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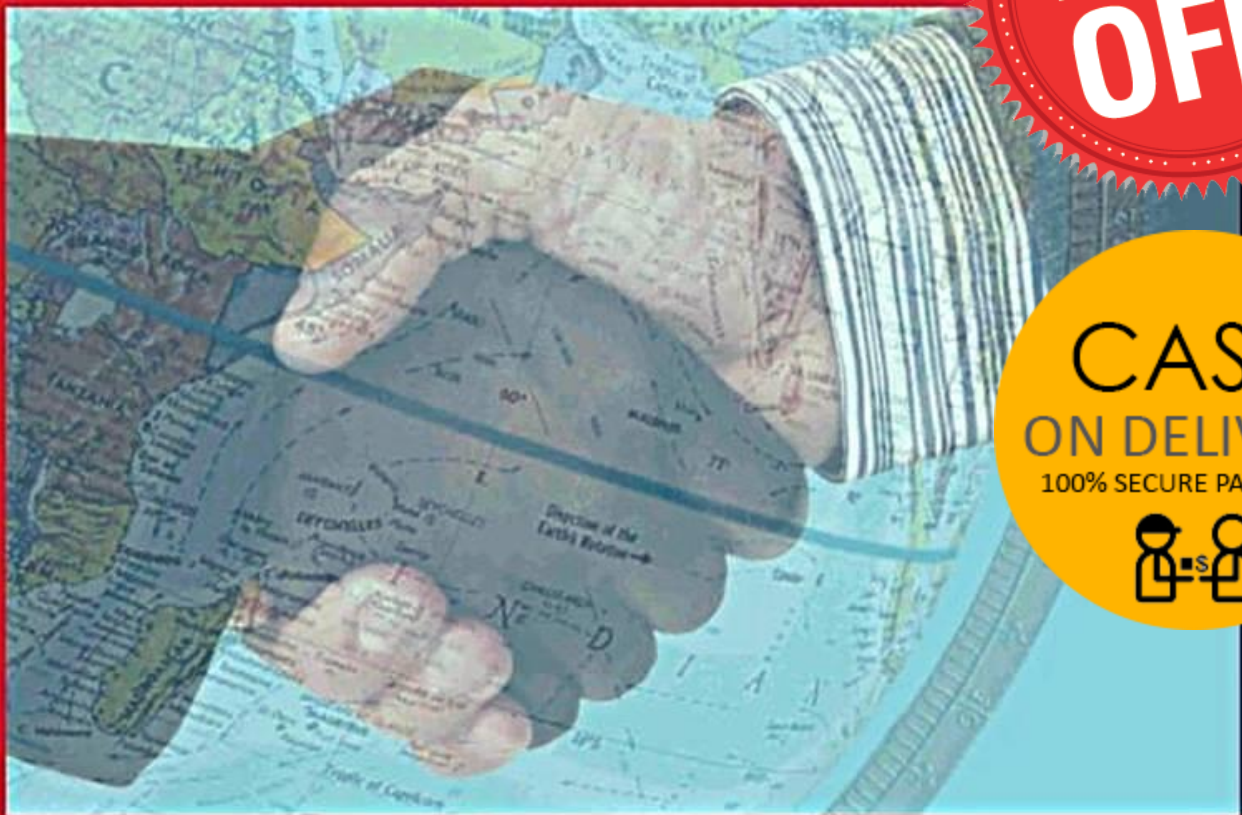
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Table of Contents

PAKISTAN

Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Relations By Shahid M Amin	8
Towards Load-Shedding Free Pakistan Editorial	11
Trilateral Talks Editorial.....	13
Delicate Pakistan-US Relations By Talat Masood	14
Terrorism: A Geopolitical Malaise By Mohsin Raza Malik	17
US Needs to Change Mindset By Muhammad Usman	21
Pakistan-China Ties In Focus By Khalid Saleem.....	23
Pakistan Dismisses India's Stance on Jadhav in ICJ By Hasnaat Mailk.....	26
The Pakistan Phobia in India By Javaid Iqbal Bhat	28
Russia Supports Pakistan's Bid to Join Elite Nuclear Trading Club	31
Pak-Afghan relations: yet another round of optimism by Imtiaz Gul.....	34
As history proves, presidents will come and go, but Pakistan's relationship with the US will always hang by a thread By Sarah Alvi	37
Policy of Full Spectrum Deterrence by Beenish altaf.....	42
IT in Pakistan: challenges and solutions by Syed Hassan Murtaza	44
A Great Leader of A Great Nation By Imtiaz Rafi Butt	48
Can Pakistan Sideline the US and Pursue an Independent Foreign Policy? By Umair Jamal.....	51
Can 2018 Be Any Different? By Talat Masood	54
India Accusation Of Disrespect Editorial	57

