



IA-Forum speaks with Dr. Maqsoodul Hasan Nuri, Senior Research Fellow, Islamabad Policy Research Institute, Islamabad on “Pakistan’s Vision 2020”. By Dr. Sohail Mahmood (IA-Forum, 4/28/2005)



IA-Forum: Before we discuss any future vision of Pakistan, we need to look at the past. Can you please review the vision propounded by the Founder of the Nation, Quaid e Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah.?

Dr. Nuri: The Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah held a vision of a progressive, liberal Pakistan based on just and equitable principles of Islam. He envisioned a Pakistan that would be free from hunger, disease and illiteracy. Further, he cherished the vision that the newly created state would emerge as a peaceful, prosperous, welfare state that would be respected in the international comity of nations and also play a leading role in the Islamic world.

IA-Forum: How far has the vision been realized? Looking from the vantage point of the present, do you think the dreams of the creator of Pakistan have been vindicated or gone sour? If so, why? Or, why not?

Dr Nuri: A brief review of past 57 years presents a mixed record of successes and failures. Pakistan’s strengths include:

1. Surviving as a nation-state. Pakistan despite immense difficulties at birth has survived despite early challenges to nationhood and the shock of the 1971 dismemberment and many other crises.
2. Acquiring nuclear power. It attained the status of the 7th nuclear power in the late 1990s and has been able to achieve near strategic parity /minimum nuclear deterrence with India.
3. Attaining a leading role in Islamic world. In the 1960s-1980s it was recognized as the leader of the Islamic World.
4. Keeping alive democratic urges. Despite bouts of military and unpopular civil rule, Pakistani civil society has had a vibrant press, political parties (despite grave shortcomings), and a politicized public wedded to the ideal of the restoration of democracy.

5. Having a sizable diaspora. It can boast of trained and hardworking Pakistanis (workers and professionals) in the Gulf, Europe, and USA, who have also contributed to Pakistan's economy.
6. Reversing the tide. By taking some bold steps since 9/11 against terrorism, economic slide and isolationism, the Musharraf government has been able to win laurels at least on the international level. This has halted, if not completely reversed, the slide towards "failed nation" syndrome.
7. Having a "frontline" and "strategic partnership" with US. These appellations signify Pakistan's recognition and role in the post-9/11 setting.
8. Initiating and maintaining India-Pak rapprochement since 2004. This is an auspicious start with far reaching ramifications for the region.
9. Claiming 'strategic location' at the tri-junction of South, southwest and Central Asia.
10. Contributing to peacekeeping. Since the 1990s Pakistan has made notable contribution to UN peace keeping operations in various countries located in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Pakistan's failures include:

1. Survival is not enough. Mere survival is not the criterion for any nation state. It is the quality of life that it offers to its people through stability and absence of war and the respect it enjoys in the comity of nations that is important.
2. The Quaid's vision remains unfulfilled. While Quaid e Azam envisioned a progressive Islamic state free from economic and political exploitation, this has still been unfulfilled. It is hoped that the present government will be able to realize its goal.
3. Internal tensions. Inter-ethnic, inter-provincial, stark economic disparities, civil-military and liberal vs. conservative divides have marred the national landscape thus weakening the national fiber. These negative tendencies have exacerbated in the last few years.
4. Neighborhood policy. If peace with immediate neighbors is a criterion of a successful foreign policy, Pakistan has not been able to achieve this. With the exception of China, relations with other neighbors have ranged from hostile to lukewarm. This has exacted a heavy emotional and economic toll. However, the recent rapprochement with India is a positive sign that needs to be taken to logical conclusion.
5. Strategic location. Albeit notable, strategic placement has not reached its full potential. Instead, it has become a cause of vulnerability and weakness.

6. Economic turnaround? Despite governmental claims of high macro indicators and promises of Pakistan entering the league of industrial nations, the “trickle down” effect has not taken place. In fact poverty levels, on the aggregate, have increased. Investment and business are not picking up as desired. In fact, overpopulation and poor education levels continue to offset economic gains made, if any.

7. Unsatisfactory law and order. The law and order situation has deteriorated with ethnic flare-ups, tribal tensions, sectarian killings, and violence against women and minorities.

8. Legitimacy question. The nation remains polarized about the role of armed forces, role of Islam in the state, and questions over political legitimacy. As a result political uncertainty haunts the horizon.

9. Image deficit. Due to above factors Pakistan as a country continues to face a severe image problem despite personal accolades to President Musharraf. Designated as an “epicenter of terrorism,” the sale of nuclear technology by illegal means and fears of nuclear weapons slipping into the hands of Islamist forces/ desperadoes is a staple of international news. The government has been diligently trying to improve these adverse images but reservations still remain with major powers — partly because Pakistan happens to be an Islamic country, partly due to Zionist propaganda and partly ascribable to its own failings.

IA-Forum: What should Pakistan do to cope with the newly arising challenges and realize your new vision for 2020?

