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THE NEW INDIAN GOVT AND NATIONAL SECURITY : Likely Policies--Part-I

Submitted by asiaadmin2 on Fri, 09/28/2012 - 07:14

Paper No. 1000

15.05.2004

by B.Raman

Shri K.Natwar Singh, former Indian High Commissioner to Pakistan, Shri M.K.Rasgotra, former Indian Ambassador to France and Nepal, former Indian High Commissioner to the UK and former Indian Foreign Secretary, Shri J.N.Dixit, former Indian High Commissioner to Pakistan and Sri Lanka, former Indian Ambassador to Afghanistan and former Indian Foreign Secretary, Shri Mani Shankara Iyer, former Indian Consul-General in Karachi who was one of the most popular Indian diplomats to have served in Karachi and who has a close personal friendship with Mrs.Benazir Bhutto, former Pakistani Prime Minister, and Mr.Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri, the present Pakistani Foreign Minister, from his student days in the UK, and Shri M.K.Narayanan, former Director, Intelligence Bureau, are expected to play an important role in the evolution and implementation of the foreign and national security policies of the new Government led by the Congress (I).

2. Whatever posts they may occupy in the new Government, they would bring to them an unparalleled wealth of expertise and experience the like of which the outgoing Government headed by Shri A.B. Vajpayee did not have. Shri Natwar Singh, Shri Dixit and Shri Mani Shankara Iyer had served in Pakistan in very difficult years during the military rule of Zia ul-Haq and in the years under Benazir Bhutto thereafter and understand better than anybody did in the Vajpayee Government the importance of good relations with Pakistan and the difficulty of improving relations with it so long as the military held the reins of power in the country and a genuinely elected democratic Government was not restored to power. They have first hand and inside knowledge of the role played by the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan in fomenting insurgencies and terrorism in different parts of India.

3. The Congress (I) has always had a wide network of contacts at the individual and organisational levels with political leaders of Pakistan in Sindh, the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Balochistan, which it had always carefully nursed and nourished without worrying about the impact which such relations could have on India's relations with Pakistan's military leadership. When the Congress (I) was in power before 1996, many political leaders of Pakistan used to come openly to India and meet the leaders of the Congress (I). Many of these relationships date from the days of India's independence struggle against the British, during which Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress (INC) were more popular than the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) in the NWFP and Balochistan. More Pakistani political leaders attended the cremation of Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991 than leaders from other countries of South Asia.

4. The BJP-led Government's policy towards Pakistan lacked consistency and was often erratic (kabi garam, kabi naram-- sometimes hot, sometimes soft) due to the following reasons:

- * Lack of expertise on Pakistan either at the political or bureaucratic level.

- * Lack of a network of contacts at the political level with different political formations in Pakistan. The proximity of many political leaders of Pakistan with the Congress (I) made them suspect in the eyes of the BJP and it, therefore, kept a distance from them. The fact that the BJP leaders had not played a very active role in India's independence struggle created complexes in the BJP's relationship with the leaders of the NWFP and Balochistan, many of whom are the progenies of the giants of the independence struggle.

* Consequently, the only active relationship at the political level which the BJP had was with Mr.Nawaz Sharif and some Muslim League leaders of Punjab, who had in the past been strong critics of the Congress (I) because of its perceived proximity to Benazir. Nawaz Sharif, a creation of Zia ul-Haq, enjoyed better relationship with Shri A.B.Vajpayee than with Shri Narasimha Rao, the former Indian Prime Minister, despite the fact that he had met Rao more number of times than Vajpayee.

* A reluctance on the part of the outgoing Government to admit that the Congress (I) had better intellectual assets vis-a-vis Pakistan, the like of which it did not have and hence it was necessary to regularly consult it on Pakistan.

5. The policies of the previous Congress(I) Governments relating to Pakistan were characterised by the following factors:

* A realisation of the importance of keeping the lines of communications open with the Government of Pakistan at different levels, whoever was in power, the political or the military leadership. Examples: the periodic, well-structured meetings between the Foreign and Home Secretaries, officials in charge of border security and narcotics control of the two countries. The Home Secretaries used to be assisted in these meetings by senior officials of the intelligence communities of the two countries, officers of para-military organisations etc. Rajiv Gandhi also experimented with meetings between senior intelligence officials, a practice that was continued by Shri Chandrasekhar. Over the years after the exit of Rajiv Gandhi from power and particularly since the BJP-led coalition came to power in 1998, these meetings were dispensed with. Even if these meetings did not serve any other purpose, they at least enabled senior officials of the two countries to know and judge each other in flesh and blood instead of through media and intelligence reports.

