

ISA S Brief

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469A Bukit Timah Road
#07-01, Tower Block, Singapore 259770
Tel: 6516 6179 / 6516 4239
Fax: 6776 7505 / 6314 5447
Email: isassec@nus.edu.sg
Website: www.isas.nus.edu.sg



A No-Win Situation for Pakistan: A Dilemma for the US

Sajjad Ashraf¹

Abstract

The United States (US) raid that killed Osama Bin Laden has raised many serious questions and has put the Pakistani ruling elite at serious odds with the public. Pushing Pakistan to the corner is not the optimal choice for the US' long-term interests in the region.

Commentary

Credible news reports in Pakistan indicate that US Senator John Kerry, Chairman of the US Foreign Relations Committee, who visited Pakistan late last week, laid out two options on the table for Pakistan. He said, 'Work with us or else Washington will resort to unilateral action anywhere in Pakistan to take out targets.' Earlier, in an unusual candour he said that his goal in coming to Pakistan is 'not to apologise' for a unilateral US raid on Pakistan, rather find a way to manage this important relationship.

The joint statement issued at the end of Senator Kerry's visit confirmed that 'Pakistan agreed to take several immediate steps to underscore its seriousness in renewing full cooperation effort with the US.' Back in Washington, Kerry declared to the media that Pakistani leaders pledged new efforts to cooperate with Washington. He added, 'These measures are concrete, they are measurable and they are in many cases joint – and we will know precisely what is

¹ Sajjad Ashraf was Pakistan's High Commissioner to Singapore from July 2004 to December 2008. He currently serves as Adjunct Professor at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy and is Visiting Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), Singapore. The views reflected in the paper are those of the author and not of the institute.

happening with them in very, very short order.’ This statement echoes Bush’s ‘you are either with us or against us’ ultimatum to Pakistan in 2001.

Pakistan’s Response

The Government of Pakistan seems to have caved in within three days of an angry parliamentary resolution, demanding revisiting ties with the US. Only last week, Prime Minister Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani said in a *Time Magazine* interview, ‘[that] continuing to work with the US could imperil his government unless Washington takes drastic steps to restore trust and win over 180 million Pakistanis.’ Wikileaks on the contrary, points to the Government’s complicity with the Americans. The Government’s credibility is, therefore, very low. With intense US pressure to comply and deliver Pakistan ruling elite puts it on a very slippery slope once again.

The statement issued by Pakistan, after Senator Kerry left Pakistan and Hillary Clinton called President Zardari, said, ‘Both sides agreed to resolve the issues amicably and move forward.’ Although this statement seems to read more like – to move forward on American terms and according to the American dictates.

The leader of the parliamentary opposition has reacted and demanded an explanation both from the civil and military authorities on agreeing to this new ‘code of conduct’ with the US, without taking the parliament into confidence. Commentators and the public at large were already shell shocked at the meek Pakistan response and are now incensed at yet another capitulation to US demands.

Troubling Questions and Pakistan’s Problems

Everyone wants an answer to the question of, ‘How could Osama Bin Laden stay undetected in Abbottabad within 1.5 kilometres of Pakistan Military Academy for over five years?’ Did he go undetected or was there complicity? How and why is it that Pakistan’s military, touted with a larger than life status within the country, failed to detect the US helicopters flying in and out of Pakistan, and staying on the ground for nearly 40 minutes? Why is there so much expense if the military is unable to tackle these incursions? The list of questions is endless for now.

Within days of Osama’s killing, Pakistan suffered one its worst suicide bombing attacks, when two bombers killed 82 and injured 142, mainly young recruits at the Frontier Constabulary Centre near Charsadda, a town close to Peshawar. The five US drone attacks in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas, killing more than two dozen people, does not make it easier for Pakistan. Despite the debates that will rage within Pakistan, both

confidentially and in public forums, the problems for Pakistan going forward have become much larger obstacles.

It must be psychologically shattering for Pakistan to hear from the Indian Prime Minister, during a visit to Kabul, that India was not contemplating a US type operation in Pakistan in pursuit of fugitives. Nonetheless, India issued a list of 50 men, it wants extradited to stand terror charges in India. These include two serving majors of the Pakistan Army, whom India alleges, gave direction to Mumbai attackers.

Pakistan's Past Actions and Consequences

Pakistani rulers, in their obsession with India, surrendered Pakistan's sovereignty back in the 1950's, by playing an American pawn in the Cold War, giving airbases and airspace in return for military hardware and God knows how many kickbacks. The Pakistani ruling elite has shamefully sacrificed their nation's interest for their own. Pakistan's first military ruler, Ayub Khan, inexplicably dismisses any compromise of sovereignty in his book 'Friends Not Masters', claiming that since these facilities were available to the Americans with Pakistan's acquiescence there was no violation. From that point on, Pakistan kept giving in. Another military ruler, Zia ul Haq, was given legitimacy by the US to be a surrogate force while fighting the Soviets. Similarly, Musharraf suddenly became a buddy after he succumbed to the US threats and switched sides, making Pakistan the biggest victim of extremism and consequent violence. Even now, when the Americans pay for 'hired guns', they demand full service. Pakistan's sovereignty is severely curtailed. Having allowed the camel in the tent, Pakistan's dilemma is how to get out of American tutelage.

Going Forward

While the civilian leadership was already explicitly blamed for blindly following the US, people now openly question the military's ability to stand its ground against foreign incursions into the nuclear armed Pakistan.

Apologists who argue for maintenance of relations with the US, claiming realism, warn that with so many economic woes Pakistan is better off toeing the US line. Otherwise, the US will pressurise all international lending institutions to deny financial aid to Pakistan, leading to free fall of currency and default on payment with its attendant consequences. Lawmakers on Washington's Capitol Hill have already asked the US administration to stop aid to Pakistan until it demonstrates more commitment to fighting Al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

Others believe, with a lot of justification that US demands on Pakistan are now escalating to impossible levels. The US aid money benefits only a little. Such a state, it is rightly argued, cannot be sustained indefinitely. Pakistanis believe that the US will jettison their country as soon as US goals are met. The Chinese have advised caution with regards to the US. Public mood is turning towards anger that can lead to an Iran-like situation. Such a situation of rapidly growing discontent against the ruling clique, reflecting popular national aspirations, can overthrow the yoke of those who represent the American agenda.

The US will then be the big loser in this new Great Game. The US better not push Pakistan into a corner if it wants to maintain its influence in this region in either the medium- or long-term. The US should recognise that 'two Irans' will be very hard to handle.

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