

QUESTIONS – Q Point

Q How do you see the current tension in relations between India and the United States? There are criticisms directed at Washington's failure to help India in its crisis at the beginning of the events. How do you see these criticisms?

Ans – There is no tension between India and USA. There is no doubt that the initial response of the US and Germany to address the ongoing 2nd stage of the raging pandemic in India was not positive and did create a feeling of being let down by friends. However, it was rectified speedily and we are seeing the release and arrival of the support from there to in India, including the critical raw materials for the vaccines.

The India – US relations are of mutual interest and like all relationship do have their ups and downs. India needs to address this relationship with balance and ensuring priority to its national interests.

It is important to understand that Indo US relationship is hinged on the current international realities. The 'Indo Pacific' region has emerged as the center of the future geo strategic competition, due to shifting of the economic 'center of gravity', from the Atlantic to Asia and the criticality of Geo-economics in this connected and globalized world. China as an emerging power with its relentless pursuit for a position of preeminence is at loggerheads with US interests, creating conditions for a protracted period of strife in the region. This is also reflected in the hegemonistic actions of China, with its continuing belligerence and bullying tactics in the South China Sea, Taiwan straits, Hong Kong, Himalayas and Xinjiang.

USA, to counter its intensifying strategic competition with the China, needed a partner in the region and India was the logical choice. For India with a dominant and aggressive China as its neighbour and aspirations to achieve its rightful place in the future world order, US support is essential. However, the current hesitancy shown by the USA, fortifies the belief that there is an urgent need for India to achieve the vision of 'Atma nirbhar Bharat' – a self reliant India.

I would like to state that the current criticism is inconsequential, in context of the larger issues at stake. Also, that the positive trajectory of Indo – US relations is anchored on common values, mutual interests for a free and rule-based world order.

Q. Do you think that the relationship with the Biden administration will witness radical transformations in US-Indian relations?

Ans There will be a change in the pace and complexion of the engagement at the apex level. Modi - Trump optics were driven by some congruence in their personalities at some level. It is too early to speak on how the personal chemistry of the two leaders will work out. Undoubtedly, a great rapport will be reflective in the pace of development of bilateral relations between the two countries.

But what is obvious after the first 100 days of the Biden administration, is that the areas of common values and focus are not only unchanged, but have got a positive fillip. A lot of this has been stated in brief in my reply earlier.

So there will not be any radical change in the direction of the Indo US relationship. However, the officialdom will play a more predominant role in the coming days for firming in and taking the next steps in the areas of common interests.

Q. Do you think that the Indo-Russian relations will be affected by what happened?

I think in international relations it is not a game of *either-or*. India has a special relationship with Russia that has stood the test of time, from the time of Soviet Union. Russian military hardware, technology sharing and support for building the strong base of our public sector key industries are there to see as proof of the depth of this relationship. Even in the case of the pandemic, the support extended by Russian leadership was spontaneous, whereas hesitancy by US and Germany were bad optics.

The Indian apex leadership has to see how they can balance their relationships with the US and Russia, while ensuring the primacy of Indian national interests. India can not loose strategic autonomy to take decisions, that are the best for the people of India.

The fundamentals of the Indo Russian relations are solid so the turbulence due to the enactment of restrictive and self-interest oriented US policies ,will not impact the solid Indo Russian relations.

Q. The Corona outbreak has confused the Indian health system, what is the impact of this on the army? Do you expect there to be negative repercussions in the near term? How do you see the army's intervention in the crisis, and does it have the capabilities to help it deal with the magnitude of the crisis?

Ans One of key ingredients for meeting the challenge of Wuhan virus is to be disciplined, both personally and collectively. And discipline is second nature to the soldiers of the Indian Armed Forces. They followed strict protocol on occurrence of a Covid patient of quarantine , contact tracing and other related actions. This internal checks and balances ensured that the armed Forces were on top of the impact of Pandemic. Concurrently the three wings of the Services supported the civil administration in both managing and controlling the public space where required , but most importantly in extending medical support of infrastructure and medical staff. It has played its responsibilities effectively to support the 'all of nation' action plan that is under execution.

As you are aware, India in April 2020, was concurrently stuck by two challenges , both from China. The impact of the Pandemic, that started with the spread of Wuhan virus in mid March 2020, was followed by the hegemonistic action of China, to exploit the nations pre occupation with the calamity, to capture Indian territory in the Ladakh region. The Indian Armed Forces had to rally and meet the complexities of this external threat, while battling against Covid 19. The unholy clash in June 2020, saw casualties on both sides, ie india and China. It is still being played out at the inhospitable altitude of 12 to 18000 feet, with adversity of climate and altitude. It is to the credit of the Indian Armed Forces, supported by resolute political leadership, that it has successfully thwarted China's nefarious designs and gave a befitting response.

With India's external security challenges, including the standoff in Ladakh with China, the nation decided that the Armed Forces should be in the first lot of citizens to be administered the vaccine against Wuhan Virus, along with the Covid frontline warriors of medical and support staff.

