

## EXTERNAL SECURITY OUTLOOK: CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES IN 2023

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Post 9/11 security in our region face a major shift in both shape and dynamics, as the injured elephant took its vengeance out by attacking a weak and nondescript country which had no link, whatsoever, with events of 9/11. The vengeful elephant crushed an innocent population under its heavy feet with all the might at its disposal while the world looked away rather rejoiced over the events that followed. Within the region this atrocious act jolted most was Pakistan, being a neighbour and having religious, cultural, ethnic and economic overlaps with Afghanistan and consequently, the very foundations of its security were jolted.

### Security Landscape

After 9/11, the regional as well as Pakistan's security landscape has oscillated between skirmishes and noisy surge in dynamite explosions across the country. Having remained volatile and centre of global attention for nearly two decades, the guns went silent in August 2011. The invaders decided to crawl out in defeat and ignominy, and leaving Afghanistan to a consequential disorder. The country was suspended between No War and No Peace, the most undesirable state for a country to be in. From governance point of view there emerged a total vacuum causing complete societal collapse and administrative chaos. It was free for all, and all troublemakers went berserk. Loot and plunder became the

order of the day and vendetta the opportunity of the hour.

As far as Pakistan is concerned, it went into a policy and response freeze, while security apparatus and its response generation mechanisms were in a state of shock. It took nearly two months for Pakistan to realise the complexity of the emerging situation, and even more to re-orientate its Afghan policy and fathom the complexity of domestic and cross border security landscape. With every passing day our policy makers were emerging more confused, and responses disjointed adding fuel to the fire.

Lately terrorist footprint is now emerging over wider tracts stretching right up to Islamabad which is alarming as situation becoming akin to 2007/8. It seems that the whole system was caught napping and now initiating a kneejerk response which is not meeting much success. This whole scenario has both domestic and external dimensions. On the external side, foreign powers are accentuating the domestic instability to bring the country on its knees and thereafter dictate terms of future policies and conduct, particularly with reference to strategic capabilities and regional policies vis a vis India and China. In this effort Afghan soil is being utilised using many anti Afghan elements like Daesh and TTA dissidents. Disjointed and foggy policies and

On the domestic front, politically failed and weak groups and leaders are

encouraging and facilitating TTP. More so, in the wake of poorly advised and wrongly implemented 'Pleasing policy' of the state in a dialogue with TTP. Principally, a dialogue between state and terrorists is a wrong move, as when such an event happens, the state and the terrorists sit across the table become equals, which is disastrous for the state.

### **Eastern challenge and Kashmir**

Situation on the Eastern Front has stayed stable and is likely to stay same in 2023, primarily for two reasons. Firstly, due to a jolting response in 2019 when two Indian fighter aircraft were shot down by Pakistan Air force. Secondly, Indians planners are convinced that no major military aggression will deliver intended dividends and the cost may be disproportionate to the benefits accrued. Also, that a conventional military operation under a Nuclear Overhang cannot deliver guaranteed outcomes while the end game will certainly be under Pakistani design.

Indians have also seen the global indifference to their domestic Nazi type policies and persecution of not only the Muslims but also lower caste Hindus and poor Christians. Therefore, they have been busy consolidating the Hindutva Stranglehold over that mammoth country and would not get distracted by an external adventure. In addition, their northern border remains volatile, and a two front escalation would not be manageable and may get out of control. As far as Kashmir is concerned, we can only work on diplomatic front and raise a strong voice for the liberation of

Kashmiris from the Nazi stranglehold of RSS.

Finally, the disastrous domestic economic and governance crisis unleashed after the April 2022 Regime Change Operation has pushed the country in a socio-economic abyss under a technical financial default. This has provided a golden opportunity to the Indians to mount a Fifth Generation offensive, and accentuate the already spiraling unrest and instability including a chasm between state and the people. For them it is a dream come true and are involved in a multi-directional terrorist and Psywar against Pakistan.

### **Western threat and rising terrorism**

This is a sad story of lost opportunities. After the withdrawal of occupation forces from Afghanistan in 2021 there emerged a rare opportunity for Pakistan to start afresh its relations with Afghanistan and its new regime. We not only failed to grab the opportunity but ended up with an even harsher relationship than the preceding years. In addition to cold connection with the Afghan regime we landed ourselves with TTP led violence in western province and creeping right up to Islamabad.

One does not visualise any major change in this pattern in the coming year, as the present regime does not have the vision and capacity to handle such complex situation. In addition, the change of guard in the establishment leaves us uncertain about the design and direction of its actions in this regard.

## Balancing China and US

This has been the most significant challenge for Pakistan for last few years and more so in 2022 due to regime change under the cloud of the famous Pak Embassy Cypher. The Foreign Ministry under the immature and inexperienced leadership of Mr Bilawal Zardari has bungled whatever balance we were maintaining in the past years. Actually, we have ended up with weaker relations with both China and the US. As far as this year is concerned it is like to remain same unless national elections are held a new regime comes and charts a new course on this critical direction. Here it may be important to note that in our effort to please the US we have weakened our growing relations with Russia. In this direction too we will only find a new format if the post-election regime so desires.

## Gulf and Iran

While the PTI government was making extra efforts to improve relations with Iran and create a positive balance with the Gulf countries, the present dispensation under western and Arab pressure is staying away from any warming of Pak-Iran connections. This has created an opportunity for the Indians to rush their relations with Iran and handicap Pakistani policy makers. In addition, the Chinese plans to use CPEC for extending trade and investment to Iran seem to be losing traction. This will also be a setback for CPEC and consequently for Pakistan too. As far as the coming year is concerned much of this cannot be undone without a very

strong effort by Pakistan failing which it may lose much of its place in Iran.

## Response options in the face of tough global and national economic situation

As of today, Pakistan has limited time and space to apply course correction if it wants to extricate itself from the morass it has landed itself in. No country can tackle external factors and problems without being internally cohesive and stable. All external players judge you by your domestic landscape. With our present state of domestic situation, no country including our friends is willing to move forward in any direction of their relations with Pakistan. Pakistan's response to meet this unprecedented challenge must have following essential components, not only for 2023 but also for many following years:

- A. Domestic political stability which can be attained by holding general elections and the so elected government allowed to complete its mandated period.
- B. Institutional strength to ensure continuity in major domestic and foreign policies.
- C. Public awareness and support for state policies.
- D. Unwavering trust between the people and the state, irrespective of political dispensation in place.
- E. A very strong and capable team to meet the economic challenge faced today, which is bane of all ill problems faced by Pakistan.

F. A special cell be established in MoFA to resolve the Afghan relation issue and a fresh approach be adopted, taking on board regional countries, particularly Russia, Iran and China.

G. As far as TTP and erstwhile FATA are concerned efforts must involve the tribes of the area.

H. Total restructuring of Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

J. Avoid a situation where our strategic defensive capacity and capability becomes vulnerable to sabotage and blackmail.

K. Undo the global perception of establishment, rather than the political government running this country. This perception has proved a poison for the image of the people and their elected governments and may lead us deeper into the quagmire of ignominy.

## Conclusion

2022 has been a disastrous year for Pakistan, probably worse than 1971. So, 2023 is the start point to change for the future of Pakistan and our efforts and endeavours in this year will lay the foundations for its very future. Without being a pessimist, one feels that if we fail to apply serious and mega course correction, we may be doomed forever into a state surviving on a ventilator and breathing at the good will and mercy of foreign players. The vision of Quaid e Azam would be erased forever and we would be a headless chicken in maze with vultures breathing on our necks.

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