



PV Vivekanand: The US-Pak alliance is queasy

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Leon Panetta, one of the chief spies of the US, was only living up to the expectations attached to his job when he rejected outright Pakistani demands to halt drone attacks and scale down unco-ordinated intelligence activities in Pakistan's soil.

Panetta, director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), in a meeting with Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) head Lieutenant-General Ahmad Shuja Pasha last week, turned down every demand put forth by Pasha, reports say.

Pasha made his demands against the backdrop of the so-called Raymond Davis affair that brought Islamabad face to face with yet another crisis and a taste of how CIA conducts its affairs in foreign lands.

Washington might be patting itself in the back for having rescued Davis, a CIA operative who was charged with two murders in Lahore, by paying \$2 million to the families of the victims. But Pakistan, which felt the heat of popular anger, saw it differently.

There are many speculative theories about what exactly Davis was doing in Pakistan and who the two dead Pakistanis were. But those did have little bearing on fury of Pakistanis that was sparked by his release.

Obviously, Pasha was expecting Panetta to feel caught by the back heel by the Davis affair and be more understanding of his demands.

But Panetta not only stood his ground but also set the record straight.

He refused to scale back CIA operations in Pakistan beyond those co-ordinated with the ISI itself. The CIA boss insisted that the drone strikes were part of his "fundamental responsibility" and that they would continue and maintained that the US government would do whatever it thinks is in its best interest in the region.

Well, that was not exactly very diplomatic, but then the American interpretation of diplomacy varies dramatically, depending on which government and who the US is dealing with.

It is the divisions within the Pakistani state and political establishment that find the country in a weak position to deal with the US and render it incapable of stating the obvious: If there is a problem of militancy in Pakistan, then it is a Pakistani problem that Islamabad is capable of solving and the US has no business to deal with directly with little regard to Pakistani sensitivities.

The Islamabad government is now caught up between American criticism for not offering "full co-operation," and militants' wrath for having aligned itself with the US in the "war against terror."

Islamabad needs American aid and backing but the price that Washington demands in return is too heavy for it to bear. And hence the loud hiccups that we hear whenever senior leaders and officials from the two countries meet. The occasional Pakistani refusal to allow fuel trucks for the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation forces in Afghanistan is only a reflection of the uneasy relationship.

An article appearing on www.nationalinterest.org written by Malou Innocent, a foreign policy analyst at the Cato Institute, observes: "Despite all the feel-good talk about partnership and co-operation, the reality is that America and Pakistan are not 'allies,' but 'frenemies': an enemy disguised as a friend or a friend who is simultaneously an enemy. Clearly, the two governments are pursuing very different and fundamentally antagonistic definitions of 'joint co-operation'."

Ideally, the US would like to deal with a strong central authority in Pakistan that would swing to its tunes without question. However, the US has realised that is impossible at this phase in Pakistan, given the conflicting vested interests of the various power centres in the country and hence its multi-pronged but high-handed approach.

The US cares not much for the grievances of the people of Pakistan who are caught in the cross-fire in the fight against militants. It could not be bothered much even if the Pakistani military kills 100 innocent civilians if one "militant" is killed in one operation.

Panetta's insistence on freewheeling CIA operations in Pakistan in the name of America's national security and on continued drone attacks that, more often than not, claim innocent civilian lives, is only making the US goals — whatever they are — in the region impossible to realise. American strategists are refusing to acknowledge or ignoring this reality and are pursuing the same old policies presented in new packages.

There is much hype in the media about Pakistan's nuclear capabilities and how much the US fears that Pakistani atom bombs could fall into the hands of militants who could use them against the US.

On a scale of one to 10, such "fears" could not be rated at more than two because the Pakistani military is no walkover for militants. The perceived shortcomings in the military's fight against militants are mainly linked to politics, both internal and regional, and are no reflection of any weakness on its part to ensure the security and stability of the country. The hype about Pakistan's nuclear weapons is mainly aimed at justifying the faulty US approach to the country and the region in general.

The US corporate media have made much out of last year's failed bombing attempt at New York's Time Square and used it to highlight the contention that Pakistan is producing militants bent upon carrying out attacks against the US.

Senior US officials have contented that militants in Pakistan pose a much graver threat to the US than Afghan's Taliban, but the contention does not hold much water.

How many anti-US attacks and plots could be attributed to Pakistan-linked militants in the last 10 years?

Indeed, the US has only itself to blame if anti-American sentiments remain high among Pakistanis. It is the US policy and approach that are breeding such hostility.

On the popular level, the Davis affair has only fuelled anti-American sentiments among the ordinary people of Pakistan. Those sentiments would only continue to grow worse if the US persisted in its present course and policy towards Pakistan. Washington needs to sit back and take a new look at what is going wrong where in real terms and come up with an approach that does not compromise the need for respect for not only Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity but also the rights and dignity of the people of Pakistan as citizens of a free country.