

Pakistan: Dollars, drones and development

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Last week, the United States of America threatened to hold back some \$800 million it owes Pakistan in military aid. The move was aimed at pressurising Pakistan, or more specifically the defence and intelligence apparatus of the country, to unquestioningly execute plans and strategies prepared at the Pentagon and CIA and to start blindly obeying orders from Washington, DC.

To add to the pressure and give more teeth to this openly belligerent no-holds-barred US policy, the IMF also decided to further delay the release of its billion-dollar no-good loan instalments. From Afghanistan, the US-led NATO allies continued to send regular gifts of drones that attack our tribal belt with missiles and kill innocent Pakistanis. Lately, they have made it convenient for militant hordes to attack our security check posts and villages in FATA. Surely, these are no ordinary problems between two allies but signs of open hostility. The question is: Is it possible to reconcile the differences between the two countries? And more importantly, are we ready to defend ourselves?

Against the backdrop of this heightened bullying by the doomed superpower, the never-ending rounds of meetings between the defence and intelligence top brass of the two so-called allies intensified, and according to latest reports the two sides have decided to mend fences. Nothing official has been forthcoming about the agreements reached in the meetings if any. Even the information attributed to unnamed officials only talks about the points of disagreement. Yet, the impression created by these reports is that the two sides have managed to iron out some differences. As a proof of progress, the US would start releasing the funds that it had earlier threatened to withhold. In the absence of any authentic information regarding the rules of cooperation agreed upon in these meetings, it is difficult to say how long the precarious and superficial peace between the two sides would last. And given the essential divergence in the way the two sides would like to sort out the Afghanistan mess, it is not bound to last very long.

Those arguing for a continuation of this roller-coaster relationship like to talk about the tensions between the two countries as if they were issues between a married couple. They say that the spouses will continue to bicker, but divorce is not a possibility. They say the two countries are indispensable to each other and, therefore, it is imperative that they find a way to reconcile their conflicting positions. The US needs Pakistan's cooperation to ensure a favourable end to the deathly game it has been playing in Afghanistan for a decade and Pakistan cannot be on the wrong side of the sole superpower that sponsors its civilian government and military operations with its dollars, they say. Actually, this is not a fair assessment of the relationship that was obviously not made in heaven. While the US is clearly dependent on Pakistan to fulfil its hegemonic designs in the region, notions about Pakistan's dependence on the global bully are exaggerated.

When it becomes obvious that the continuation of a marriage would result in murder, a divorce is the only option.

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