

India, Afghanistan And Developments In Pakistan

■ Dr. M.N. Buch

A wise man does not venture into unknown territory, at least not till he has reconnoitered it thoroughly. Perhaps I am not wise because I am trying, through this paper, to venture into an area about which my knowledge is sketchy at best. I do this not to pontificate on what India can do about Pakistan and Afghanistan, but to raise questions which, if answered by experts who know, may educate me and make me more knowledgeable. Many of the questions arise from how I perceive Pakistan, because ultimately what happens there affects both us and the Afghans.

I recently had a Pakistani gentleman as a guest. I would describe him as well off but not filthy rich, well educated and clued up about his country, an environmental activist, not a part of the ruling class but not far from it either, quite candid and optimistic about his country. The question came up about the future of democracy and the role of the army in Pakistan. I told him quite bluntly that we feel that the army, like the Prussian, succeeded by the German Army, has projected itself as larger than life, poses as the guardian of Pakistan against the enemy, obviously India in this case and needs this image to protect its place of pre-eminence in Pakistan. It may tolerate a sort of civilian government but will not accept subordination to it and, therefore, will never allow real peace with India because minus India as an enemy the army would lose its claim to predominance as the shield and buckler.

To this must be added Afghanistan, a country in whose internal affairs Pakistan has meddled, or been forced to meddle, in a big way. To oust all Indian influence from Afghanistan would obviously be one of the objectives of Pakistan so that when the Americans withdraw Pakistan would be the only country to influence developments in Afghanistan. The Pakistan Army is bound to be the driving force in this behalf, which means that it must continue to play a pivotal role in the government of Pakistan. How would that reconcile with a strong, democratically elected government in that country? The future of democracy, the building of institutions of civil government, the role of the army in Pakistan, therefore, are all issues of the utmost importance to India.

At about the same time a very senior and respected journalist from Bhopal visited Pakistan. He reported that he sensed a strange reluctance on the part of the army to seize power in Pakistan. General Kayani, the Pakistan Army Chief, has publicly stated that he is in favour of an elected civilian government ruling Pakistan. Is this a diversionary tactic to hide the real intentions of the army? Is it a ploy, a show of reluctance which ultimately accedes to a public demand for army intervention as the situation worsens? Is it a genuinely held belief, brought on by ground realities, which makes the army want to take a back seat?

My Pakistani friend candidly said that an army takeover was so remote a possibility that one could rule it out. According to him Kayani is ambitious, but not politically so. Abbotabad, the worsening situation in the North-West of Pakistan, the deteriorating law and order situation, the state of the Pakistani economy have all affected the credibility of the army, which does not want to gain more public anger or loss of credibility. The political parties in Pakistan will not support or participate in a coup which means that even with the support of Imran Khan's party the army cannot muster enough political backing to be able to form and run the government.

Incidentally, this coincides with the assessment of the Pakistani situation by one section of thinkers in India. I would welcome comments on this because depending on this would emerge the policy options available to us.

Suppose there is a civilian government in Pakistan. Would the army accept civilian control as is to be found in other democracies, including post war Germany? Recently General Kayani is reported to have met the Pakistani President and to have told him that the senior Pakistan Army Commanders were worried about law and order, especially sectarian violence against the Shias and wanted government to quickly deal with the situation. Such advice from the Indian Chief of Army Staff is unthinkable, but then the Indian Army is not engaged in a fratricidal war of the type that Pakistan faces in Baluchistan and the North West, especially North and South Waziristan. Does this mean that the Pakistan Army could assume and intervene in a police role in that country? In India the army can only act in aid of civil power on the specific summons of the executive magistracy. Can the Pakistan Army act independently and if so, under what law? My guest who is also a lawyer (non-practising) told me that the Supreme Court of Pakistan, following the frequent attacks on Shias, especially the Hazaras, has directly ordered the para-military Rangers to intervene. Can it order the army to do so also? Will this provide legal cover to limited army operations or would it once again embroil the army in civil affairs and encourage it to seize power? My guest opined that in Pakistan they are moving towards constitutional government and neither the political parties nor the Supreme Court would accept an army takeover but, nevertheless and considering ground realities, the Pakistan Army would continue to be a key player in government. I would certainly like the expert opinion of our thinkers and policy makers on this proposition.