Dr Nuri: We must first understand what has happened before we discuss Pakistan’s Vision 2020. The post-9/11 world has undergone a paradigm shift in international relations. With the emergence of a unipolar world and US accent on policies of unilateralism and forcible regime change, preemption and arbitrariness, the international system has become volatile and uncertain. The stability and countervailing checks of a bipolar world have given way to an uneasy angst about future instability and uncertainty. The three US military invasions (Gulf and Afghanistan) in the 1990s have underscored the salience of the global reach and expansionist urge for hydrocarbon resources by a reigning sole superpower. The perceived Islamist attacks on the US mainland have led to US entrenchment of military forces in the Gulf, Afghanistan Central Asia, and greater influence in Pakistan. With the reelection of Bush Administration, the neo-con agenda is in full motion with possibilities of re-drawing of the “Greater Middle East” in accordance with the superpower’s aspirations. For control of nuclear proliferation and terrorism, Syria and Iran are under increased pressure as “recalcitrant regimes” in the Middle East. With stationing US forces stationed in Afghanistan and Iraq, Pakistan now has a superpower as its immediate neighbor. While this provides a sense of short term security as a “frontline state” the

uneasy existence of a superpower with an expansionist agenda poses long-term security ramifications.

Based on premises and existing ground realities some future trends can be delineated that that will shape the region and international system in the next 15 years or so. VISION 2020 for Pakistan should keep in mind the following key features:

Unipolar world to remain. For foreseeable future an essentially unipolar world for the next 15 years with slow configuration towards multi-polarity of the emerging pillars of a new global architecture (Russia, EU, China, Japan and India).

US prolonged presence of troops to remain in the Gulf, Iraq, Afghanistan and Central Asia for the foreseeable future given the geopolitical significance of the region (Israel and hydrocarbon resources).

EU, Russia, China and India's role. India-China, India-SU and India-US long term durable relationship based on centrality of India in the region and rising power.

Nuclear proliferation and international terrorism to remain the focus, especially the latter, of US policies under the new Bush Administration.

Globalisation trends to continue with the induction of WTO, IT technology and regional integrationist patterns.

Increase in international crime due to a softening of borders; drug trafficking will continue.

Curbs on migration will limit frequent travel and job opportunities in the Western world.

Emphasis on good government, legitimacy and democratization will remain the mantra of the US and the West.

IA-Forum: Given the key postulates you just mentioned, what are the key areas of significance for Pakistan?

Dr. Nuri: The first factor is the Pakistan-India-China triangular relationship. Let me explain. As against \$1.5 billion in 1998-1999, the India-China trade turnover has risen to \$13.6 billion in 2004; at the rate of 30 per cent increase over the last 8 years. This trade level may further rise up to \$30 billion by 2010. China's exports in software and back office services total less than a fifth of India's estimated \$17.3 billion.

The triangular nature of relations amongst China, India and Pakistan are undergoing significant changes in the last several years. These changes had profound impact on the whole gamut of their relations, and to certain extent, on bilateral relations with other countries. It is appropriate here to give an overview of the historical background in which these relations have evolved.

During the first decade of independence, India and China were closer to each other than China and Pakistan. Due to this cordiality, Sino-Indian relations were termed as Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai (Chinese-Indian as brothers).

However, the long un-demarcated Himalayan border of 3,400 kilometers and the Tibetan issue soon created a cleavage in their relations and culminated in a short border war in Oct-Nov 1962.

The Sino-Indian rivalry laid the foundation for Sino-Pakistan friendship. As a consequence, cordiality between China and Pakistan developed in the wake of these developments. Had Sino-Indian border war not taken place, Sino-Pakistan relations could not have taken this new turn.

An important factor that provided glue to Sino-Pakistan entente was their common enmity towards India. In other words, the former relations sharply improved in the face of common security concerns vis-à-vis their immediate unfriendly neighbors. Thus, their mutual relations were initially limited and revolved around politico-military aspects.

This nature of triangular relations existed until the late 1970s. In the early 1980s a number of factors were responsible for affecting changes in all dimensions of the triangular relations.

IA-Forum: What factors led to this change?

Dr Nuri: A concatenation of events caused the changes in relationship: the most important being the emergence of new leadership in China under the Paramount Leader Deng Xiaoping. He reoriented Chinese foreign policy and introduced sweeping internal and external reforms. As a result, these reforms had deep impact on Beijing's relations with both Islamabad and New Delhi. Under the new policy, China had realpolitik reasons to cultivate better relations with India — relations that were frozen for the more than two decades or more. By engaging India, China started seriously addressing Indian concerns with regards to China's special nature of relationships with Islamabad. In point of fact, India had expressed these concerns to Chinese authorities at an early stage of their contacts when then Indian foreign minister, A. B. Vajpayee visited China in 1979. Since then, notable shifts in China's policy towards both India and Pakistan have taken place.