* A realisation of the importance of a regular dialogue between the Governmental leaders of the two countries. Examples: Rajiv Gandhi's bilateral meetings with Benazir and Narasinha Rao's meetings with Nawaz Sharif on the margins of regional and international conferences. Even in the worst days of Indo-Pakistan relations, leaders of Congress (I) Governments did not avoid meetings with their counterparts in Pakistan and always maintained a certain civility in personal relationships.

* A realisation of the importance of maintaining their network of personal contacts with the political leaders of Pakistan even during years of military dictatorship, without worrying about the likely impact of such contacts on the minds of the military leadership.

* A realisation that India has to deal with whoever was in power in Islamabad, whether the political or military leadership, and, hence, should not allow the fact of a military dictatorship being in power in Pakistan to distort its policies towards Pakistan.

* The importance of a robust counter-terrorism policy. This policy had the following aspects: (a). A determination not to concede demands made by terrorists through intimidation. There were over a dozen incidents of hijacking of aircraft and kidnapping of prominent personalities by the Sikh and Kashmiri terrorists when the Congress (I) was in power. It did not concede any of their demands. The only deviation from this policy occurred during the occupation of the Hazratbal holy shrine in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) in October, 1993, by a group of Pakistan-based jihadi terrorists, who were allowed to escape to Pakistan instead of being arrested in order to protect the shrine from any damage. (b). A vigorous campaign against Pakistan on its sponsorship of terrorism in order to make the international community aware of the insidious role of Pakistan. (c). Policies and actions meant to convey a message to Pakistan in no uncertain terms that its use of terrorism against India will not be cost free. (d). Keeping the doors always open for a political dialogue even with Pakistan-aided insurgents and terrorists once they realised that violence was untenable. Nagaland and Mizoram are good examples of the success of this policy. To Congress (I) and to it alone should go the credit for having effectively dealt with terrorism in Punjab without ever conceding any of the demands of the terrorists. (e). Not to link Pakistan's sponsorship of terrorism in India to the question of a dialogue between the two countries. Talk-talk, hit-hit was the policy.

* A determination not to concede to the USA any locus stand in matters relating to the political aspects of Indo-Pakistan relations such as the future of J&K.

* An emphasis on the primordial importance of the Shimla Agreement while negotiating with Pakistan.

6. It is expected that the policy of the new Government led by the Congress (I) towards Pakistan would be marked by the following features:

* Continuance of the dialogue process initiated by the outgoing Government.

* Efforts to restore the Shimla Agreement to its primordial position. This could create difficulties. The policies of Gen. Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan's military dictator, ever since he seized power in October, 1999, have been directed towards consigning the Shimla Agreement of 1972 negotiated by Indira Gandhi and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and the Lahore Accord of 1999 negotiated by Vajpayee and Nawaz to the dustbin of history and lay down fresh parameters determined by the military to govern future relations between the two countries. It was the opposition of Vajpayee to Musharraf's attempts to exclude all references to the Shimla and Lahore Accords in any final statement which led to the break-down of the Agra summit in 2001. A careful perusal of the statements, which came out of the Islamabad summit in January last, gave a worrisome impression as if Vajpayee had agreed to a dilution of the importance of the Shimla Agreement under US pressure in return for Musharraf's assurance on the question of stoppage of support to terrorism, an assurance which has not yet been implemented. It remains to be seen whether the Congress (I)-led Government would go along with the Islamabad formulations and, if not, what effect it would have on the dialogue.

* A revamping of the counter-terrorism policy in order to give it some of the teeth which it had lost under the outgoing Government.

- * Vigorous follow-up action on nuclear confidence-building measures.
- * Avoidance of unnecessary rhetoric on nuclear and non-nuclear military issues, which could create difficulties in bilateral relations.
- * A hard-headed approach devoid of emotions and complexes and based more on substance than on style, bombast and spin, which became the characteristic of the outgoing Government's policy.
- * Greater transparency and readiness to consult the opposition and associate it with the policy-making.

7. All the parties belonging to the new ruling coalition broadly agree on the parameters of the policy towards Pakistan and hence this is unlikely to create any discord inside the coalition.

