



Sovereignty as defined in political science textbooks — “omnipotent, permanent, original, illimitable, indivisible, internal and external” — doesn’t exist on Planet Earth, governed as it is by the harsh realities of geopolitics.

What we Pakistanis should know is even superpower sovereignty has limits.

America cannot unilaterally alter or abrogate international charters to which it is a signatory; or treaties which it signs with another government or groups of states even if it wants to, and if it does (as it did under George Bush Jr. with regard to the ABM treaty with Russia) it has to suffer

world censure.

Also, America has no option but to allow many foreign personalities it regards as terrorists — and as 'obnoxious' as many Latin America leaders — to enter its territory and address the UN General Assembly each year in September.

More provocatively, satellites from other nations cross its space, but there is nothing that mighty America can do to stop them from photographing its sensitive installations.

It cannot shoot them down because the 1967 space treaty to which it is party forbids military action in space.

And when it comes to voting for a UN resolution on Palestine, or making a policy shift on the Middle East, Washington's exercise of sovereignty is not 'illimitable' and 'external'; it is circumscribed by foreign pressures.

Since when has a treaty of alliance become taboo or an offence against sovereignty?

If having military alliances and foreign bases compromises sovereignty, then today such countries as Britain, Germany, Turkey, Japan, Israel and many oil-rich Gulf states have their sovereignty compromised.

(Immediately after 9/11, the Indian foreign minister Jaswant Singh offered bases to America.)

Throughout history, especially since the beginning of the nation-state system, countries big and small have come together and formed alliances to protect their territorial integrity, strengthen their military capability, defend themselves collectively, and advance their national interests.

## **M. A. Siddiqi: Sovereignty chorus**

Written by M. A. Siddiqi  
Friday, 26 August 2011 09:05

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In each case, the issue was to determine who the principal enemy was and who the lesser evil.

After the Second World War especially, a new era in alliance-making dawned, with states big and small, superpowers and mini-states, coming together throughout the world to guard their freedom as the Cold War intensified.

NATO and the Warsaw Pact had states of sizes ranging from America and Russia to Luxembourg and Hungary.

Pakistan cannot run away from where destiny has placed it, for it is in the nature of its geographical location that it will continue to be in the eye of the storm.

(Wait for things to hot up in Iran. You will again be called upon to make hard choices.)

This is the lesson we can draw from our history and from the policies we had no choice but to follow — Seato, Cento, MDAP and the Eisenhower Doctrine in the 1950s and 1960s, the response to the Soviet Afghan misadventure in the 1980s, and 9/11 in the 21st century.

The Abbottabad raid was authorized by President Barack Obama, but we forget it was Bill Clinton who long before 9/11 had signed the order authorizing Bin Laden's killing.

Pakistan, like the entire world, knew this.

Therefore, the shock at the American raid is as bewildering as the loopholes it exposed in our security.

Islamabad's options are limited.

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We cannot in misplaced anger and self-flagellation over the May 2 raid squander such leeway as we have and shoot ourselves in the foot.

To be specific, opting out of the war on terror is an option that common sense suggests could spell economic and political disaster for Pakistan, leading to our international isolation, with states traditionally hostile to Pakistan cashing in on our impetuosity.

America's position needs to be understood.

The Isaf-Nato forces have been defeated.

This humiliation has been inflicted not by Germans or Japanese but by .... well ... Muslims. Could there be a greater source of mortification?

No nation accepts responsibility and guilt for defeat; everyone finds a scapegoat, and they have found it in Pakistan.

After all, NATO governments have to woo their voters and win the next election.

This means we must have the wisdom and the nerve to play along when they say 'Do more!'

We should know it is interests that matter, not laughable notions of arcane sovereignty.

Much, though not all, of what passes for foreign policy criticism stems from unwarranted anti-Americanism, whipped up by those who in the 1980s were America's faithful errand boys.

To them, in the 1980s, anti-Americanism was heresy; today 'hate America' is the demand of faith.

It would be unfortunate if policymakers were to succumb to this minority-led hysteria and ignore global power equations and the TNT-filled atmosphere at home and in our environs.

To play Ahmadinejad without his oil is suicidal.

Let us not lose sight of our foreign policy goals.

Given the nutcracker situation we are in, we need a course of action that gives stability to Pakistan's foreign links, advances its security interests and ensures a trouble-free relationship with America, the European Union and the world community.

Z.A. Bhutto once cautioned against having a nagging relationship with any country.

He said it was better to have a confrontation, because in its aftermath the level of relationship could perhaps go down but at least the ties would be tension-free.

We never had the courage to have a confrontation with the US, but the Raymond Davis affair and the Abbottabad raid have imposed a confrontation on us, and this should help fine-tune our relationship with America.

***(The writer is a member of staff at Dawn newspaper in Pakistan where this article was first published on Aug. 25, 2011.)***