

Defiant Pakistan

K. Subrahmanyam

The Chairman of the US Senate Armed Services Committee, Senator Carl Levin, after a recent visit to Pakistan has come out with a pessimistic prognosis. He said, "After talking to the Pakistanis, I don't have any great hopes that they are going to do what ultimately is needed for their own security, and that is to deal with people who are threatening their own sovereignty." The Senator differed from the arguments of the Pakistani military leaders that their resources are stretched out and thus would not be able to launch fresh attack against the militants in new areas. Levin said, "I don't believe that. I think it is a matter of will and it is a matter of political decision: that we will leave those folks alone as long as they bother folks in Afghanistan and cross the border into Afghanistan and don't bother us...that is a threat to Pakistan sovereignty which one of these days they would wake up to...But they have got to do it...We can't force it." Similarly, in the same week it was widely reported in the Pakistani media that US Defence Secretary Robert Gates was clearly told that Pakistan would not be launching any more military action for the next 6-12 months. There were complaints about delays in reimbursement of coalition support aid amount and there were demands for transfer of new military technology like the Predator drones to Pakistan. Secretary Gates reassured them on the coalition support aid reimbursement and promised supply of unarmed reconnaissance drones, *the Shadow*. It is obvious that US failed to get any commitment from Pakistanis that they would act against the four terrorist groups against whom the US had demanded action. Those are Afghan Taliban, Al-Qaeda, Lashkar -e- Toiba and the Haqqani network. Unlike the Pakistani Taliban, which threatened the Pakistani state and therefore the Pakistani Army acted against it, the other four, as Senator Levin points out do not threaten Pakistani state and have been used as instruments of Pakistani state policy. Therefore, in spite of clear US demand, Pakistan has indicated that it will not act against those groups.

On 20th January 2010 ,Washington Times published a report that US National Security Council had decided against the protests of the Intelligence Chiefs to downgrade the intelligence priority of China from priority one. It has been speculated that this was done to concentrate more intelligence resources on the Af-Pak region and the terrorist groups. In the recent weeks US has intensified the drone strikes and it is expected that when the troop surge is completed in Afghanistan and the campaign gets under way, it will be mostly through drone strikes. Obama has warned Pakistan if targets on which actionable intelligence are not engaged by Pakistan, US will not hesitate to strike them. There is a spate of reports that US may strike Taliban targets in Baluchistan if Pakistan does not act.

Presumably forestalling such a contingency, Pakistan is trying hard to bring Taliban to the table for a power –sharing arrangement with President Karzai in Kabul. Pakistan appears to be calculating on US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2011 and thereafter Taliban's ability to seize power in Kabul, thereby restoring the status quo ante of 9/11, when Pakistan had Afghanistan as its strategic depth. Pakistan is trying hard to reduce India's role in Afghanistan in terms of nation building, training Army and police

personnel. However at present, as the US forces get ready to initiate operations, the only card Pakistan has is to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table. While there is a strong constituency among the US security establishment for a negotiated settlement with Taliban, it is not quite clear at this stage whether the Quetta Shura will be acceptable to US for power-sharing in Kabul.

While Pakistanis attempt to focus attention on Taliban, NATO countries are concerned with stabilization of Afghanistan. Obama strategy of December 1, 2009 highlighted 2011 as the beginning of withdrawal from Afghanistan. The core of Obama strategy, both of March 27, 2009 and December 1, 2009 demanded the disruption, dismantling and defeat of Al-Qaeda, Afghan Taliban, Pakistani Taliban, Lashkar-e-Toiba and Haqqani network. Of late, the use of Lashkar-e-Toiba as a terrorist instrument of state policy against the US has been exposed by US security agencies. Though all attempts at terrorism against US mainland have been thwarted by US agencies, there is no doubt that the masterminds behind the Lashkar are of the view that continuous terrorist threat to the US is essential to compel the US to pay large sums to Pakistan as coalition support aid, military aid and development support. US is demanding Pakistan to disrupt, dismantle and defeat the terrorist groups and if that is not carried out, the Pakistani army is worried that flow of funds from US will stop. To address this concern, US has legislated long range development aid to Pakistan. But that aid will be tightly scrutinized and will not be available to Pakistani army. Therefore, Pakistan army wants to keep the terrorist threat to US alive to milk US for funds for Pakistani Army. This is the fundamental conflict of interests between the US and Pakistani Army.

President Obama says he will not quit. For him this is a just war and a matter of national security for the US. In this war Taliban is not the central issue. It is Al-Qaeda and Lashkar-e-Toiba. As Robert Gates hinted in Delhi, the Pakistani Army may try a diversionary move by initiating a major terror strike against India with a view to provoke a short, sharp and very limited military conflict which it can use as an excuse not to pursue any action against any terrorist group. If there is agreement that this is likely to be the Pakistan strategy, it is in India's interest to think how to avoid walking into the trap of a direct military conflict and seek a punishment for the terrorist act in alternative ways. That way Pakistan will be compelled to confront the US on issues of Lashkar-e-Toiba and al-Qaeda. The additional US intelligence efforts will continue to be focused on Pakistan, both to support drone strikes as well as to counter Lashkar-e-Toiba terrorism.

Pakistan appears to be going in for a total defiance of international community. It is in defiance of US and NATO on Taliban in Afghanistan. It is in defiance of US in dealing with international terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda and Lashkar-e-Toiba. It is in defiance of the entire Conference on Disarmament on formulating an agenda. Since US and India are deemed as primary adversaries of Pakistan, it is necessary for the two countries to have a joint study on the state of mind of Pakistani ruling elite.

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The Hindi version of this article first appeared in Dainik Jagran on January 31, 2010.