Suppose internal peace is resorted in Pakistan. What next? Will this cover the Afghan border, the badlands of the North West, the internal situation in Afghanistan, the Afghan-Taliban and the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)? Where does that leave the L-e-T, the Sipaha-e-Saheba, the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and other militant groups, all of whom target India in general and Kashmir in particular? Will the government of Pakistan bring ISI firmly under civil control, close down terrorist training camps and stop cross border terrorism? Will the Pakistan Army, whilst eschewing open war, curb low intensity conflict for which India is not extracting a heavy price? If the situation vis-à-vis India does not change, can the Pakistan Army afford to stop projecting India as an enemy? If that is so, can the army really be said to have accepted civilian rule in Pakistan?

One major problem in Pakistan seems to be that the institutional structures are either weak or non-existent. For example, in India the district administration, including panchayat raj institutions, is very much alive and kicking. There is Naxalite violence, but it is the district administration and State and Central Government who are tackling it. No one says, "Let the Army sort it out". I told my guest the story of the siege of Hazratbal when militants seized one of the holiest shrines of Islam. The Army and Police were trying to starve out and smoke out the terrorists and had cut off all services and supplies. Someone filed a writ petition in the J& K High Court alleging that denial of food was a violation of the Fundamental Right to Life under Article 21 of the Constitution. The High Court accepted the plea and directed that the siege notwithstanding, the security forces will feed the terrorists. So strong is the judiciary that morning and evening huge degs, or cauldrons of food were carried in to the very terrorists we are trying to starve into submission. Fortunately they ultimately surrendered. This farce, under

judicial orders, proved that even under extreme conditions our legal and constitutional institutions function and this is our real strength.

By contrast even liberal minded Pakistanis speak of the army's pivotal role. If there is lawlessness the Supreme Court does not order action by the local or provincial administration. It gives direct orders to the Pakistan Rangers and, if need be, to the Army. This is unthinkable in India. But weak institutions of government create a whole series of problems. Law and order suffers because the police is poorly commanded and accountability is diffused. The delivery systems for development are not well organised. Politics may be noisy but, paradoxically, it is not vibrant. Can India, in framing immediate responses and simultaneously preparing a longitudinal policy towards Pakistan, ignore these factors? Do we see a gradual strengthening of institutions in that country, or will things deteriorate? Will the Army not become more assertive if things worsen and can it then resist adopting a bellicose posture towards us?

Before returning to the Indo-Pak scene let us see what is unfolding before us in Afghanistan. The Karzai Government is weak, the Afghan Police and Army are neither well trained, nor armed, nor disciplined, nor motivated to be able to ensure Afghan security after 2014. The country has the Pakhtuns, straddling North Western Pakistan and large parts of Afghanistan. It also has Uzbeks, Hazaras, Tajiks, Kazaks and other tribal groups who have their own territories and do not kindly accept Pakhtun hegemony. The Taliban, with their Pakistan sponsors, already occupy de facto large swathes of territory and, given a chance, would take over Kabul. Would darkness once again descend on Afghanistan? Would there be civil war? Certainly Pakistan would try and close down all Indian development activities in that country and we would have a major setback, notwithstanding that our doctors, engineers and teachers enjoy a good reputation there and are liked by the people. In the long run our support for the Pakhtun aspirations since 1947 and the close links of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru with Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and the Khudai Khidmatgar will pay dividends, but what do we do in 2014 and the immediate thereafter?

I ask this question because an extreme, bigoted regime in Afghanistan, especially if the government, be it the Taliban, is unable to establish a complete hold over that country, will be troublesome for Pakistan also. That country can hardly countenance a T.T.P. resurgence because it would not only endanger peace and order but also threaten democracy and its institutions. I believe there is a strong section of the more liberal civil society which would be supremely unhappy at the forces of fundamentalism becoming strong enough to take over Pakistan and would expect the army to ensure that this does not happen. If civilian government gains strength, if the police and judiciary become effective instruments for ensuring law and order, as also justice, then the army could operate in aid of civil power. But if the civil power is non-existent or weak, as many Pakistani thinkers feel it to be, then the army becomes the surrogate of civil power, which is highly dangerous.

An interventionist army is, at best, unpredictable. It can play a legitimate role, put down disorder and restore effective government. It can equally adopt a disruptive role in which it tries to divert extremist forces to target a common enemy, India and use Jihad as an instrument of state policy. It has happened in the past and could happen again. In other words, encourage low intensity conflict with India, use the extremists for this purpose and keep chipping away at our safety and security till either the Indian State collapses, or else decides to enlarge the conflict into war. Bearing in mind that state sponsored low intensity conflict can both inject foreign terrorists into India as also encourage home grown terrorism, how do we respond? Do we

batten down and try and ride out the storm? Or do we become proactive, aggressively repulse the enemy and take home the war to him?

