



The axis that bemuses India

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While Indian eyes were rivetted on the cricket matches (and, to a greater extent, on the ongoing General Election), several events took place that marred the South Asian scene. Unfortunately, very few people in New Delhi and elsewhere have shown any interest in these "foreign" affairs.

First, the United States' Secretary of State, Mr Colin Powell, came visiting. In Delhi, the Secretary of State said that he was going to increase pressure on Pakistan to stop its support to cross-border terrorism. Delhi was more than just delighted. The Indian officials could afford to relax. Then, Mr Powell went to Islamabad where he told his interlocutors: "The US President will soon designate Pakistan as a major Non-Nato ally for the purposes of our future military-to-military relations." It took a few days (and a famous cricket victory) for Delhi to wake up.

Commentators wrote that the announcement came as a surprise after the "nuclear proliferation scam". It coincided with Pakistan launching a serious offensive against the Al Qaeda network as well as the Taliban militants in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan. A few weeks earlier, Chinese drawings of nuclear warheads were found in Libya. These had been sold by Islamabad as part of a nuclear technology transfer arranged by Pakistani scientist Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan. The Libyan discovery was termed as the first "dramatic evidence" of the China-Pakistan nuclear connections.

Earlier, according to Western intelligence agencies, no "definitive" proof had ever come to light. Incredulous as it sounds, nobody in Pakistan knew exactly what was going on in Dr Khan laboratories!

However, declassified American documents published in US by the National Security Archives in March this year throw new light on the ostrich-like behaviour of four successive American administrations. A paper titled, China, Pakistan, and the Bomb: The Declassified File on US Policy-1977-1997, analyses 26 secret notes and telegrams

originating from the US archives. It provides new clues and evidences on the "complex and ambivalent" nuclear policies of United States, China and Pakistan.

The first of these documents is dated July 1965, a few months before the India-Pakistan war and a year after the first Chinese nuclear explosion. The American note details the "problems with Pakistan", the then (and now) favoured US ally in South Asia. "Soon after the Chinese nuclear test, President Ayub termed the test (as) "a most significant achievement of the Chinese Government and people," states the note, adding: "Pakistan's attitude in this regard was particularly unhelpful, coming at a time when we were attempting to mobilise world opinion against the Chinese nuclear threat."

Three years later, another note pointed towards "*Peking's continued willingness to overlook ideological factors in dealing with Pakistan. In return, Pakistan has shown a willingness to collaborate with China by passing on information concerning aircraft obtained from the United States.*"

By this time, the construction of the Karakoram Highway which "would facilitate the flow of military supplies" between Pakistan and China had started. This, eventually, became the main corridor for transfer of nuclear technology from China to Pakistan. The following notes and telegrams continue to provide information on the "progress" of the Sino-Pakistani collaboration. It was evidently clear, even to the American eyes, that the rapport between China and Pakistan becoming too "intimate".

The documents particularly emphasise the following events:

- * Chinese assistance to Pakistani nuclear-weapons related projects in 1977
- * The stolid refusal by Chinese diplomats in 1982 to give an "unequivocal answer" to queries about nuclear weapons aid to Pakistan
- * The State Department's conclusion in 1983 that China was assisting (Pakistan) with the production of fissile materials
- * US "disquiet" in 1992 over China's "continuing activities with Pakistan's nuclear weapons programmes"

This is obviously just the tip of the iceberg (some of the documents are heavily "excised" and the Central Intelligence Agency papers still remain "classified"). It nevertheless illustrates that the American agencies were aware of what was going on.

For instance: In 1979, the Jimmy Carter administration received definite proof of Pakistan's efforts to develop reprocessing facilities. Beijing denied providing help to Islamabad, but advised US to refrain ("for goodness sake!") from punitive action against Pakistan which was facing the "Soviet peril"

The Soviets invaded Afghanistan in December 1979 and Washington recognised the soundness of Chinese advice. They suddenly needed their ally, Pakistan, too much to fuss about some "unconfirmed" nuclear cooperation! Again, unbelievable as it may sound, the US approved an indefinite waiver of the sanctions.

The quid pro quo continued during the following years. In 1982, *Newsweek* published a cover story highlighting the close Sino-Pakistani collaboration in the nuclear weapons programme. However, during the same year, the American embassy pointed out that there was a market worth billions of dollars of contracts available to sell nuclear reactors to the Chinese; US companies like Westinghouse were in competition. The conclusion formed in the United States was: "*Why (should the Chinese) pay the French to obtain older technology developed by the United States?*"

Under the administrations of Ronald Reagan, George Bush Sr and Bill Clinton, the saga continued with one recurring aspect: Each one of the US Presidents wanted to "contain" India. Whenever it was convenient and whenever the US needed its faithful ally, Pakistan, hard facts were ignored or brushed aside. One of the few occasions on which sanctions were imposed against Islamabad was in 1989, when George Bush Sr withheld the necessary certification, triggering the severance of military and economic aid to Pakistan. The Soviets had just withdrawn from Afghanistan and Pakistan had temporarily lost its strategic importance. The moral of the story is that when the United States (as well as other Western powers) need Pakistan, there eyes are suddenly shut to any suspicious or ambiguous activities.

In 2004, the George W Bush Administration still finds itself in need of Islamabad's help to tighten the noose round Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda network and sundry Islamic fundamentalist activities along the Afghanistan border. The disclosure of Chinese documents in the Libyan consignment came for a purpose. Pakistani President, General Pervez Musharraf, can be blackmailed, and he becomes even more of a US puppet; Dr

Khan is pardoned in the process and the Americans may be able to catch Osama bin Laden before the November elections.

American foreign policy has always been simple and specific in principle-it serves US interests alone. Last week, speaking of terrorist sanctuaries in Pakistan, the US Ambassador to Afghanistan, Mr Zalmay Khalilzad, declared: *"We cannot allow this problem to fester indefinitely."* Mr Khalilzad added: *"We have told the Pakistani leadership that either they must solve this problem or we will have to do it for ourselves."*

At the same time, Mr Khalilzad praised General Pervez Musharraf's leadership for increasing the heat on fugitive Taliban brigands and tracking down Al-Qaeda's members and other "high-value" targets absconding along the areas on the shared Afghanistan-Pakistan border. If the Pakistani strongman delivers the good, the world's eyes will remain closed. If not, he will be in trouble.

In the meantime, cricket goes on!