

Time for unity

By Khalid Aziz | From the Dawn Newspaper 20th May 2011

AFTER the 9/11 attack, the US began to put together its response to global terrorism based on its wealth and power.

The US is a strategic gorilla in a world of middling and poor states. It accounts for a huge 23 per cent of the world's GDP and is also the biggest spender on the means of war — a whopping 43 per cent of the global military expenditure.

The other nations don't come anywhere near these statistics. In another context, such abilities give the US an opportunity to define developments, at the same time providing the country the luxury of making mistakes and recovering from these fairly easily.

Clearly its excellence in leadership and knowledge of global issues are formidable as we discovered in the unearthing of Osama bin Laden in our midst.

Pakistan, the other player in Osama's story, is a nation of 180 million people and sits astride one of the most sensitive locations in Asia. Its geographic location is both a bane and an asset. It is an asset if used for trade and commerce but a liability when the security demands of the neighbourhood are considered.

Pakistan's security managers have long dominated the country's politics and commanded its resources due to the prioritisation of security over trade.

Thus Pakistan's people and infrastructure both remain marginalised. Paucity of the resources required to run the state has made Pakistan dependent on external funds that in turn has permitted undue foreign influence to dominate Pakistan's policies.

Despite being a nuclear power, the management of state institutions remains below par. Poverty abounds as investment in the people is low. At the same time, we have relied on religion to bind the country together — a narrative reinforced after the decade-long Mujahideen war in the 1980s. Today, the same religious extremists frequently used as proxy warriors, are tearing Pakistan apart.

After the May 1-2 raid in Abbottabad and the discovery of Osama, Pakistan's civil-military leadership has come out poorly. It is shocking to be found with stolen goods in our front yard; it is a failure of the state managers and not the people. Pakistan is being set up to pay a high price in some form unless the arrest of Osama itself was a set-up.

Unfortunately, when our parliament speaks of the violation of our sovereignty in the context of

this matter it doesn't hold.

States like human beings are not equal — some are more powerful than others and there is one country that has the capacity to cause immense pain and hardship to us and that is the US.

One might be thinking, 'hey this person is taking me to the market to be sold'. I have nothing of the kind in mind. However, I do recommend the exercise of rational thinking for the long-term survival of a normal and a peaceful Pakistan.

In order to succeed, we need to revisit many of our fondest strategic paradigms since that is where the problem lies. Our limited military capacity does not warrant the role that we have assumed.

Secondly, we have known for a long time that the more proxy wars we fight, the weaker we become. In order to get out of this, we need to transform our narrative from being exclusive to one that celebrates diversity; resisting this transition will be suicidal.

In a recently held shura meeting of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, three important issues were reportedly discussed.

Hakimullah Mehsud swore that but for the drones he would have taken over Islamabad. In another exchange over suicide bombings, the shura was told by a participant that innocents have died in every revolution; if the shura had qualms it could compensate those who were considered innocent after they had achieved power!

Will the US exit from Afghanistan? It is unlikely; 40,000-50,000 troops will remain in that country in the foreseeable future. Societies in Afghanistan and Pakistan have been radicalised and it will take more than a generation to make them neutral. Thus the war will not end with the exit of the US from the region. If that is the case, what should Pakistan do?

It is clear that our strategic policies are beyond our financial capacities. The money needed for implementing them combined with the cost of internal security is crippling us. Unfortunately, the dearth of leadership in Pakistan is delaying the change necessary; we have no statesman; only carpetbaggers masquerading as democrats.

Our major political parties are managed by dynastic leaders who place their own interests before Pakistan's. Although democratic political forums have the right to lead the nation and solve the people's problems, we still see them wasting time on rhetoric rather than taking effective action to solve problems.

Clearly, the need of the hour is to stand united. Now is not the time to blame each other. The political and military leadership are sons of the soil and must know that they will have to work together as institutions, not personal fiefdoms. Whatever the differences between them, the civil and military leadership must work jointly to take the nation out of its current crisis.

Secondly this is a good opportunity to rationalise our security doctrine and the national narrative that must reflect principles of universal peace and brotherhood. Pakistanis were surprised to learn of Osama bin Laden's presence in Abbottabad; still, let us use this embarrassment to good effect and become stronger and wiser by reforming ourselves. Pakistan's future lies in building relations of peace with all its neighbours