safe haven to foreign militants who are mostly Arabs, Chechens, Uzbeks and, of course, Afghans. Operation Sherdil primarily aims to reclaim the Bajaur region from the Taliban-Al Qaeda axis whose writ runs undisputed in this region

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and its cancer like growth is inexorably spreading towards the Pakistani hinterland. The Americans, especially their special forces operating in Afghanistan have been making repeated forays, commando raids, employing Predator drones firing Hellfire missiles and helicopter-based air assaults across the Durand Line to hit at the militants in their hideouts inside Pakistani territory. Gen Kayani has his job cut out in ensuring the sanctity of his borders even from his allies and mentor in the war on terror but primarily ensuring that his forces also carry out their part of the responsibility with determination and sincerity, unlike Gen Musharraf who clearly was guilty of double dealing. Having appointed his own man, Lt Gen Ahmed Shuja Pasha who, since the last two years, was overseeing operations against the Taliban and other militants in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan, now as the ISI chief in place of Lt Gen Nadeem Taj – a Musharraf appointee— Gen Kayani will have to give a new orientation to the ISI and its role, else he will be falling in the same trap of his not so distinguished though wily predecessors. Only time will tell if the current Pakistani COAS has learnt the lessons of history and geo-politics. Perhaps more than anyone else in the entire Pakistani establishment, it is Gen Kayani and his handling of the Pakistan Army and the ISI which will impact the maximum on the future of Pakistan as also its relations with its neighbours. Incidents like the ISI sponsored bombing of the Indian Embassy in Kabul can have far-reaching repercussions for Pakistan. The Pakistani COAS, thus, must steer clear of encouraging the erstwhile ISI-*mullah*-military axis perpetuated by some of his predecessors for personal and temporary tactical dividends.

US and Pakistan: A Turbulent Relationship

The US, since the 1950s, has generously pandered to Pakistan's economic needs and military requirements and had made it one of its staunch allies during the early stages of the Cold War era by admitting it into the regional military pacts sponsored by it, namely the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) and then the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO). Though these pacts were ostensibly to thwart the Communist threats emanating then from the erstwhile Soviet Union and China, it eminently suited the Pakistanis in their anti-India obsession and they received a fair amount of military largesse from the US, in return for providing military bases and intelligence assistance against China and the Soviet Union. In addition, the US, for its selfish reasons, always turned a blind eye to various military dictators cropping up to rule Pakistan and crushing democracy and dissent in that country. This relationship, however, saw its warmest phase when the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and ISI, in particular, got together to create the Taliban to oust the Soviet occupation forces which they successfully achieved with limitless US resources and Pakistani training and manpower to the many militant groups established by them in Afghanistan. With the demise of the Soviet Union, Pakistan's extremely close and ever growing friendship with China, its sponsoring of terrorism in India, and its clandestine nuclear programmes, the passage of years saw diminishing returns for the US which moved away to some extent from its erstwhile protégé. However, the devastating terrorist strikes in the US on September 11, 2001, dramatically changed the entire strategic scenario for Pakistan that once again became a frontline ally of the US in its Global War on Terror (GWOT). It was indeed a travesty of circumstances that Pakistan which was the nerve-centre and breeding ground for global terrorism, was forced to become an ally for the US. The Americans needed to hunt down the Al Qaeda terrorists under Osama bin Laden who reportedly masterminded the 9/11 attacks in the US, and the US wanted bases in Pakistan, apart from intelligence support and Pakistan's assistance to capture or eliminate the ISI's own protégés which had, by now, become a grave danger to the US hinterland and its interests worldwide. This "blow hot blow cold attitude" towards the Pakistanis has been symbolic of the US patronage of Pakistan for many years. Gen Musharraf, among all the Pakistani leaders, encashed to the maximum, this weakness of the US, and obtained for his country nearly \$10 billion munificence from the Americans to support their war on terror since 2001. The American establishment, charmed by Gen Musharraf's sophistication, could not, in the early years of his presidency, see through his guile and double-dealing ways and invested heavily

on him to deliver in their war on terror. Recalls Afrasiab Khattak, president of the Awami National Party (ANP) in the NWFP that Pakistani forces would occasionally help the CIA capture second string Al Qaeda figures to meet the objective of keeping aid money flowing from Washington. He added that “the Bush Administration deceived itself. From the very beginning, the Pakistani generals were playing a double game.” He further added that that Osama bin Laden had close relations with Pakistan’s spymasters and he had warned the US as early as in 2000 that Al Qaeda was rebuilding itself in the tribal areas. In addition, he opined that the US was naïve to think that Musharraf or his generals would do much to

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hunt for Osama bin Laden, and that the ISI had cultivated fraternal ties with the Al Qaeda leader since two decades or so and many officers of the ISI and Pakistan Army were sympathetic to his cause. The fact, thus, remains, that the US protégé (Gen Musharraf) as the Americans now realise, has left a very strong anti-US legacy in Pakistan and the current government will have a lot to do to dilute this anti-Americanism in Pakistan for some time to come.