8. Annexed are relevant extracts from the Congress (I)'s policy document titled ISSUES BEFORE THE NATION---SECURITY, DEFENCE AND FOREIGN POLICY. (To be continued)

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ANNEXURE: RELEVANT EXTRACTS

"The BJP/NDA Government's policies related to Pakistan have been a saga of contradictions and confusion. Whether in Lahore or at Agra, the BJP/NDA Government showed a singular lack of advance preparation leading to disastrous consequences. Because of this lack of foresight, Lahore was followed by Kargil and Agra led to a fresh phase of accelerated tensions in Indo-Pak relations. The BJP/NDA Government completely failed in containing and countering terrorism sponsored by Pakistan.

"The BJP/NDA Government's Pakistan policy has been full of contradictory extremisms and ambiguities. Prime Minister Vajpayee's trip to Lahore was followed by Pakistan's perfidy at Kargil. Despite this, General Musharraf was invited to the Agra Summit, which was a fiasco. This was followed by the terrorist attack on Parliament, resulting in Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee declaring: "Now India would fight the Pakistani menace to the finish." A few months later, all of a sudden a peace initiative with

Pakistan was undertaken. The claim of the Prime Minister that normalization of relations with Pakistan is his most important achievement is ludicrous. The fact is that the Prime Minister and his government have lacked clarity, consistency and conviction while dealing with Pakistan.

"There has been no clarity in the BJP/NDA Government's Jammu & Kashmir policy. At one time, its thinking was that the principal problem in J&K was Pakistan-sponsored cross-border terrorism and proxy war and that there could be no meaningful discussions on the subject unless cross-border terrorism was stopped. Yet both at Lahore and more recently at Islamabad, the BJP/NDA Government has agreed to discuss the territorial status of J&K with Pakistan. As regards talks with diverse shades of public opinion in J&K itself, once again there has been no consistency or transparency in approach. From time to time, the BJP/NDA Government has appointed a series of special envoys to discuss the future of J&K with various political groups. However, the country has never been taken into confidence with regard to their mandate and terms of reference. No wonder, the atmosphere of serious discussions has been missing and talks with separatist groups like the Hurriyat have not made any headway.

"Finally, the BJP/NDA Government has deliberately and mischievously used tensions with Pakistan to polarise our own society and call into question the patriotic credentials of a very large number of our countrymen and women. The Deputy Prime Minister is on record as having said that only the BJP can make peace with Pakistan because that would make it acceptable to the religious majority in our country. This is a dangerous and pernicious argument and is an extension of the "two-nation" theory first put forward by the RSS almost eight decades back. The fact is that it is the Jan Sangh/BJP/RSS that has always stymied serious efforts made in the past to bring about reconciliation with Pakistan (and China). This obstructionist past cannot be disowned.

"Terrorism and insurgency have emerged as serious security concerns in several parts of India. The activities of extremist groups in the North-East and in the tribal regions of Central India pose a serious challenge. The Congress will implement a comprehensive multi-faceted strategy to cope effectively with the twin challenges of terrorism and insurgency. The national security network will be modernised and streamlined, paying particular attention to intelligence gathering, respect for fundamental human rights and sustainable social and economic development which reinforces successful security operations.

"The Congress will give particular attention to fashioning a stable, working, cooperative relationship with Pakistan under the framework of the historic Shimla Agreement of 1972 and subsequent agreements and confidence-building measures initiated by later Congress governments well upto 1996, while remaining alert about India's defence requirement, and being firm in responding to any threats emanating from Pakistan.

"Management of India's relations with other nuclear weapons powers is an important task, given India's nuclear weapons and missiles capacities. Special attention would be given to enhance India's credibility as a responsible nuclear weapons power and for forging equations with other such powers, to stabilize the international security environment. The Congress will take the initiative to have credible, transparent and verifiable confidence-building measures in treaty form to minimize the risk of nuclear and missile conflict with Pakistan and China. While doing this, the Congress remains committed to an agreement on a time-bound non-discriminatory international agreement on elimination of weapons of mass destruction. The Congress would participate in consultations and negotiations to put in place effective international agreements for this purpose.

"The Congress considers international terrorism a phenomenon of high and critical concern. The Congress will support all efforts at international action to counter this menace in any form.

"The Congress will be firm and decisive and prompt in responding to terrorist violence structured against India.

"The fundamental objective of India's foreign policy would be to safeguard India's security and vital strategic interests. The endeavour would be to form a national foreign policy based on informed national consensus, particularly on important issues of development, defence, nuclear issues and the requirements of a stable and secure international order."

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