China started softening its overly pro-Pakistan approach and adopted a somewhat neutral posture on Indo-Pakistan conflicts. This was well reflected during the Kargil crisis (1999) and the Indo-Pakistan military stand off (2001/2002). Similarly, China has shifted its policy on Kashmir issue from previous firm support for the right of self-determination to a neutral stand and emphasizing bilateral and peaceful negotiations for the settlement of disputes.

China has started reducing its support to Pakistan on the controversial nuclear and missile program, which were irritants in Sino-Indian and Sino-US relations. In fact, Beijing has uncoupled its relations with Islamabad from New Delhi and deals

with the two as independent of each other. At the same time, China understands and values the importance of its “special relations” with Pakistan but prefers to adopt a different approach. Thus, Sino-Pakistan friendship is running parallel to the Sino-Indian normalization (what Chinese say “old friends (Pakistan) and “new friends” (India). Both these are now seen as independent of each other.

IA-Forum: How would you best describe the present political scenario?

Dr. Nuri: Sino-Indian relations have been rapidly improving at Beijing’s initiative. Since the 1980s both have been fast improving their relations and are reaching a greater degree of mutual understanding. The two most populous economies in Asia — the “dragon” and the “elephant” — are moving closer in a spirit of détente with commonality of interests, at least for the foreseeable future (15-20 years). For example, the border issue was the most stumbling block in Sino-Indian relations. On this particular issue, they have conducted, as of to date, 15 rounds of talks.

China has accepted de facto recognition of Indian occupation of Sikkim. In return, New Delhi has expressed its commitment to Beijing on the Tibetan issue. These compromises reflect a policy of good neighborly relations and policy of co-existence.

Significantly, China and India have started military-to-military contacts and recently held a major joint naval exercise. These contacts are at an initial level, but keeping in mind past rivalries, these developments are noteworthy.

Their mutual trade has increased from less than US\$ one billion by the end of 20th century to US\$ 14 billion in 2005 and aims at US\$ 50 billion in 2010.

The other dimensions of relations, viz., political and cultural are also on the increase.

These developments indicate a growing understanding in Sino-Indian relations, which should continue in the following decade.

IA-Forum: Any policy recommendations you might want to offer at this time?

Dr. Nuri: Foreign policy pundits in Islamabad should keep the above developments in mind while devising foreign policy in order to achieve the targets set for year 2015 or beyond. Items for consideration:

The Indian factor is a new variable that must be taken into consideration by Pakistan. India, as a common enemy of China and Pakistan, is no longer as relevant as before.

The platitudes of Sino-Pakistan’s “eternal” and “all weather” relations needs a review: The new leadership in China is highly pragmatic and does not see the world in an ideological-romanticist mode as before. The present level of Sino-

Pakistan relations is qualitatively different from the relations that existed during the Mao-period.

Primacy of economic cooperation over political and military cooperation. "Power no longer flows from the barrel of the gun" as the old Mao dictum said but from the "chimney stacks." It is only after these that relations could successfully enter a new phase of deeper interaction. This can be found from the fact that there are more than 400,000 private Chinese entrepreneurs while only 31 are operating in Pakistan. Islamabad should devise such policies to avail benefits from China's emergence as an economic power. Thus Pakistan needs to build sound economic and industrial ties with its friend.

Military and political levels Sino-Pakistan relations have, to date, emphasized defense and strategic aspects. With the visit of premier Weibeng in April 2005 new initiatives have been launched that tend to diversify these ties into economic sectors.

Expansion of cultural-educational and societal level ties.

Improvement in indo-pak relations would directly serve Chinese long-term interests in South Asia. Such improvement would positively impact Sino-Pakistan relations, too. China would like to maintain ties with both without annoying either party.

Improving the Karakorum highway In the next decade or so, China's western relatively underdeveloped region of Xinjiang province, adjacent to Pakistan, would have considerably registered economic development. It would need an outlet for exports and imports. Pakistan can help China in this regard through fast paced completion of the Gwadar seaport. An upgrade of the Karakorum highway (KKH) is therefore very significant. It would also enhance communications and two-way trade between the two countries from the north.

The law and order situation has been a major impediment to foreign investment in Pakistan. The latter should pay attention to this seriously as no significant Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) or joint ventures will take place without attaining normalcy in the country.

Curbing anti-china activities. Pakistan should ensure that its territory is not used in any way for anti-China activities. Any movement of Jihadi elements should be stringently controlled and no quarter should be given to Xinjiang separatist groups in Pakistani territory.

Establish research centers that should exclusively focus on internal and external developments of China, learning of Chinese language culture arts and history.

Switchover its defense dependence from the US to China for being reliable, geographical proximity; cheaper weaponry, easy accessibility, easy operation, supply without political strings, minimum procurement commissions, and transfers of technology along with equipment.

Avoid military alliance with any other country that is not friendly to China.

India-China relations should not be viewed as necessarily a threat to Pakistan's national interests. In fact, the India-China nexus should be perceived as a sobering and restraining effect on India when it deals with Pakistan.

