

Pakistan: The unfolding scenario

The bomb blasts in Lahore and Karachi underscore the point that there are forces that seek the destabilization of Pakistan. Actions to achieve this goal can take many forms. These can be 'false flag' operations where the finger points at local political or government agencies while the real identity of the attackers remains shrouded in mystery. These can also be the work of 'rogue intelligence' agencies created from within the establishment of either one or more countries for this specific purpose. To form a mosaic one has to determine who benefits the most.

There is the broader 'balkanization' scenario that has strategic overtones. The Al Qaeda/ Taliban combine identifies Southern Afghanistan and Western Pakistan as the geographic space most suited or its future existence and operations. It extends the space and its sphere of influence by extending eastwards into Pakistan and opening new battle ground in which to involve the Pakistan Army. It uses its assets to strike in Pakistan's urban areas to undermine the internal situation and bring the Pakistan Army in a confrontation with the people. The intensity and geographic locations are then modulated for maximum effect. US intervention suits the overall design, as does Indian exploitation of Pakistan's vulnerability.

There is the narrower more restricted political scenario. The political party that is unlikely to realize its ambitions at the polls and that sees rigging as not being a viable option creates an environment in which elections are either cancelled or delayed. It uses all available assets including 'non state actors'. Street anger because of manipulated crises is also employed.

A 'worst case scenario' from Pakistan's point of view is one where there is convergence of interests and internal and external forces combine to create chaos or even acting independently reinforce each others actions. Many factors fit into this scenario---US-India collusion against extremists and their nuclear ambitions is just one. Implosion from within to bring about fragmentation is another.

Pakistan needs to remain steadfast on the election track. Internal defence needs to be enhanced. The western area stabilization needs to continue. Wavering in the election scene can lead to disastrous consequences especially because Benazir's party scents victory and can play the provincial card if thwarted. A result that brings in a PM from that party can have an overall calming effect especially if the other big party has signaled acceptance of such an outcome. The problem that might upset this scenario is that the government party may not accept being sidelined unless this happens through a free and fair election.