President Asif Zardari, immediately on taking over, made his maiden visit to the US and also addressed the UN General Assembly where, by all accounts, he made the right noises and voiced politically correct statements. In the US, as reported in the media, he pleaded for US assistance in rebuilding the precarious Pakistani economy while conveying his concern to the US Administration over frequent violations of Pakistan’s territorial sovereignty by US forces, from across the Durand Line, that have been targeting the tribal areas in search of the elusive Osama bin Laden and his band of terrorists. Reportedly, while accepting his concerns regarding border violations, the US has conveyed to him that no adverse activities against the US and NATO forces operating in Afghanistan, will be tolerated if it emanates from Pakistan’s tribal areas – a tall order indeed! In addition, the Americans appear to have given a nod to the World Bank to release the \$ 1.3 billion support to Pakistan which had earlier been refused. Meanwhile, in the run-up to the US presidential elections in November 2008, the presidential candidates and their vice presidential hopefuls have come out strongly against Pakistan’s record in its performance in the war on terror. In

slightly varying degrees of expression, both Barack Obama and his Republican competitor, John McCain, have unambiguously stated that they would not hesitate to hit at Al Qaeda and Taliban sanctuaries inside Pakistan and would relentlessly pursue Osama bin Laden and his cohorts, and have warned Pakistan to deliver with sincerity in these operations. Thus, whatever be the outcome of the US elections, Pakistan has it coming from the US in this aspect albeit sugarcoated with economic assistance and some military equipment, including the F-16s lying in wait to be delivered to the country since long. The US, in any case, will continue to keep a close watch on Pakistan and would endeavour to ensure its control owing to its mortal fear of the formidable Pakistani nuclear arsenal falling into undesirable hands.

Growing Islamic Fundamentalism

Pakistan, especially since the last two decades or so, has become a nation not only “where angels fear to tread” but increasingly so civilised society, especially educated women, tourists and all those who are secular and modern in their outlook and aspire to be part of the global order in today’s world. Though Pakistan suffered since its birth from lingering ethnic, religious and linguistic fissures, it was, surprisingly, a military dictator, Gen Zia-ul-Haq, who injected a heavy dose of fundamentalism in the ranks of the army and conceived and fanned the military-*mullah* nexus, primarily to suit his devious political ends. Subsequently, both Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, during their respective prime ministerships of Pakistan, were guilty of pandering to Islamist political parties for their political survival. It merits mention that religious political parties did not enjoy a large social base in Pakistan till 2002 even in the NWFP or Baluchistan. However, in the 2002 general elections, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), an alliance of six religious parties whose militant wings have been involved in sectarian violence, suddenly emerged as one of the three major parties. Some analysts see this as a growing fundamentalisation of Pakistani society as a whole. It is ironical that Benazir Bhutto, otherwise personally liberal and Western in her outlook, who had realised during her long exile, the folly of encouraging fundamentalism when she thought it politically suited her, fell a tragic victim to it, immediately on her return to Pakistan in December 2007, when she promised, and had the potential, to bring back political normalcy and sanity to Pakistani politics. Even the perennial US favourite, the Westernised Gen Musharraf, openly allied himself with the Islamist parties in the provinces to sustain his pseudo- democratic government in Islamabad. It is worth considering that the major reason, apart from drumming political support from

fundamentalists by even the mainstream parties in Pakistan, has been that various political leaders in Pakistan have used fundamentalism to energise an all-inclusive Islamic identity to bridge the existing ethno-linguistic divides and, thus, Islam is being used to dilute the intense pulls of ethnic and regional loyalties. Major regional groupings in the provinces like the Baloch National Party, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) in urban Sindh, and the Sindh National Front in rural Sindh have always been anti-Islamic fundamentalists in their outlook and, thus, been targeted by the Islamabad military regimes, the intelligence agencies and other