Steer a cautious line in the ongoing Japan-China tensions (both major Asian powers and aid givers to Pakistan) and US-China tensions, as evidenced in enhanced interest in South Asia in helping to "build India as a major power" and promoting it as a countervailing power against China.

IA-Forum: What about East Asia?

Dr Nuri: East Asia is vast geographical region extending from Myanmar in the South to Japan in extreme north and then southwest to Indonesia. Denoting the distant nature of the region from rest of Asia it can be distinct geographical zones of Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, Oceania and Russian Far East. Culturally the region is diverse with Islam, Buddhism and Christianity as dominant religious systems. Japan, Korea, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia are predominantly Buddhist while Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei are adherents to Islam. And Philippines, East Timor, Christianity. East Asia is a cultural extension of Indian, Islamic and Confucian value systems. East Asia is a hub of trade and business. The end of bipolar world and 9/11 profoundly affected the region. Japan's economic slowdown, restructuring of economies, the North Korean nuclear issue, and globalization and regionalization are emerging trends. Issues affected the region:

By 2020 the region will comprise 7 out of top ten world economies.

US, Japan, China and India are prime actors jostling for power and influence in the region

US is a key player in their development and the future sheet anchor of stability in the region. It has guaranteed the stability of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan through its military presence.

US-Japan military alliance is a lynchpin and likely will continue to be so until 2020. Japan's role in peace keeping and military deployments around global hot spots may increase.

Malaysia and Singapore are espousers of democracy while embedded in local cultures (Islamic and Buddhist). Moreover they are shining examples of economic and political reliance while sometimes exhibiting healthy defiance to the West.

Regionalism as evidenced through ASEAN and ARF are indicators of regional cooperation for economic development.



IA-Forum: Any policy guidelines you might want to recommend?

Dr. Nuri: There is trade improvement of only 15 per cent with the region with Pak trade, with Hong Kong being the highest trade partner. It is followed by Japan and South Korea 1.5 and 1.2. Japan has \$ 1 billion in foreign traded FDIs. \$414 million of trade occurred after 9/11 when new commonalities (against religious extremism and terrorism) were found with close US allies.

The sensitive areas are: terrorism, and disturbed border regions, nuclear weapons, democracy, and India relations. These factors will continue to mould the strength or weakness of relations. South Korea is the second most developed country after Japan. The Korean model was originally adopted from the Ayubian model in the 1960s. There is need for trade, FDIs and business ventures need to be strengthened. Bilateral trade is \$600 million. Japan and Korea are major business trading partners. The ASEAN broadened over the years. With new entrants like Laos and Cambodia. Prime Minister Zafarullah Jamali's visit Pak concession loan facility to Cambodia and Pakistan. The ASEAN countries have followed an indigenous model as these countries have relied on their intrinsic value systems. Modernization and Westernization are two different things: while the former must be followed as they did unbridled Westernization is not desirable as it involves importing Western norms and values that are extraneous to indigenous culture.

We need an image rectification. The policy of "Enlightened Moderation" has to be implemented in word and deed. While in Indo-China the Indian presence is pronounced due to proximity and historical reasons, Pakistan can cultivate relations with Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei. Membership in ASEAN and Asian Regional Forum was done despite Indonesia's opposition. Pro-active diplomacy at the bilateral and multi-level has to be pursued. In this regard, the role of the Indian Diaspora has to be adequately countered.

IA-Forum: What targets should Pakistan concentrate on?

Dr Nuri: Instead of spreading Pakistani assets thin, they should be concentrated on specific target countries is required for quick results. The population factor, instead of a liability, should be converted into an asset by attracting domestic and foreign investment and utilization of human resources. For example, the total FDIs in 2003-2004 were \$38 million against US \$950 million from Hong Kong, South Korea while main investors from ASEAN remain very limited.

Interaction with ethnic Chinese should be emphasized. Pakistan should capitalize on good relations with China and forge economic links with ethnic Chinese in the region who are an affluent trading community.

Pakistan must build up Gwadar. The building of Gwadar and other infrastructural ancillary facilities should proceed at fast pace. But this should be done with keeping the sensitivities and concerns of the Baluch people in mind. It has to be win-win proposition for the locals and Pakistanis.

Diversification of trade. Nearly two third of Pakistan's exports are textile-based. There is a need to diversify manufactured and value added goods based on improved industrial technologies.

Universal education is important for growth of democracy, human development, lessening of extremism, and economic development.

IA-Forum: Can you please characterize the state of United States-Pakistan relation in the contemporary period?