ECONOMY

Iran-Pakistan Ties: Impact on CPEC By Asia Maqsood	59
Rupee's Devaluation Dilemma Editorial.....	62
Pakistan's Economic Promise By Munir Akram	63
Tehran won't allow India to use Chabahar port to undermine Pakistan, say Iranian diplomats By Kamran Yousaf.....	67
Fiscal Outcome 1st Quarter, 2017-18 By Dr Hafiz A Pasha.....	69
CPEC: The Long-Term Plan by Ahsan Iqbal	73
Yuan Proposal Puzzles Financial Circles By Khurram Husain	77
Outlook Uncertain Editorial	80

CPEC, SCO Side By Side Editorial	81
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EDUCATION

Higher Education: The glass Ceiling By Irum Maqbool	83
Higher Purposes of a University Education By Dr S Zulfiqar Gilani.....	86
Uniform System of Education For Pakistan By Abdul Hadi Imran	88
Quality of Literature Counts, Not Language By Farrukh Kamrani.....	92
Education Crisis Editorial.....	95

WORLD

What We Really Know About North Korea’s Nuclear Weapons By Siegfried S. Hecker.....	97
The Jerusalem Decision Editorial	103
Concluded War Against IS? Editorial.....	105
Time for OIC to act Editorial.....	106
Russian Advice For India Editorial	107
Putin’s Plan For Syria By Dmitri Trenin	108
How America Became An Imperial Power By Dr. Syed Amir	112
Trump, Jerusalem and the OIC Summit by Sajjad Haider	117
Palestine and peace by Ashraf Jehangir Qazi.....	119
Trump’s Afghan policy and ground realities by Mohammad Jamil	122
Another US Policy Flip-Flop Editorial	125
Climate Change: A Soft Threat By Zile Huma.....	126
USA Against The World Editorial.....	129
America Is Heading for an Unprecedented Constitutional Crisis By Max Boot	131
Finding Balance in KSA-Iran Tussle By Junaid Ali Malik	135
US Isolates Itself Editorial.....	137
Middle East in 2018: A look at Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Syria and Iraq	138
The United States Should Resolve to Avoid War With North Korea in 2018 By Colin Kahl.....	143
‘America First’? So Far, Trump’s Foreign Policy Mostly Puts America Last. By Aaron David Miller and Richard Sokolsky	149

PAKISTAN

Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Relations By Shahid M Amin

MAINTAINING close friendship with Saudi Arabia has long been a pillar of Pakistan's foreign policy. No doubt, Pakistan has friendly relations with many countries in the world. In the Muslim world, relations with Turkey eg have been exemplary. However, friendship with Saudi Arabia covers strategic, military and economic interests of a magnitude not found in Pakistan's relationship with any other country, except for China. The foundation for Pakistan's friendship with Saudi Arabia is, of course, the Pakistani people's strong attachment to Islam. They deeply respect Saudi Arabia as birthplace of Islam where its two holiest cities are located. Millions of Pakistanis visit Saudi Arabia each year for pilgrimage and other reasons.

Since the emergence of Pakistan, close ties have existed between the two countries. Saudi Arabia supported Pakistan in the two wars with India in 1965 and 1971. It stood squarely behind Pakistan on the post-1971 War issues like return of PoWs and non-recognition of Bangladesh. It has always supported Pakistan on the Kashmir issue. When there was Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in 1980, Pakistan saw it as a direct threat to its own security and decided to support Afghan Mujahideen in their war of liberation. Saudi Arabia fully supported Pakistan's efforts since it considered Pakistan's security as its own security. There has always been very close military collaboration between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

Over the years, Pakistan has received more economic aid from Saudi Arabia than from any other Muslim country. The Faisal Mosque in Islamabad is a Saudi gift. When sanctions were imposed on Pakistan by USA and other countries, after our nuclear explosions in 1998, Saudi Arabia supplied oil to Pakistan free of cost for several years. The largest number of Pakistani workers abroad is in Saudi Arabia, an estimated three million. Their remittances are the highest from any single country in the world. Saudi Arabia is the largest trading partner of Pakistan in the

Middle East. Pakistani leaders pay more visits to Saudi Arabia than to any other country.