extremist elements in Pakistan. However, the centre of gravity of the fundamentalists' forces in Pakistan is the region where the Pashtuns are in majority, namely, the FATA and the NWFP. The much respected principal political party in the NWFP, the Awami National Party (ANP) has been losing clout to the fundamentalist forces in this region and needs the assistance of Islamabad to regain its primacy which will be in the interest of the integrity of Pakistan. In neighbouring Afghanistan, a dramatic resurgence of the Taliban has led to the rapid growth of the Pakistani Taliban now known as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Pakistani Pashtun tribesmen in the border regions were speedily radicalised by their Al Qaeda guests. Last year, according to authentic reports, the Pakistani Taliban developed their own political mission of creating a new "Sharia state" that would ultimately lead to the balkanisation of Pakistan. The Pakistani Taliban now control all seven tribal agencies that make up the FATA. The ease with which they overran the picturesque Swat Valley with even some of the security forces surrendering without a fight would have rung panic bells in the Pakistani establishment. In addition, the Taliban have made heavy inroads in many areas of the NWFP as well. It is ironical that the Taliban, a creation of the ISI, to help Pakistan acquire 'strategic depth' in Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal, has grown so formidable, along with other extremist groups and terrorists, that it has acquired "strategic depth" itself inside Pakistan and is now seriously threatening the integrity of the host country itself! Pakistan to survive has to realise that the war on terror is its own war and not the Americans' or anybody else's.

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Apart from the politico-military aspect, a major reason for the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan can be unmistakably linked to the rise of poverty. Lack of adequate educational facilities, especially in its rural belts and tribal areas, coupled with abject poverty, have proven to be destabilising factors for Pakistani society. This shortcoming has been exploited by various religious organisations that run *madrassas* all over Pakistan and impart medieval and radicalised forms of Islamic education. Thus, these *madrassas* end up acting as breeding grounds for future foot soldiers of militant Islam. There are also clear inhomogeneities in the different regions of Pakistan that contribute to the country's rising poverty graph. In a survey done a few years ago, the urban areas of Sindh province like Karachi had the lowest levels of poverty while Punjab in its various subregions had different levels of poverty and not surprisingly, the NWFP had the highest incidence of poverty. In the absence of any economic progress, the Pashtun people of this region survived by smuggling drugs, arms and other goods since the days of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and subsequently with the patronage of the Taliban. If the current government wishes to restore law and order in this restive region, it will have to pump in massive doses of economic investments and in education to wean away the Pashtuns from their traditional reliance on guns and drugs. It is interesting to note that some Islamic scholars, otherwise balanced in their outlook, have opined that Islamic fundamentalism is not as simple a phenomenon as made out by the West and by itself there is nothing evil in being fundamentalist, as many people in Pakistan also feel. Many Pakistanis, according to them, condemn and reject extremism, violence and terrorism but respect many among those who follow a staunch form of Islam as long as these staunch believers eschew violence. Thus, currently, some confusion regarding interpretations of what constitutes the real Islam is apparent in Pakistani society. However, sane Pakistani society must note that the Taliban and Al Qaeda elements, whose growth is spreading like cancer all over Pakistan, are the most prominent practitioners of mindless violence and if their activities remain unchecked, will transport Pakistan to the dark ages. The recent massive Marriot Hotel bombing which took place hours after, and close to, where President Zardari assumed office, unmistakably displays the presence of these evil intentioned terrorists right in the midst of Pakistani cities as well. The Talibani influence has spread to Pakistan's cultural capital, Lahore, as well. Music shop owners and other traders are quietly following the Talibani diktat of not selling any pornographic CDs or DVDs and voluntarily have destroyed material offensive to the morality standards of the Taliban. President Zardari, his

government and the saner elements of Pakistani society realise that religious fundamentalism in Pakistan has become such a dangerous force that it threatens the very fabric of Pakistani society. He will have to get the currently estranged Opposition leader Nawaz Sharif, on board, to jointly fight their common enemy, namely, the extremist elements, before Pakistan reaches the point of no-return. On both of them rests the responsibility of persuading their Islamic population to reject violent religious tyranny.