As of now the Indian Armed Forces have been 100% vaccinated for the virus and along with its security responsibilities at the borders , is supplementing the national effort of setting up and managing temporary hospitals, transporting oxygen, repair and functioning of abandoned and

disused plants. It has opened its military medical infrastructure to not only the Ex Service men as hitherto fore , but to the local affected civilian population. The support of the Armed Forces is across the complete spectrum of physical and emotional space.

Q. How do you see the army's intervention in the crisis, and does it have the capabilities to help it deal with the magnitude of the crisis?

In addition to what has been stated in the last answer , the Army is fully tailored to meet its ever increasing commitment in this fight against the Wuhan virus. It has the resources , manpower and infrastructure located all across the country, including the remotest areas, that can at short notice contribute to the national effort with its resources and organisational skills . This is while addressing its security imperatives astride the Western and Northern borders with Pakistan and China, respectively.

Q. How do you see the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan? What are the implications for security in the region? What are the possible repercussions on the Afghan interior?

The US led Global War on Terror for the last two decades in Afghanistan has been addressing the shadow of Terrorism, without decapitating the source, which has been acknowledged as Pakistan. Pakistan continues to support terrorist groups and remains the fountain head of terrorism, reflected by the fact that two of the five prominent factions of Taliban, participating in the talks in Afghanistan, are in cohorts with the Pakistan Establishment.

This has a historical legacy, as Pakistan became the support base for training, equipping, despatching and controlling the irregular force to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan, in the 1970s, on behalf of the US and western powers. This was the start of the mujahedeen force in the Region, that led to the eventual withdrawal of the Soviets from Afghanistan. Thereafter, this trained force, along with foreign mercenaries, was used by the emboldened Pakistani establishment ,to start a 'proxy war' in Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. It till date, continues to vitiate the security of the State, resulting in the loss of innumerable precious lives.

With the Taliban coming in a power sharing with the ruling dispensation in Afghanistan in the near future and Pakistan establishment still supporting terrorist groups, terrorist actions are likely to not only continue but keep increasing in intensity, based on the emerging situations, in India and Iran for sure. Also, elements of AL Qaida and ISIS have not been totally eradicated by the western and US Forces. There is likelihood of their re-emergence in some form or the other, not only in this Region/ South Asia but also across the Middle east. that are not only affecting this region but the Middle east and UAE as well. The instability in Afghanistan will be a fertile ground for these groups to re-establish bases and start operating from here, incase care is not taken by the new political dispensation in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan undoubtedly is in for a long period of internal turmoil, more so as the contours of future power sharing agreement between the elected dispensation and the Taliban, has not been resolved. The current state of Taliban violence in the areas of its writ, in the last few months, do not augur well for the future of Afghanistan. Pakistan continues to be an active player and that will further complicate the environment. There is likely to be a regression in the current way of life in Afghanistan with greater restrictions on women and girl child.

Q. How do you see the recent tensions on the border with Pakistan?

The tensions between India and Pakistan is based on border disputes ,that go back to the time of partition of British India, into the two independent countries of India and Pakistan. The present state of tension has been due to the pre-condition for dialogue by the current Indian Political dispensation to Pakistan, to stop of State support to terrorism in India. The fragile economic condition of Pakistan is further exacerbated with this stalemate with India. The change in mind set of the Pakistani establishment towards use of terrorism as an instrument of State power is required before we see any long term resolution and peace along the borders. It was a pleasant surprise when on 21 February, the two Director General of Military Operations of the two countries, announced a cease fire with mutual consent. A god time for introspection by the leadership in the two countries to decide on future engagement.

Q. Do you expect that the UAE mediation will succeed in the long term in bridging the rift?

There are indicators that the UAE has brokered the recent ceasefire between the two countries. However, in my opinion the final resolution, for long lasting peace, will be contingent on the two countries, themselves. They have to to 'let bygones be bygones' and let not emotional baggage influence future bilateral dialogue. Also, Pakistan will have to show positive action to stop its soil being used for waging terrorist action in India. With respect to outside help, India has been repeatedly stating that this is a bilateral matter and is not open to outside assistance. It would be fair to state that the UAE can facilitate the backdoor engagements, with the final action contingent on the two countries.

Q. Do you expect that there will be a temporary lull in the military clashes, or is there a possibility to envision a complete vision to deal with the matter?

Yes there will be a temporary lull in the military clashes along the border of the two neighbours. A good thing as the two countries like the rest of the world are reeling under the Pandemic and the adverse impact on their economies. The current priority should be to provide succour to their respective populations, with necessary health support and protect them from the ravages of the pandemic.

This is a good time to initiate baby steps by the two countries, for meaningful rapprochement .

Q. Does the Indian army have the ability to engage if required?

Indian Army is one of the most battle hardened militaries of the world. It has in 1971 (Creation of Bangladesh) and again in 1999 against the Kargil intrusions, displayed its professionalism and resilience in waging, both conventional war or limited war, against Pakistan. It has to be remembered that 1971 ended with surrender of 93,000 soldiers of Pakistan Army in East Pakistan/ now Bangladesh.

The successful and speedy response against China in both 2017 and last year in Ladakh, has shown the mettle of Indian army. It has to be appreciated that the Indian Army has been flirting with fire, while dealing with the Proxy war in Jammu and Kashmir for more than two decades.