Dr. Nuri: US-Pak relations are pivotal to Pakistan's security. Starting from the Cold War days of the 1950s, they became strategically close in the 1980s following Soviet invasion of Afghanistan when Pakistan became a "frontline state" against then-Soviet expansionism. Except for some interludes in the 1990s, the relations have remained by and large good. However characterized as a "love-hate" relationship, they sometimes oscillated between high expectations and feelings of "betrayal" from the Pakistani side. After 9/11 it was re-designated as "frontline state," strategic partner and major non-NATO ally against international terrorism. Recognition of the US as the sole surviving superpower for the next decade or so, and as a "regional neighbor" (physical occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq) dictated that Pakistan had to maintain intimate strategic ties with the US, while trying to open its options and gain strategic space and maneuverability as much as possible.

IA-Forum: In order to sustain these ties, any suggestions do might want to offer?

Dr Nuri: I can make a number of suggestions. For example, maintain the momentum and continue to maintain strategic ties with the US by providing its utility as a medium sized moderate Islamic country. At the same time, US-Pak relations have to be more broad based (scientific-technological, educational, cultural, trade, business, tourism) than mere military cooperation.

Diversify relations discreetly with Russia, Japan, EU, and other centers of emerging powers.

Check on nuclear-proliferation, nuclear-control and nuclear-trafficking as these concerns have become very central with the New Bush administration. Of course, these stringent measures should be followed keeping in view of Pakistan's own national interests.

Pursue anti-terrorism policies and avoid the impression that Pakistan is going soft on terrorism. After all, anti-terrorism is as much in Pakistani national interest as for any other country. Since the menace of religious extremism and terrorism is going to be on the global scene for quite sometime, Pakistan has to be a serious partner of the major powers, including the US.

Maintain Indo-Pak normalization. The US and major powers are interested to see a peaceful South Asia that's weaned away from a "nuclear flashpoint." Again, the peace process with India is in Pakistan's own interest.

Avoid taking sides in US-Japan, US-China and US-Iran rifts. Albeit difficult under the present international milieu of polarization, Pakistan should endeavor to avoid taking sides and deal with China, Japan and Iran independently. This will involve a test of its diplomatic skills.

The Pakistani diaspora in the US should be mobilized to play a proactive role in promoting a better image of the country, enlisting support from decision makers, and countering Indian caucuses/lobbies/pressure groups in the US.

Prepare for recognizing Israel. At some stage, Pakistan will have to seriously consider recognition of the state of Israel. "Pakistan first policy" in President Musharraf's words has to be followed. First, to dent the emerging Indo-US-Israel nexus, secondly, to dilute Israeli hostility against its nuclear program, thirdly, to garner support from the pro-Israeli US lobby sympathetic to Israel, fifthly, procure needed science and technology, and last but not least, to obliterate the tenacious negative image of Pakistan formed as an "religious extremist state" (supporter of Taliban and staging post for international Jihad). However, this step will have to educate public opinion and must be made in concert with other Islamic states who ultimately will have to agree to recognize Israel. This depends upon progress in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. Given Pakistan's recent flexibility already shown on the heretofore Kashmir issue, this should not be so difficult.

IA-Forum: Can you please characterize the likely scenario of Pakistan and Central Asia in 2020?

Dr. Nuri: From all present indications, the following projections can be made for the foreseeable future (15 Years), barring some major, unpredictable or seismic socio-political changes that could occur in the region:

US geopolitical interests to endure: US interests in West Asia and Central Asia will force it to maintain pressure on curbing Islamic militancy/terrorism.

US unilateralist policies. The newly elected Bush administration will most likely remain committed in pursuing unilateral policies in the region. The 2004 elections in Afghanistan and Iraq, installation of new governments in the countries, democratic changes in Ukraine, Georgia and in Republic of Kyrgyzstan have vindicated the US thesis of post- 9/11 "wave of democratization."

Support to key/anchor states. Support of (Israel) in the ME, Uzbekistan (Central Asia) and Pakistan, India (South Asia) as "anchor states. Pakistan is a "frontline state" against international terrorism and a major non-NATO strategic ally.

The war against international terrorism, nuclear proliferation, drugs, crime and arms trafficking will continue.

IA-Forum: What are the new opportunities and challenges faced by Pakistan? Can you spell out the Central Asia: Vision?

Dr Nuri: Due to kaleidoscopic changes and US physical proximity in the region, Pakistan faces new opportunities as well challenges. While the proximity of a unipolar superpower has its own advantages, it is not without negative aspects as it can lead to over-dictation, constraining of political space and flexibility. Hence, this will require skillful balancing if Pakistan has to optimize opportunities and translate its assets and minimize its limitations.

Let me spell out the Central Asia: Vision 2025 and the options for Pakistan.

The energy-rich Central Asia comprising Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and the Caspian Sea has attracted world attention since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Central Asian Republics (CARs) have a combined land area of nearly four million square kilometer. Through China, Iran and Pakistan, it has access to the Pacific Coast, the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean, respectively.

IA-Forum: What are the options for Pakistan?