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Benefactors of Pakistan

Apart from the US, two countries which greatly influence Pakistan and have been its unstinted supporters are its 'all weather' friend China and its main problem shooter, Saudi Arabia. The Chinese unqualified support for Pakistan has its own strategic dimension for the Chinese, namely, in the containment of India, both militarily and economically— an aspect which has eminently suited the Pakistanis so far, apart from serving the ends of China to counter its main rival in Asia, namely, India. The US, despite pumping in billions of dollars into Pakistan since the 1950s, besides shoring up most regimes in Pakistan, has been at the losing end and is hardly popular there but not so the Chinese who have ensured a place of permanent influence in Pakistan. It was not surprising that soon after his visit to the UN and US, President Zardari travelled to Pakistan's biggest mentor and even before departing for Beijing, exclaimed that "China is the future of the world." He signed a large number of economic, technological, energy and military agreements with the Chinese; Pakistan looks forward to signing a nuclear deal with the Chinese on the lines of the 123 nuclear deal between the US and India. The Chinese will do their utmost to fish resolutely in the troubled waters of the Indian subcontinent and keep Pakistan well equipped to checkmate India on their behalf. The growing Chinese interest in the disputed territory of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) must be carefully monitored by India. On the other hand, Chinese and Pakistani military collaboration, especially in the development of modern weaponry, is likely to enhance as per current trends. As is widely known, Pakistan owes its missile and nuclear capabilities to the Chinese who are one of the world's worst proliferators. The Chinese, of course, are worried about the Islamic resurgence in their Xinjiang

province and have instructed the Pakistanis to prevent the territory being used by certain Islamic groups for terrorist acts inside China, as was witnessed recently before the recently conducted Beijing Olympics. Last year, President Musharraf's controversial decision to raid the Red Mosque in Islamabad is seen as a result of Chinese pressure, though it proved counter-productive in many ways for Pakistan as it triggered off many subsequent terrorist acts.

Saudi Arabia has been Pakistan's conscience keeper and a stabilising factor for most Pakistani regimes in the past and has bailed them out economically and in times of political turmoil, apart from granting political asylum to many Pakistani leaders for a long time. Currently, the Saudis are endeavouring to broker peace between the Coalition forces in Afghanistan, especially the British, and the Taliban to cease operations against each other and resume the dialogue process. However, these parleys may have an adverse effect on Pakistan for remnants of the Afghani Taliban may just be available to reinforce their brethren, the TTP. As such, the Pakistan government may have to request their Saudi mentors to include the TTP at a later stage to ensure peace in the restive border regions. As always, Sunni Wahabist Saudi Arabia will continue to play an important advisory role in Pakistan as it is respected by the Sunni hardliners who constitute the majority among the fundamentalist elements in Pakistan as well as all Pakistani governments.

A Floundering Economy

Pakistan, even well before the current global recession, was in dire economic straits since a year or so. Investor flight and bleeding of national reserves to subsidise the global spurt in oil prices and the national inflation index crossing over 25 percent in recent months, have all contributed to a critical financial crisis. Thus, Pakistan has been making frantic efforts to get the badly required aid from its rich "all weather" friend China, Saudi Arabia, the oil rich Gulf States to the tune of \$ 4 to 6 billion. President Zardari, on a visit to China, asked for generous financial assistance to bolster his country's battered economy. In addition, the Pakistanis have also sought financial help from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Notwithstanding all this aid, which is likely to come into Pakistan, overall some drastic financial measures, including reduction in defence spending, will have to be implemented for Pakistan to get its precarious economic situation back on the rails.

Implications for India

For 60 years, India-Pakistan relations have been marred by four wars, perennial tension on the borders and the Line of Control (LoC), Pakistan's well

crafted strategy of ‘bleeding India by a thousand cuts’ and, thus, exporting terrorism to India, and abetting and aiding countless terrorist acts and insurgencies in many parts of India, aiming to keep “the pot boiling” in India. However, there have been half-hearted attempts on the part of some Pakistani governments to improve relations with India, and Gen Musharraf, also, while pursuing his own agendas, till the ignominy heaped on him by his ill-fated Kargil incursion, woke up to the realisation that peace with India would be primarily good for his country. Though the permanent interests of countries do not alter radically either with the passage of time or change in governments, there are defining moments in history when sincere efforts, if

made by both sides, can usher in peace and stability for warring nations and together they can combat the common and very serious problems of terrorism, poverty and economic crises — all of which face both India and Pakistan today. Though India as the biggest country in South Asia and an emerging global player may take the initiative to improve relations with Pakistan, it will be incumbent on Pakistan to realise the gravity of today’s international geo-politics, its precarious state of internal stability and the many “wars within” that it is fighting, to survive as a nation as also the financial mess it is in, so that some light may be visible at the end of the tunnel for peace to prevail in this volatile region. With a new dispensation at the helm of affairs in Pakistan, India must adopt an approach commensurate to its size, power and clout, without lowering its guard in matters concerning its security and territorial integrity. In the early days of his presidency, currently President Zardari appears to be voicing mature and friendly sentiments towards India and has not adopted, so far, any contentious postures on the J&K issue.

