

Perils of Relying on American Support

Issue:

The contemporary wars in the Indian subcontinent have seen an increasing involvement, or at least, mediation, by the United States. India seems to be relying on American support to achieve its objectives in Kashmir, imagining that personal relationship with American leadership is enough to win wars.

Analysis of the recent developments:

- In the current scenario, there is a growing feeling that India has a clear advantage over Pakistan to impose its will in the whole of Kashmir, including Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (POK).
 - The presence of President Donald Trump at the “Howdy Modi” event in Houston and the rather low-key criticism of India’s handling of the situation in Jammu and Kashmir has led to many Indian analysts imagining that New Delhi’s brilliant diplomatic manoeuvres have defeated Pakistan’s efforts to exploit the complete shutdown of Kashmir and to highlight it as the violation of human rights.
- Pakistan’s weak economy and the lack of full American support are seen as twin factors that would deter Pakistan from launching an offensive. The most naive assumption is that India’s decisive leadership can manage both nuclear Pakistan and international opinion.

The issue here is that the tendency to indulge in premature celebrations and claim victory much before the final whistle is blown, adds a sense of complacency in the decision-making processes, which in turn leads to the neglect of historical experiences.

History of American Support in the Sino-Indian War of 1962:

- A similar mood had prevailed in New Delhi before the commencement of the 1962 war with China. Indians believed that China stood isolated, for two main reasons:
 - the Soviet Union had given it a cold shoulder
 - the United States (US) and other Western countries sympathised with India’s position on the border dispute.
- India launched the “forward policy” with confidence in its near-perfect management of the diplomatic relations with world leaders.
- Indian leaders assumed that Mao Zedong’s position within the Chinese Communist Party was weak and Beijing was an international outlier, incapable of launching a full-scale war.
- Indian calculations went awry and China did declare war on India. India was caught unprepared. To top it all, the US, India’s main military adviser and supporter during the war, refused to employ its bombers to support India.

Forward Policy:

- Forward Policy was a set of tactical strategies and presumptuous theories utilised by the then Indian Prime Minister Nehru, designed with the ultimate goal to effectively force the Chinese out of territory that the Indian government had claimed.
- The doctrines were based on a theory that China will not likely attack if India began to occupy the territory that China considered its own.
- Part of that thinking was based on the fact that China had plenty of their own external problems in the early months of 1962, especially with the Taiwan Strait Crisis. And that the Chinese leaders had insisted they did not wish for war.
- Nehru began acting out a policy of establishing new outposts further to the north of the Line Of Control (LOC).
- The outcome of Nehru's forward policy was not as he had wanted. Contrary to his policy predictions, China attacked the Indian outposts that were north of the McMahon Line and so began the Sino-Indian war.

- Indian strategy was rooted in the belief that Americans hated China and wanted to see it defeated and humiliated. But for the US, war was more important than its outcome.
- Direct American involvement in bombing China may have brought victory to India, but it would have brought China and the Soviet Union closer. This was certainly not what the US wanted to achieve through the Sino-Indian war. For them, the war was a means to intensify the Sino-Soviet divide and this objective was achieved by the 1962 war.

History of American Support in the liberation of Bangladesh 1971

- In the 1960s, the Pakistani army committed ruthless atrocities against their own people in the then East Pakistan. Heinous human rights abuses were committed to retain Pakistan's territorial rights.
- Confident of American backing in the international fora, the Pakistani elite remained completely oblivious of consequences of their actions.
- It is widely believed that there was a clear anti-India bias in the US administration's policy during the Bangladesh crisis, and this bias largely arose from President Nixon's (the then President of the U.S.) sense of personal friendship with the Pakistan leaders and his general sympathy for Pakistan.
- During the war, the US did not back Pakistan as expected. The Nixon administration did not have any serious reservations to an independent East Pakistan. Their main concern was not to end up being accused of having encouraged the split-up of Pakistan.
- The US was least concerned about the victory of Pakistan. It was more interested in using the crisis to achieve its policy goals. It was chasing China and Pakistan; India and Bangladesh were merely the means to reach Beijing.

- The coming together of India and the Soviet Union was needed to convince China that national interests, and not ideology, determines international relations.

Conclusion

- The American geopolitical need to contain China may make it imperative for it to court India. But, this does not mean it will overlook whatever India does in Kashmir. It might not continue to favour New Delhi if the probability of a nuclear war in the subcontinent becomes unavoidable.
- The US is expected to cater to its own strategic needs. If its strategy demands that Gilgit–Baltistan come under India’s control, it may extend support to India. But if strategy demands that Gilgit–Baltistan remain with Pakistan or become independent, then despite overt support to India, the US will act to ensure that India does not succeed in Gilgit–Baltistan.
- The historical experiences indicate that, the more the small and medium countries enter the vortex of war, the more they are vulnerable to exploitation by the global hegemon.
- A little support from the US did not prevent Pakistan from paying a heavy price for selective subversion of democratic rights and creating a humanitarian crisis in East Pakistan. A few F-104 from Jordan and some F-86 from Saudi Arabia that Pakistan received with American help did not change the course of events during the war.
- Under the prevailing circumstances, the reality is that China is the main concern for the US. India and Pakistan continue to be viewed as the foot soldiers, always willing to die for an unknown cause.