Dr. Nuri: The CARs and Pakistan are significant to each other. Pakistan, with its geo-strategic location, can provide the shortest, cost-effective pipeline and transit-trade routes to the CARs. Great potentials exist in Pakistan-CAR relations, especially in hydrocarbon resources, the war against terrorism and promotion of enlightened moderation. However, there is need to exploit those options with shrewd planning by both sides, along with favorable regional and global circumstances.

Central Asia's political and economic legacies have conflicted with the emerging realities of the post-cold war transitional period, resulting in conflicts, instability, political turmoil, and a host of multifaceted challenges. On the one hand, the CARs need to establish their identities, redefine political standing in international relations, and chalk out national strategies to tackle their problems through economic development. On the other hand, the world's well-established MNCs are all set to exploit the fledgling states to their own political and economic advantage.

Central Asia has a two-fold economic significance. The region's population is 55 million which represents a sizeable consumer market along with estimated 23 billion tons of oil and 3,000 billion cubic meters of gas. Being situated at the crossroads between (Asia, Europe, the Persian Gulf, the Middle East, and the Far East) it will undoubtedly gain considerable importance in European and Asian economies.

During the Soviet era, the CARs were treated as a source of raw material. Presently they are pursuing a 'strategy of transition to mixed economy' and welcoming foreign investment by trying to open their economies. Pakistan can serve as a strategic bridge, linking the CARs with the South East Asian tigers and Japan. At the same time, as the CARs seek economic diversification, a unique opportunity has emerged for Pakistan to export goods, establish new

industries, and thereby play a strategic role in bringing about structural change in their economies.

The geo-economic significance has added to its own geo-strategic importance. CARs are in the nascent stage of establishing their own armies as Russia has been their security guarantor.

Central Asia has always enjoyed an important position in Asian politics and in world history. Historically Silk Route is passing through Central Asia was the traditional trading route between Central Asia and the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent since ancient times. Most of the foreign rulers in the South Asian region came along this route.

Pakistan stands to benefit by having bilateral relationship with the CARs — ranging from economic to strategic gains from the region. Pakistan's economic cooperation with the region will create an image of a progressive and responsible partner in the Islamic world. That image will support its role in promoting peace, curbing terrorism and maintaining stability in the region by turning Pakistan into a major energy export route.

Central Asia has always enjoyed an important position in Asian politics and in world history. Historically, the Silk Route, passing through Central Asia, was the traditional trading route between Central Asia and the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent. Most of the foreign rulers in South Asia came along this route.

As an export route, Pakistan's importance for the international energy market could lead to deeper global interest in its stability and security.

IA-Forum: What policy would you recommend?

Dr Nuri: Pakistan must avoid promoting narrow interests of any regional state over others; i.e., Pakistan should not seek to create regional or local surrogates.

Construction of a pipeline from Turkmenistan to Gwadar should be expedited.

Influence should be extended in the region by way of new economic and political agreements.

Engagement of regional and major powers through China, Europe, Turkey, USA, and Central Asia is of mutual interest in the region.

Maintain dependable access to the region by building infrastructure.

Promote internal stability of the cars with the assurance that the region will not be divided into spheres of influence by other regional powers; it is essential to ensure that rivalry of regional powers is minimized.

Develop and diversify transportation corridors to, and from, the region to facilities of trade and business should be made on a secure basis, especially regarding energy and minerals.

Maintain an 'open-door policy' that is in Pakistan's interests.

Strengthen ECO, SCO AND CICA.

Promote barter trade, technological aid and human capital between the two regions.

Reconstruct Afghanistan, that is essential as a gateway to the CARs.

Promote tourism, education and cultural exchanges

Establish research institutes/centers to train a core group of scholars on the region.

Train professionals and teaching of English language, that can be done at a lesser cost in Pakistan.

Export Pakistani unskilled and skilled workers to some of these countries should be encouraged

Enhance collaboration between the Armed Forces

Special attention to Uzbekistan needs to be accorded, as previously they were critical of Pakistan due to the Taliban connection

Kazakhstan and Krygyzstan are more accessible as they were not directly affected by Taliban's activities. Besides, they are comparatively liberal. Pakistan has greater scope in developing relations with these two countries.

Neutral Turkmenistan has a potential for improvement in Pak-Turkmen relations. Turkmen government is very keen to construct gas pipeline through Pakistan. There is already collaboration in training of military personnel, especially of officers in Pakistan.

Promote the cultural and historic ties as exclusive reliance on the Islamic card or slogans are not sufficient.

Avoid taking sides in any conflict in the region.

The region's potential annual market of \$80 billion; even if Pakistan secured five per cent it could earn up to \$4 billion dollars per year--about equal to Pakistan's current total annual exports. The opening of the Almaty-Karachi road and roads connecting Quetta, Bishkek, Mirpurkhas, Osh, Faisalabad and Shikarpur are likely to reduce current cost of imports (via Iran) greatly. This could increase the trade volume.