Pakistanis have played a key role in the overall development of Saudi Arabia. Pakistan has trained a very large number of Saudi military personnel. On the strategic side, since 1950s, all Pakistani governments -civil and military- have assured Saudi Arabia that whenever there is a threat to Saudi security, Pakistan will come to its help. There is no formal treaty to this effect but this assurance has been repeated time and again. In 1969, Pakistani pilots saw action against South Yemen to repel an incursion by the Communist regime. Throughout the 1970s, Pakistani troops were stationed in Saudi Arabia near the Israeli border. In 1979, the siege of Ka'aba and the Grand Mosque was ended with the help of Pakistani special units. During the 1980s, an unprecedented number of Pakistani troops were stationed in Saudi Arabia, mainly for internal security. In the Gulf War of 1990-91, several thousand Pakistani troops were sent for the defence of Saudi Arabia. At the present time, Pakistan is a member of Saudi-led Islamic Military Alliance against terrorism: its former army chief General Raheel Sharif is commander-in-chief of IMA.

Pakistan-Saudi relations are important for both countries and need to be carefully nurtured, based on mutual respect and consideration of each other's constraints and peculiar circumstances. As a proud country, Pakistan cannot be taken for granted. There must be appreciation in Riyadh that even though Pakistan is a nuclear power, it has serious security concerns, mainly due to aggressive designs of its large neighbour India. It cannot over-stretch itself nor can it afford to have bad relations with an important neighbour like Iran. Pakistan has made a huge commitment that it will help if and when there is aggression against Saudi Arabia. But there is no commitment that Pakistan will join Saudi Arabia when it goes to war with a third country. In a recent case, it should have been understood that since Yemen had not invaded Saudi Arabia, Pakistan could not be expected to get involved. Pakistan also does not want to be dragged into sectarian conflicts, since it has always sought to promote relations with Muslim countries, irrespective of sectarian differences. Terrorism is a common concern for Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Pakistan has suffered heavily due to terrorism, particularly due to its support of Afghan Jihad, which did succeed but left behind harmful consequences. Religious extremism has grown and led to terrorism. The Afghan Jihad radicalised and militarised Islamic extremists and created many Frankensteins. Thousands of

Pakistanis have been martyred and there have been heavy financial losses. One factor for rise of religious extremism, since 1980s, is Saudi financial and ideological support for certain religious seminaries and religious groups in Pakistan. Probably, Iranian support for Shia groups in Pakistan induced Saudi Arabia and some Gulf States to patronise Sunni groups in Pakistan. But the cold war between Saudi Arabia and Iran has made Pakistan a battleground and destabilised it.

Moreover, it constitutes an unwarranted interference in Pakistan's internal affairs. To ensure Pakistan's security, which has been an important Saudi concern, this kind of support for Pakistani religious groups must be stopped. Important internal changes are at present taking place in Saudi Arabia. Some of the reforms were overdue but the pace of change can be destabilising. Similarly, too many fronts have been opened in foreign policy. As a well-wisher, Pakistan hopes that matters will go smoothly in Saudi Arabia. Political stability of Saudia has long been taken for granted and it remains important not only for Saudi Arabia but also for a close friend and well-wisher like Pakistan.

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Source: <https://pakobserver.net/pakistan-saudi-arabia-relations/>

Towards Load-Shedding Free Pakistan | Editorial

The government announced Sunday that 63% of the feeders in the country are load-shedding free and criteria being adopted for the purpose means no electricity shortage or outage for regions where theft or losses are minimal. Minister for Power Division Sardar Awais Leghari while giving details at a news conference said that zero load-shedding feeders include LESCO 1227, GEPCO 748, FESCO 896, IESCO 710, MEPCO 763, PESCO 309, HESCO, 204, QUESCO 61 and tribal areas 29 feeders.

