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by B.Raman

Some circles in the US see a linkage between the recent high-profile visit of Mr. Richard Armitage, US Deputy Secretary of State, to New Delhi, the unpublicised visit of Mr. George Tenet, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), to Islamabad where he had an unusually long meeting with Gen. Pervez Musharraf, the self-styled Chief Executive of Pakistan, and the surprise decision of the Government of India to invite the General to New Delhi for talks without any longer insisting on the stoppage of Pakistani support to cross-border terrorism as a pre-condition for a resumption of the bilateral dialogue at the political level.

Mr. Armitage, who had spent some years of his career in the CIA/DIA and holds the highest Pakistani civil decoration that could be awarded to a foreigner for his role during the Afghan war of the 1980s, has a large circle of friends in the Pakistani military and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate.

Mr. Tenet had worked for some years as an aide to one of the Congressional Intelligence Oversight Committees before he was nominated by Mr. Bill Clinton as the Director of the CIA.

Significantly, he was one of the very few (the Director of the FBI was another) important appointees of the Clinton Administration to have been asked by President Bush to continue in his post despite the criticism of the functioning of the CIA and its failure to detect the

preparations for India's Pokhran II nuclear tests of 1998 by Mr. Bush and his advisers during the Presidential election campaign last year.

These circles attribute this decision not to disturb Mr. Tenet from his post to an important behind-the-scenes role, which he has reportedly been playing since last year in working for a rapprochement between the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Israel in West Asia and between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. Mr. Bush and his senior aides, who do not want the President to personally play an active mediatory role in West Asia or elsewhere similar to the high-profile roles played by Mr. Clinton, reportedly felt that US interests could be better served by continuing to use the deniable, stealth services of the CIA chief.

It is said that Mr. Tenet was involved in the secret goings-on which preceded the subsequently-aborted cease-fire between the Government of India and the Hizbul Mujahideen and in the events preceding and following the non-initiation of combat operations in Kashmir by the Govt. of India. He operated directly as well as through Maj. Gen. (ret'd) Mahmud Ali Durrani, who like Gen. Musharraf, was a blue-eyed boy of the late Gen. Zia-ul-Haq and who is now a close confidante of the self-styled Chief Executive.

Maj. Gen. Durrani had in the past served as the ISI station chief in Washington and was responsible for the ISI's liaison with the CIA and the FBI. Last year, Jamaat-e-Islami circles in Pakistan had alleged that he had, at the instance of the CIA, played a role, in consultation with Gen. Musharraf, in persuading the Hizbul Mujahideen to agree to a cease-fire. However, the whole exercise was sabotaged by Lt. Gen. Mohammad Aziz, the then Chief of the General Staff (CGS), who is a Sudan from Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir and had not been consulted by Gen. Musharraf and Maj. Gen. Durrani. Gen. Musharraf had him subsequently transferred to Lahore as a Corps Commander.

It is claimed by these circles in the US that the Ramzan initiative of the Govt. of India (non-initiation of combat operations) was to have been reciprocated by the General with an order to his troops for restraint along the Line of Control (LOC) and action to moderate the activities of the jihadi terrorist organisations in Jammu & Kashmir which, in turn, would have been reciprocated by India with permission to the Hurriyat leaders to visit Pakistan.

While the General issued the restraint order to his troops, he allegedly went back on his word to the CIA to issue a similar restraint order to the jihadis on the ground that this was being opposed by some of his Corps Commanders. It is said to be correct that some of his Corps Commanders and retired military officers such as Lt. Gen. Hamid Gul and Lt. Gen. Javed Nasir, former chiefs of the ISI, had strongly urged that any restraint by the jihadis should be conditional on progress in a resumed political dialogue with India.

Lt. Gen. Nasir reportedly even urged that if the dialogue was resumed, any restraint on the jihadi organisations should be only as a quid pro quo to a similar restraint by the Govt. of India on the alleged anti-Muslim activities of the RSS, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Shiv Sena, but his advice on this issue did not reportedly enjoy the support of other officers, serving or retired.

It is claimed that in the face of this log jam, Mr. Tenet once again stealthily stepped into the scene through his recent visit to Islamabad and

worked out a formula, which could be projected by both India and Pakistan as a vindication of their respective stand hitherto.

Ever since capturing power in October, 1999, Gen. Musharraf has been repeatedly expressing his desire for talks at any place, at any time and at any level. Even if the forthcoming summit has really been midwived by the CIA as claimed, this need not detract from the significance of the turn of events.

But, one has to keep one's fingers crossed till the summit actually takes place. Gen. Musharraf, sarcastically called in Pakistan Gen. Retreat, had in the past repeatedly reversed decisions which were opposed by the jihadis. If the jihadis outside and inside the army continue to oppose the summit, it is to be seen whether he would resist their pressure and stick to his decision to come to India.

The summit would at least provide an opportunity to our Prime Minister to test the military dictator's sincerity and to judge whether the reasonableness projected by him is an act of desperation to move Pakistan out of its continuing diplomatic isolation and economic difficulties or just one more crafty move to catch India on the wrong foot.

In the past, India had had no qualms about negotiating with Pakistan's military dictators, but Gen. Musharraf cannot be compared to them:

- * The past dictators were either Punjabis or Pakhtoons, who hold the majority of the posts in the military. Gen. Musharraf is a Mohajir, who is looked down upon by the Punjabi officers as a Mohajir parvenu.

- * As Qazi Hussain Ahmed, the leader of the Jamaat-e-Islami, often points out, the past dictators seized power themselves, but it was Gen. Musharraf's subordinates who seized power in his absence and made him the ruler. He, therefore, owes his gratitude to them and cannot easily over-rule them.

- * The past dictators enjoyed absolute power, but Gen. Musharraf is only the first among equals.

- * He has conceded more demands of the Islamic fundamentalists during his 19 months in office than Gen. Zia. Till now, he has been extremely amenable to pressure from the Jihadis.

In recent weeks, significant sections of Pakistan's civilian bureaucracy and, particularly its economic managers, have been coming round to the view that Pakistan's continued involvement in Afghanistan and J & K was coming in the way of its economic recovery and that the harping of the military leadership on the nuclear flashpoint theme in the hope of thereby internationalising the Kashmir issue was scaring

foreign investors away There has been a dramatic drop in foreign investments since the General seized power.

The Corps Commanders, however, do not share this perception and continue to believe in their present policy of keeping Indian security forces bleeding in J & K in the hope of thereby weakening them and keeping the jihadis fighting and dying at the hands of the Indian security forces in order to prevent their returning to Pakistan and talibanising the country.

India should guard itself against any illusion that the summit could lead to peace in J&K. What will really lead to peace is better governance and attention to the grievances of the people in the State , effective control of human rights violations by the Security Forces and a willingness, capability and readiness to take the proxy war to Pakistani territory.

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