Build up trade routes. The greatest obstacle to Pakistan's Central Asian ambitions is a lack of direct access to the region. The shortest route is the Karakorum Highway from Rawalpindi through Chinese Xinjiang to Almaty. There are three railheads on the Pakistan side: one each near Peshawar and Quetta facing Afghanistan and one terminating inside Iranian Balochistan at Zahidan.

The Wakhan strip can be used as Pak-Central Asian border but insurgency and warlords in Tajikistan are big hurdles. Air routes between Pakistan and Central Asia (dating from May 1992) are insufficient and expensive for trade.

IA-Forum: Any other reflections on what should be Pakistan's future vision?

Dr. Nuri: Any suggestions about Pakistan's vision revolve around four main competing schools of thought that are currently in vogue and are advocated by: 1) Idealists; 2) Antagonists; 3) Realists; and 4) Alarmists.

The idealists seem and sound starry eyed that present economic and social policies are succeeding well and that they will catapult Pakistan into the top League of Nations as a success story. Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz echoed this feeling when he mentioned that Pakistan will soon become a "rich country" and a member of "ten industrial nations."

The antagonists on the other hand opine that peace and normalization with "arch enemies" like India is neither possible nor imminent and with the "baggage of history" of Hindu-Muslim historical antagonisms reconciliation is not possible. The newly-launched peace diplomacy, it is concluded, is a non starter and going to prove counterproductive. Hence a policy of "strategic defiance" a la Iran is the only option. This school also foresees a "final war" with India that will end all future wars.

The realists or pragmatists take a somewhat sober view and point out that a time has come for Pakistan to alter and adjust its policies, given its limitations, constraints and compulsions. It takes note of realities of the post 9/11 world with new windows of opportunities that are opening up in a unipolar world. It is cognizant of the nuances and subtleties of regional developments and configuration of forces, the presence of the US as an immediate neighbor, military occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, and pressures on Iran and Syria. They would like policies to be framed with focus on geo-economics and policies of non-confrontation, and mutual coexistence.

The alarmists, the last school of thought, characterize Pakistan's inherent contradictions, complexities and convolutions as so overwhelming that they feel convinced that it will not be able to post any economic recovery worth the name, or emerge as a stable nation state in the next 20 years. Moreover, the school posits that it will continue to stumble and muddle through as a "failing [ed] state," that could mean its unraveling as a viable nation state.

As always, the truth lies somewhere in between the varied hypotheses. However, there is no gainsaying the fact that Pakistan has to retrace its steps fast after making many faux pax in the last few decades or so. Whether its policies were due to compulsions or exigencies, acts of commission or omission is beside the point. Again, if they were crafted by design or default should not detain us here.

The sad fact however is that the bitter harvest is being reaped today and is reflected in the overall socio-economic and political slide. Of course, some

unforeseen global and regional developments like 9/11 have compounded problems for Pakistan for which the latter cannot be wholly blamed.

Creditably, the Musharraf government has taken some bold steps but it seems lately that the law of diminishing return is setting in. Many analysts believe that the regime is hobbled by contradictions, inconsistencies, and lack of a megavision. On many occasions, its policies are seen as “one step forward and two steps backwards.” Whether these tactical compromises are necessary and will prove beneficial in the larger national interest, are increasingly questioned.

If Pakistan has to get out of the woods, and to realize its vision by 2020, it will have to stringently adhere to the following measures:

**Economic robustness:** Needless to say, the ultimate respect of a nation is not due to presence of large armed forces, or nuclear weapons alone but a sound economic base, good governance and a satisfied populace, enjoying fruits of equity, justice and development. In other words, it is the ability to offer, donate and extend aid to the other countries and the outside world that evokes ultimate respect and recognition rather than seeking aid, grants, handouts, loans, subsidies or waivers. No wonder, small but economically vibrant countries (Singapore, Taiwan, Holland, Switzerland) and significant powers (Japan, Germany, Sweden, Canada, Australia) are admired because of aid-giving potential, high standard of living and industrial and economic prowess. Therefore, in order to improve its image and be taken seriously, Pakistan has to turn away from the image of an aid seeker to an aid giver or at least attain national autarky.

**Issue of political legitimacy.** Economic and political modernization will remain an elusive goal until the political system attains stability and continuity through legitimacy. That is only possible when genuine political forces representing mainstream political forces, instead of being marginalized, are co-opted into the system. Besides, parliament, judiciary, press and other civil institutions need to be allowed to grow, and due respect to the Constitution is maintained.

**Limits of nuclear weapons** have no doubt a functional utility for deterrence purpose. But then they are no panacea for security related issues as they cannot protect a country from internal disharmony and implosion. President Musharraf has underlined this aspect repeatedly by saying that dangers from within were more serious than from without. Nuclear weapons are there to protect, and paradoxically, if one has to instead protect them, they are a liability.