My intention is not to lecture to the experts, but I want to be educated by them. As I see it the whole situation emanating from our immediate, unfriendly neighbours is composed of several layers. The first, of course, is what shape Pakistan will take politically in the years to come, what will be the role of the army and the impact on India of how Pakistan develops. The rules of engagement under different circumstances must be worked out by our policy makers so that instead of ad hoc track-II discussions, do-gooder contacts at different cultural and intellectual levels and mere wishful thinking on our part, we have a blue print, or series of blue prints, which help us formulate responses at all levels, but particularly the diplomatic and administrative. The purpose of the exercise would be to signal the people, government and army of Pakistan what to expect from India under varying scenarios. We can and must build flexibility into the system, but always within a framework in which our opponents know that any misadventure on their part will invite quick and effective response from us. As Theodore Roosevelt said, "When faced by a large and angry dog smile at him, while reaching behind for a big stick". That stick must never be far from our arsenal.

What is our internal security doctrine? India is no stranger to purely home grown conflict, be it separatism in the North East, militant Khalistani violence in the Punjab, endemic dacoity in the Chambal region (now fortunately much quieter) or Naxalite violence in the heartland of India. Kashmir I put in a separate category because that is a purely Pakistan sponsored militancy and has to be dealt with accordingly. The sub-continent has always had sectarian strife, mainly Hindu-Muslim, but there is also a fair amount of conflict on account of caste, region and issues of momentary local antagonism. In some ways terrorism exported by States such as Pakistan, aimed at destabilising India, is directly linked to sectarian violence which is religion based because one feeds the other. In Kashmir anti-national interests feed imported terrorism. The Indian State, its intelligence and counter espionage agencies, its strike forces, especially the police, have to be equally multi-layered, but highly coordinated so that whether the enemies of law and order operate in overlapping layers or they have a cellular structure, we have a response waiting for them. The question really is whether we have such an internal security apparatus in place and whether it has an extra-territorial outreach to deal with externally sponsored terrorism. Because our lives and the nation's safety depend on a positive answer to this question we must come up with it without delay.

Diplomacy, an internal security doctrine, is all very well, but there are three other factors which are equally important. The first is the capacity to gather information on a global or regional basis, correlate, collate and analyse it and then, perhaps by gaming, perhaps by intelligent guess work, perhaps by commonsense, prepare possible scenarios of threat perception and suggest the options of action available to us. The second is the building up of military capabilities to deal with such situations, either by way of demonstrable ability to deter, or by credibly proving our strength to deal with limited conflict, or by showing that we can both contain and counter any enlarged or extended campaign. This would be particularly true of our relationship with Pakistan and China. The third factor is the strength of our economy. An economically progressive and strong India would be the biggest deterrent to any irrational action by Pakistan.

The United States has a number of what they call "think tanks", in government, in academia and in the corporate sector. A great deal of foreign policy emerges from such

intellectual exercises, as also covert and overt intelligence operations. Does this happen in India? I am sure that neither R and AW, nor IB would or should share any information in this behalf because deniability is a strong and legitimate weapon of the State. However, if the body of Daud Ibrahim were to be found in the rubble of his house or Hafiz Mohammed Saeed were to come in the way of a speeding bullet I would sleep much easier in the knowledge that some unknown someone is looking after my safety. I do not only want to read some newspaper report, ex post facto, that information about a possible attack on Bombay from seaward had been passed on to the Maharashtra Police. I would much rather read that an inexplicable explosion had occurred on a small motorised craft sailing toward Bombay and that there were no survivors.

I have raised a number of questions about what is happening and is likely to happen in future in Pakistan and would love to be enlightened. But regardless of whether the Pakistan Army directly rules or stands behind the curtain and manipulates the system, it is extremely doubtful whether, in the foreseeable future, it will change its attitude towards India. If India is no longer projected as the enemy the Pakistan Army would be reduced to an internal security force to deal with local disorder. The Afghan situation and the temptations it offers would probably prevent this from happening and, therefore, one way or the other India would still have to deal with cross border terrorism and its local ramifications. I hope we are realistic enough to recognise this and have the good sense to come up with the means to neutralise the enemy, secure the country and let us all sleep safely in bed.
