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Afghan issue and its Implications on Pakistan Nuclear Security (Centreline)

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The US has contingency plans to deal with a situation, if it conceives of a serious threat to Pakistan’s nuclear weapons arising from a possibility of falling these into wrong hands. With the Afghan war entering in the end game phase and frequent rising of concerns by the US lawmakers and media over suspected Pakistan’s complicity with terrorist groups, Pakistan finds itself braced in a situation of between devil and the deep sea. US calls for expanding the sphere of operations by Pakistani military against militant/extremist outfits in tribal areas and also on mainland Pakistan could lead to internal instability and backlash while any inaction might put it in a confrontational situation with the US which also is unaffordable.

Most of the good will earned by Armed Forces of Pakistan, after the restoration of judiciary, successful Swat operation, resettlement of IDPs and relentless efforts to provide relief to the flood affected people has considerably been lost in flurry of events since May 2. The situation in the US perceptions appears to be serious especially in wake of series of stories published in the Western media reporting of widespread discontent prevailing within the rank and file of the armed forces coupled with CIA’s efforts to stage a coup. The severity of situation forced Kayani to address the officer cadre at various stations in a crash visit programme. However, recent arrest of military officers including a brigadier, over their alleged connections with the extremist outfits has just confirmed the fears of trouble within its ranks. These developments might ultimately provide the right opportunity for the US government if it becomes desirous of conducting a May 2 style of raid over Pakistan nuclear installations. However, in past the US officials were not confident of achieving a 100% success in any such kind of operation. According to an unnamed US military official, every war gaming scenario on the issue has always ended up in a ‘sort of mess and an unmanageable situation for the US’. There is no available data on the perceived success ratio but obviously the US confidence in its abilities in any such kind of operations after Operation Geronimo, must have been reinforced.

The Obama’s troop drawdown speech from Afghanistan came as a stern warning to Pakistan, reiterating that terrorist safe havens would not be tolerated inside Pakistan. This changing US role, from counter insurgency to counter terrorism could involve frequent aerial strikes, deep within Pakistani territories, besides coercing Pakistan to take action against militant groups like Haqqani networks and LET etc which so far haven’t been actively pursued by the military. Such operations would have profound domestic implications in shape of severe backlash from these groups, economic degeneration, public discontent and further radicalization of the society which eventually could affect the armed forces as well. Therefore, these operations if conducted could bring about a situation just deemed necessary for implementation of US plans to secure Pakistan nuclear sites. On the other hand if Pakistan takes a stand against US, it may result in direct confrontation which could be used to acclaim Pakistan as a state sponsoring terrorism and subsequently be subjected to nuclear disarmament under the UN mandate.

The case of military personnel having links with extremist organizations would serve the purpose by providing US a space to build upon its hypothesis of Pakistan nuclear weapons falling under the control of undesirable elements. Or else a CIA sponsored coup could provide a classical justification for nuclear safety and security operation in Pakistan. The US plan to secure or strike Pakistan nuclear installation, can be implemented both ways i.e. if the a situation arises where threat of their falling in
wrong hands become obvious or else create environments using covert means, conducive enough for implementation of such plans. Analysing the current course, Pakistan at the moment is heading in a direction where eventually it would meet its day of reckoning and unfortunately not many options are available within this short span of time and Pakistan has to walk on a tight rope.

The only rational course therefore, must be to immediately put its own house in order besides strengthening its bond with its regional countries like Iran, China, Turkey and Afghanistan etc finally to speed up its process of composite dialogue with India towards a logical end. Decreasing dependency on foreign and US aid is vital for Pakistan's survival because historically no state or empire has ever proved to be indispensable in the grand design.

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