**Rectifying image deficit.** The image problem will not resolve easily. After all, it is the cumulative effect of past policies of acts of omission and commission (support to Taliban regime in Afghanistan and to Jihadi elements). In truth, the national scene, of poor law and order, sectarian killings, violence against women and minorities does not send positive signals. Perhaps erroneously, the fear still persists that Pakistan is an “epicenter of terrorism” and that its nuclear weapons could slip into the hands of Islamist forces. In fact, Pakistan government has



taken steps to allay these fears. But images have direct correlation with reality on ground. If reality is revised, rectified and redressed, the images will automatically change for the better.

Negative or positive Images are cumulatively built over a period of time on some empirical indicators: democracy, strength of political institutions, economic virility, contribution to science, education, culture; good governance, aid giving potential and a positive role played in the community of nations. Pakistan in the 1960s had acquired a sound image and was cynosure of many developing countries. But its image started plummeting in the 1980s under Zia's Islamization drive and regressive policies. Tinkering with image will prove just a cosmetic exercise. And only positive image would flow from meaningful and progressive developments at home.

Proactive foreign policy and functional foreign policy can result from nurturing peaceful, productive relations with all neighbors. Diplomatic eggs should be put in many baskets. China's example of "peaceful rise" through building of sinews of economic strength (FDIs, trade and business) and harmonious relations with all neighbors is a vivid example of a nation pursuing fast economic development vision in 21st century.

Demystifying geopolitical salience of a country is only translatable into a concrete strategic asset if duly backed by intrinsic economic prowess: on the contrary, with the best of geographical setting, a country could still remain vulnerable and prone to foreign interventions, if economically or politically fragile. The strength of small East Asian economies is a function of their intrinsic strength rather than mere geographical salience. It is their radiation of strength outside their location per se that is important; e.g., Afghanistan, strategically located at the crossroads (Central Asia, ME and South Asia) was invaded and occupied twice due to internal fissures and weaknesses. It continues to be an occupied state. The example of internal implosion of the Soviet Union as a "two- legged superpower" (military and large geographical size) is another illustration. Internal cohesion and strength are a function of economic viability, duly fortified by political legitimacy, than mere location on face of the map. After all, geographically, all countries (small, big, super) can rightly claim that they are located at the centre of the earth.

Aiming for modest goals:

Pakistan has to set modest, realizable, and practical goals in foreign policy. Once it was remarked that Pakistan as a medium sized country aimed too high for a "global foreign policy." Now the primary and immediate need should be to first build this "less developed country" into a "developed country" on fast track. Attaining major power status in South Asia is an unattainable goal, bordering on fantasy. Strategic cloth must be cut according to resources, size, population and economic assets. Needless competition with a stronger neighbor, endowed with bigger size, population and resources is both debilitating and counterproductive. Any mismatch between grandiose ideological foreign policy and achievable goals

has to be avoided. Hegemony can be only countered by building up one's assets, national cohesion and internal strengths.

De-ideologisation of foreign policy is essential under the altered international environment. Needless to say that small or middle size developed countries can equally enjoy respect if they improve the quality of life for their people.

Prioritization of national policies is important. Many analyst believe that under the given global limitations and constraints, Pakistan will have to follow, at least for some time, modest policy goals aiming at "damage control" or "damage limitation," while continuing to seek the best under the existing conditions.

IA-Forum: Any final thoughts on the subject?

Dr. Nuri: The future is fraught with risks but also new and emerging opportunities. Many variables could possibly shape the vision of 2020: domestic, regional and global. Also, the future is contingent upon how sagaciously the policy managers (present and future) assess the correlation of forces at the regional and global level and how adroitly they frame responses in the larger national interests. If national policies are followed with resilience, prudence, creativity and imagination, the reversals suffered could be recouped and "course correction" made in time for the future.

Pakistan presently faces the main challenges of ethnic divide, provincial disharmony, religious extremism, weak economy and heretofore tense relations with neighbors. The latter problem is being fortunately addressed and is showing signs of improvement.

Needless to say, Pakistanis deserve a better life and are not destined to live a life of poverty, hunger, disease, violence and perpetual hatred. They have some unique assets that have enabled them to survive many crises in the past; these assets need to be harnessed and exploited to the full. The human material is excellent but needs direction and genuine leadership. Edmund Burke once said: "patriotism comes naturally once the country is made to look beautiful to its own people."

All in all, it is the leadership that has to "put its act together" and demonstrate political will, perspicacity, and direction. If that is forthcoming, Pakistan could surely turn a new corner and emerge as a self reliant, respected people in the comity of nations. Moreover, it could proudly claim that, as a country, it is at peace with itself, its neighbors and the world at large. Only then it will be able to justify its creation as a separate homeland for the Muslims of the Subcontinent for which immense sacrifices were made and thereby achieve the realization of the vision of Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

The Musharraf government has made a positive start but this vision has to be relentlessly pursued to its logical conclusion. Pakistan has "missed the bus" many times before and cannot afford it this time again.

Let us march towards Vision Pakistan: 2020 with Faith, Unity and Discipline.

Comments? Please send them to [editor@ia-forum.org](mailto:editor@ia-forum.org)