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Home | **NEW!** RSS | Archives | Contact Us | Monday, September 03, 2007**CONTENTS****Main News****National****Islamabad****Karachi****Lahore****Briefs****Foreign****Editorial****Info Tech****Sport****Infotainment****Advertise**

Friday, March 07, 2003

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**Second opinion: What should Pakistan do?**

*Khaled Ahmed's
Urdu Press Review*

Anger wells up when easy options are not available. A past unwillingness to become flexible and adjust has now eroded the options that could have been available. In this plight, most anger is showered on the divided self

There is resentment in Pakistan against the world. The hatred of United States is almost universal, but the traditionally held contempt for the rulers of the Islamic world has also become intensified. There is hatred towards India, which has now reached pathological dimensions after the mischief of the BJP in India. In this state of mind, what should Pakistan do? Different communities have different priorities. The religious community feels extremely alienated from the United States because of the war against the Taliban in Afghanistan and the FBI operations in Pakistan aimed at arresting Al Qaeda agents. The ulema feel that India is the lesser evil compared to the US. There are others however who see India and the US in cahoots against Pakistan. In these circumstances, what policy should Pakistan adopt? Flexible or hard, adaptive or maximalist? Flexibility is mostly dismissed as capitulation and cowardice.

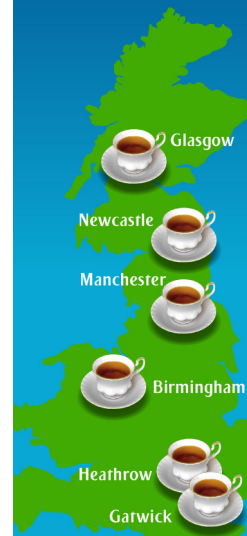
Jamaat Islami chief Qazi Hussain Ahmad was quoted by "Nawa-e-Waqt" (March 2 2003) as telling the Foreign Office in Islamabad that Pakistan would be better off patching up with India rather than being friend of the United States. An initiative towards could be based on India's acceptance of the Kashmir issue as a dispute. He said the foremost condition of the country's foreign policy should be its security and sovereignty. He said America was targeting Islam in the name of war against terrorism and recommended that Pakistan vote against America in the Security Council. For the economy his recommendation was that to achieve self-reliance the rulers should adopt simplicity. He said nothing outside of the Islamic movements in Pakistan would succeed.

The Foreign Office elite that listened to Qazi Sahib would be hard put to exercise the new option held forth by him. The two capitals have just finished evicting each other's diplomats. The fear and loathing felt by the peoples of the two countries is at its highest, not a little of it stoked by the religious Hindu parties in India and the Islamic religious parties and their mujahideen in Pakistan. Even in Congress-I the ratio of those that have fear and loathing of Pakistan is 60 per cent. The common man in India wants diplomatic relations broken off with Pakistan and the Indus Water Treaty denounced. On the other hand, relations with America, however hypocritical on both sides, have yielded a bonanza of a billion dollars to Pakistan's sick economy. As against a universal anti-Pakistan feeling in the world, Washington pretends to care about Pakistan's stance on Kashmir. The Islamic world is no longer willing to raise the Kashmir issue at the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Conference) and wants India included in the Islamic organisation. Iran clearly wants to do business with India rather than with Pakistan and may even have reached an agreement with India on regional security. Qazi Sahib's economic vision should be understood in the light of the economic manifesto of his party as outlined by Prof Khursheed Ahmad. Self-reliance according to it clearly means renationalisation of the economy and totalitarianism. It doesn't simply mean enforced asceticism on the part of the rulers, it means an aggressive rejection of the IMF and the World Bank. The pursuit of sovereignty in these troubled times may actually mean intense isolationism which brought destruction to Iran under Imam Khomeini and to Iraq under Saddam Hussein.

Chief Editor Majid Nizami said in "Nawa-e-Waqt" (March 2, 2003) that Pakistan army should learn Pakistan ideology because the country could not be run without it. He said Pakistan ideology should be taught in civil services academies and military training institutions. Allah said in the Quran that the Muslims should keep their horses ready for war and

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- ▶ **Sharon's sleight of hand**
- ▶ **Of cricket and politics**
- ▶ **An Islamic response to tyranny and injustice**
- ▶ **Second opinion: What should Pakistan do?**
- ▶ **POETIC LICENCE: Pakistan likely to face fresh water shortages in the years ahead**
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Pakistan's nuclear weapons were the horses of war which had kept Vajpayee from conquering Pakistan. He said his hero was Dr Qadeer Khan and not the pop singers of the country.

As opposed to Qazi Hussain Ahmad, in the worldview of Mr Nizami is that the US and India are both enemies with whom Pakistan should have no dealings. Therefore his "ideology" may be different from that of Qazi Sahib. He looks at the nuclear weapons as a guarantee of Pakistan's security vis-à-vis India. He doesn't look at them as a means of achieving reconciliation with India.

Daily "Khabrain" (February 28, 2003) quoted Majeed Nizami as saying that if Saddam Hussein took the bold step of sinking an American ship in the Gulf with a missile the Americans would run away from the region. He said General Pervez Musharraf may publicise himself as a liberal but in the eyes of the Americans he was one of the mujahideen. America could order India to attack Pakistan's Kahuta nuclear installation during the coming war. He said Pakistan was next because the real target of America was Islam. He said if Pakistan wanted to fight America it had to do as China did and Pakistan had to do exactly as China would want it to do.

Here the basic idea is that America in fact is behind the aggressive anti-Pakistan policy adopted by India. The suggestion that the sinking of an American ship in the Gulf would make America run away does not jibe with American behaviour in the past. Al Qaeda's attack on American embassies and ships has so far brought America out instead of sending it home. As for doing exactly as China would have us do, it would be very difficult to imitate the Chinese foreign policy conduct of the recent past. Its pragmatic foundations will not jibe with our more emotional behaviour. China is a global player adept at pursuing "realpolitik". Our love of China is based on lack of knowledge of China just as our hatred of India is based on a lack of knowledge of a "predefined" India.

Columnist Nazir Naji wrote in "Jang" (March 2, 2002) that the resistance of the Taliban to America would be of no use to the Afghan people. He said the Soviet Union was defeated but did that result in Afghanistan becoming prosperous? Now if the Taliban's fight with the Americans was successful would Afghanistan become as technologically and economically advanced as America? Because, after victory, the Taliban must become powerful technologically and economically to save their defeat from becoming meaningless. There were no foreign troops in Afghanistan before 1977 but Afghanistan was backward. In 1986 foreign troops were driven out of Afghanistan but the country was worse off after their exit. Today if the Taliban succeeded in driving the Americans out, will Afghanistan become more powerful than America? He said the Islamists were leading the Muslims in the wrong direction. Because the only way out was the possession of power equal to the Americans. Without that any united action would be fruitless. He said that the state of the Muslims was so weak that non-Muslims of the world had come out in the streets but the Muslims were too downtrodden to make such a show of strength.

This is a kind of journalistic "heresy" in Urdu, but Nazir Naji has always allowed himself the freedom to occasionally break the ranks of "transcendental" orthodoxy of column-writers. The column is a rare invitation to think realistically in a world where global moves of the big powers endanger the lives of smaller underdeveloped societies. By insisting on the achievement of technological and economic viability, the writer places the unbearable onus of internal reform on leaders more interested in external military conflict. *

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