

Price of Peace

The other day, when BBZ reportedly suggested that the ISI and the RAW could work together to resolve the Indo-Pak riddle, I was sure some of my old friends would recall the saga of The Spy Chronicles. The book was co-authored in 2018 by the two former heads of these agencies and besides much else, built upon an earlier joint venture on Intelligence cooperation. Dulat being a hardcore spymaster often told me that some of the gains on the secret channels could not even be imagined by the run of the mill peakniks. We still had to concede that this teamwork could at best prevent yahoos from turning a bad relationship worse, and only in the rare case when a process had the right credentials – “ownership” in simple English— some good work done behind the public glare could give it a running start.

Peace-Making is the domain of the state, and in our bilateral context has many a time been undertaken at the right level and by the heads screwed in the right place. Gujral as the Indian Prime Minister, was the brain behind the Composite Dialogue; the best crisis management structure I’ve ever known. JATM, a Musharraf-Manmohan Singh co-production, added many more dimensions to our cooperative efforts. The four-point formula was reasonably sound and had the potential to provide some relief to the oppressed Kashmiris. Book’s punchline was in its conclusion: all the good intentions, sound concepts, even the right leadership would fail to deliver unless the countries were willing to pay the price for peace—almost always higher than the cost of conflict. Maybe one should look at another live situation to defend this thesis.

After a lot that has happened on the Israeli-Palestinian front, if anyone thinks that the international community – whatever it means – has done something of substance to address this enormity, one had no idea about the stakes in this conflict. I was first told about the Israeli dilemma by Admiral Levi, their military attaché in the 1980s in Bonn. According to him if at the nascent stage the country was accepted by its neighbours, Israel would have ceased to exist a long time back – either assimilated in the region or sufficiently tamed to be drowned in any of the surrounding seas. The price of peace for this rogue country is therefore its likely demise. And assuming that the US was the only power that could force a change of policy on Tel Aviv, it could only do so at a colossal cost— and not only because of the Jewish Lobby and that sort of stuff. A Middle East at peace would be in the Eastern Camp before one could say “China”. Moreover, who wants to lose the camel herds that pay trillions to Washington as protection money*. Iran certainly had a desire to act against Tel Aviv, and according to Douglas Macgregor could “flatten” the country in a day – but at the cost of American retaliation. Turkey too has been neutralised for reasons that might range from eight trillion dollars annual trade with the regional criminals to some contrived threats on its peripheries. But it’s the Pakistani case that helps me understand the price part a bit better.

Taunted as beggar, bankrupt, and a failing state; a few highly suspect sources have started positing that we were now being wooed by the who's who of the world. Indeed, some of our people were well prepared to take on the ideologically drunk Modi-Doval Duo – God bless those airmen and may their tribe increase – but in an order where even a lunch was not free, this new found infatuation with Pakistan could not just be because we shot down a few aircrafts! Let's still assume that the stated bounty was genuine and ask ourselves what were

we expected to do in return. Looking at a gift horse in the mouth may be in bad taste but what if the horse was trojan!

The US has often intervened to broker a ceasefire between India and Pakistan. The grounds may have varied from its self-assumed role as a global go-between, to preventing nuclear holocausts, to the threats to the trade ties. Post the 9th of May, the urgency with which the sole superpower acted could only be understood as helping an ally in the New Great Game wriggle out of a critical bind. All the same, the deftness with which Trump has trapped us in the illusion that he would now untie the Kashmir Knot is a tribute to the American seductive sway and a moment of dead reckoning. It's not only because India could not be arm-twisted on what it believes would cause a contagion effect but also that if the issue was no more, the Region would smoothly fall in the Chinese lap.

After the 4-day war it looked that Pakistan was all set to pay the price for peace— embark upon an Armageddon. Has the red herring of money and mediation distracted us from raising the cost of conflict of what we fatuously call our “core issue”?

*Their dancing with the wolves was forecast by Habib Jalib decades ago:

تُو کہ ناواقفِ آدابِ غلامی ہے ابھی
رقص زنجیر پہن کر بھی کیا جاتا ہے

Asad Durrani

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