Notwithstanding a country’s economic power, military capabilities, political stability et al, the logic of geography always impacts upon neighbouring countries. As such, events in Pakistan will always have a bearing on India in more ways than one. With India having the second largest Muslim population in the world, linkages and problems with Islamic Pakistan will always exist. India too desires peace and stability in its strategic backyard and does not want

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Islamic fundamentalism, which is now engulfing Pakistan, to spread towards its territory. Overall, India's options in postulating a policy towards Pakistan, especially with a new regime in place, which requires India's encouragement for getting "into the saddle", are briefly summarised in the next paragraph.

With the backdrop of a new democratic regime struggling to find its feet in the current political and financial mess, and grave threats to the internal stability of Pakistan, India primarily has three options to choose from in formulating its Pakistan policy. The first option is to have a status quo approach in its relationship with Pakistan, and deal with each problem area on a case to case basis. This approach accords to India the opportunity to gauge the sincerity and authority of the new regime to address Indo-Pak problems independent of the dictates of the Pakistan Army. Also, India does not have to make any major concession or commitment to a regime whose future is still uncertain. In the current circumstances this is a safe and guarded approach. The second approach could be one of benign detachment. In this option, India keeps totally aloof from the happenings inside Pakistan and underplays any overtures or initiatives being made by the new regime towards India till we feel that the Zardari regime is well ensconced in the hot seat of Pakistani governance. Meanwhile, our own general elections will be over in the coming months and a new regime in India will have the moral and political right to take any initiative it deems fit vis-à-vis Pakistan. The third option could be that India, in keeping with its emerging role as a responsible global player, pulls out all stops from day one and takes whatever initiatives are possible to shore up the Zardari regime, including internationally. This option includes stepping up the intensity of contacts between the two countries at various levels and giving a momentum to the existing mechanisms in place, inherited from the Musharraf era. This approach will include assisting Pakistan in its economic crisis and enhancing cross-border trade and cultural exchanges. However, whichever approach India adopts, the cardinal aspect of its overall security preparedness, enhancing its military potential also to take on a two-front threat, internal vigilance, especially in its counter-terrorism/insurgency operations and energising its intelligence gathering mechanisms remain *sine qua non*. The recent visit of Pakistan's national security adviser to India is a good beginning and India must take the initiative now to invite the major centre of power in Pakistan, namely, their COAS, Gen Ashfaq Kayani, to India and have a one to one, no holds barred discussion with him and impress upon him to address the common grave problems facing the subcontinent in a spirit of cooperation, for time appears to be running out.

Conclusion

Pakistan today, gravely polarised on religious, and ethnic grounds and in dire economic straits, with all the makings of a failing state, truly stands at the cross-roads of its destiny with the glue of Islam not being able to hold it together. Its newly elected president will have to display courage and commitment to his nascent democratic system to fight extremism and terrorism in its myriad dimensions if Pakistan has to survive as a nation-state. An unstable Pakistan, in the danger of imploding, has very serious implications for India and we, thus, must monitor the security scenario with deliberation and caution, and suitably enhance our security preparedness. The entire

world is conscious of the perils of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal falling into the wrong hands and, thus, the new regime requires all assistance for democratic and responsible rule to become a permanent feature of the political landscape of Pakistan. India, as the largest country in South Asia, will have to play a balanced and lofty role to give this volatile region the peace and stability which has eluded it so far. Pakistan can meanwhile take comfort from the analysis of the noted expert on South Asian affairs, Stephen Cohen, who summarises the current situation in Pakistan by stating that "Pakistan belongs to that class of states whose survival is uncertain, whose legitimacy is doubted and whose security related resources are inadequate. Yet these states will not go away nor can they be ignored. Pakistan is geo-strategically located, is a nuclear power and can influence the global strategic balance." Only the future will tell how President Asif Zardari, Gen Kayani and Opposition leader Nawaz Sharif conduct themselves to salvage Pakistan from the pits of balkanisation, or fail. India can only wish them well.

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