

Pakistan Foreign Policy: A Desired National Consensus and Institutional Collaboration

Humera Iqbal

ISLAMABAD: “Prior to elections, the country should encourage and establish a common national agenda where security doctrine and economic vision is primarily laid down for foreign policy so that a coherent guidelines for future development can be carried out” said Senator M. Akram Zaki, Former Secretary General Foreign Affairs, at a roundtable organized by the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) here on Thursday.

Senator Akram Zaki emphasized that foreign policy is the projection and protection of a nation’s sovereignty; security; vital political; cultural and its citizens interests beyond it’s borders. Since foreign policy is interdependent and linked to domestic realities, economic; security; and determined leadership must be the primary focus of Pakistan. Senator Akram Zaki highlighted the challenges faced by Pakistan’s foreign policy which includes country’s relations with it’s immediate neighbors and beyond. To overcome these apprehensive challenges, Senator Akram Zaki stressed the need of focusing on building and expanding economic relations. In this context Pakistan’s aspiring membership in the Shanghai Corporation Organization (SCO) and the recent D-8 initiative has been a positive breath in diversifying its foreign policy.

Senator Akram Zaki while talking on challenges from neighbors mentioned that Pakistan with time developed good friendly relations with China and Iran. However, Senator Akram Zaki said that Pakistan has difficult relation on both its eastern and western front. On western front with Afghanistan since independence Pakistan has experienced difficulties which are extended now with the presence of extra territorial neighbors; US and NATO in Afghanistan. On eastern front with India a long history of conflict and trust deficit, Pakistan should focus on maintaining status quo out and negotiations a necessity.

Senator Akram Zaki stressed on the presence of US and foreign troops in Afghanistan as a biggest challenge to counter as Pakistan might experience more night raids and drones inside its territory in the future. From western front tension and violence might increase for Pakistan. Therefore, Pakistan has to be more patient and cautious of the situation. Senator Akram Zaki maintained that Pakistan being a part of SCO now gives an opportunity to rebuild relationships with the Russian Federation, stalemated after the breakup of Soviet Union, and to have closer ties with the Central Asian states so that a regional cohesion can be established.

On Pakistan’s relations with the Gulf states, Senator Akram Zaki expressed that both sides enjoy good relations due to overseas Pakistani’s and religious linkages. However, Senator Akram Zaki mentioned about the surfacing dangers of western policies that focuses on war against radical political Islam and not terrorism that is creating confusion among Muslims. The western policies have promoted destabilization of Middle Eastern societies through creating a clash within Islamic civilization that leads to religious and ethnic violence.

Report: Roundtable on “Pakistan’s Foreign Policy Challenges” with Senator M. Akram Zaki, on December 06, 2012

During the discussion, Amb. Ali Sarwar Naqvi, Exec. Director of Centre for International Strategic Stability pointed out that identity is the most important manifestation of foreign policy and foreign policy does not remain static but keeps on evolving and changing as per changing international realities. Lt. Gen. (R) Amjad Shoaib expressed his observation on the matter of democracy that the true spirit of democracy is yet to be implemented in Pakistan. Pakistan’s national interest are being challenged while maintaining good ties with both the US and China. Gen. Shoaib stressed that Indian expanding interest in Afghanistan, China, Russia, Central Asian States, and the US are a testing point for Pakistan, not ignoring the various factions US war has created in Afghanistan to be dealt by Pakistan.

Prof. Zhou Rong of the Chinese Guang Ming Daily praised Senator Zaki on being an architect of Pakistan-China relations. Prof. Zhou realistically said that in China, India’s role and East Asia is focused more because of economic interests while terrorism is seen as a challenge. Amb. B. A. Malik said that law and order and effective working of institutions are important factors of foreign policy. Mr. Fazal-ur-Rehman, Director East Asia at the Institute of Strategic Studies, expressed that Pakistan’s hopeful membership in the SCO should not be over looked due to the diverging interests of Russia and China i.e. Russian interests dominate security whereas China’s economic. Mr. Rehman emphasized that Pakistan can contribute in the anti-terrorism mechanism but it must identify and focus on the economic contribution it can make in its neighboring countries.

Dr. Shabana Fayyaz of the Department of Defense and Strategic Studies at the Quaid-i-Azam University said that nature of civil-military relations in Pakistan is a biggest challenge in framing and implementing foreign policy. Dr. Fayyaz said that within institutions a clear line needs to be drawn for sustainable future policies. Syed Asim Raza, Anchor at Such TV, pointed out the confusion among the people about the nature of state that whether Pakistan is a security state or a welfare one since there is no unanimity of policies.

Mr. Basharat Hussain, Research Officer at the Institute of Regional Studies said that Pakistan is diplomatically isolated and there is an urgent need to formulate a foreign policy based on changing regional and global scenario. Moreover, Mr. Hussain said that foreign policy must reflect the public opinion. Mr. Adnan Bukhari from the South Asian Strategic Stability Institute raised two challenges faced by Pakistan’s foreign policy, US policies of drones inside Pakistan; and Internal instability caused by insurgency as these incidents presents image of Pakistan in the international community.

Senator Akram Zaki while answering the participant’s comments concluded that Quaid-e-Azam had laid down the foundations of Pakistan’s foreign policy which were based on peace at home and peace abroad. Senator Akram Zaki stressed that this is the century of Asia and Pakistan has to expand its areas of interests and try to restraint in areas of conflict. D-8 must be a focus of Pakistan to build stronger and closer economic ties as the international community particularly US focus is Asia.