This is not a small achievement if one recalls what present government inherited in 2013 despite tall claims and repeated claims by its predecessor PPP govt during its five-year tenure. PPP added to woes of the people and it only complicated the situation by launching schemes like rental powers that provided almost no relief to consumers but the country is still trying to grapple with the consequences in international court for settlement of disputes. The incumbent government worked hard and launched thermal, hydel, solar, wind and nuclear power projects, many of which are now contributing to the national grid and many more are in different stages of implementation. The announcement of zero load-shedding is not because of reduction during winter season but the country today has 2,700 MW of surplus electricity and the situation would improve further in coming months when more projects would start generating electricity. By successfully addressing the chronic problem of power outage, the PML (N) government has disproved assertions by leaders like Syed Khurshid Shah, who have been saying that the menace of load-shedding would be there in 2018 as well. Apart from electricity, the present government also took practical steps to overcome gas shortage and it was because of import of LNG that today there is no gas load-shedding, unlike in the past, in any part of the country even in winter when consumption increases significantly. Uninterrupted availability of electricity and gas means accelerated socio-economic development, credit for which would surely go to the policies pursued by Mian Nawaz Sharif, who has a vision to develop Pakistan on modern lines. The announcement of load-shedding free Pakistan would further boost confidence of the people in developmental approach of PML (N). Hopefully, the achievement would be sustained and steps would be taken to address remaining

ills of the power sector including replacement and improvement of distribution system, new transmission lines and elimination of corruption.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/towards-load-shedding-free-pakistan/>

Trilateral Talks | Editorial

The meeting between the foreign ministers of Pakistan, China and Afghanistan in Islamabad – coming just a couple of days after the first ever Speakers Conference of regional parliamentary leaders – is part of Pakistan's push to pursue a foreign policy that isn't US-centric. Our relationship with Afghanistan in particular has suffered because of the US-India nexus and the main aim of this meeting was to begin repairing the damage. A start was made when Afghanistan agreed to be part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor even though it had expressed serious reservations about it in the past. Afghanistan's stance was that it be allowed to use Pakistani territory for trade with India under CPEC, and it withheld access to Central Asia until we did so. Now, however, it has realised that the potential benefits of CPEC – and the massive Chinese investment it brings – are too great. As the US is becoming further embroiled in an unwinnable war in Afghanistan, China has stepped up its involvement in the country. This has primarily been economic but now it is looking to be more politically active as well. The peace process in the country was believed to be all but moribund as the US announced its plans to pour in more troops but China, which has been part of talks with the Afghan Taliban before and is seen by all sides as an honest broker, used this meeting to take the lead in reviving it.

If the damage that has been done to the Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship is to be repaired, it is essential that the Afghan government try to reach a negotiated peace settlement with the Afghan Taliban. Ties between the two countries worsen every time the Afghan government accuses Pakistan of supporting the Afghan Taliban. Pakistan is important for its perceived ability to bring the Afghan Taliban to the negotiating table, which is why China has proposed restarting the three-country peace process which has been moribund since 2015. At the same time, we need to diversify our ties with Afghanistan so that they are not entirely dependent on security issues. Inviting Afghanistan to join CPEC is a good start not only for Pakistan but for the Afghans too who would probably ideally not be dependent on the US. As the economic fortunes of Pakistan and Afghanistan become increasingly intertwined, both countries will find it easier to withstand American pressure and go their own way.

Source: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/261396-trilateral-talks>

Delicate Pakistan-US Relations By Talat Masood

Managing relations with the US has always remained Pakistan's greatest foreign policy challenge. Military rulers whether it was Ayub, Zia or Musharraf sought legitimacy by submitting to America's global and regional agenda and relations remained generally satisfactory and even cordial. The most recent and glaring example of this cooperation was Pakistan's robust support to the Afghan Jihad during Soviet occupation and later its involvement in Afghanistan after the events of 9/11. But these expedient policies had long-term consequences whose ill affects are visible even now.

It is somewhat sad that either by coincidence or otherwise whenever civilian governments have been in power, whether it was the PPP or the PML-N, they were subjected to US sanctions or remained under pressure. It was Pakistan's nuclear programme that was the rationale, although during military regimes for expedient reasons it was overlooked by Washington.

Once again we are undergoing a very challenging phase of our relationship with the US. We are being continuously blamed for providing sanctuary to the Haqqani Network and the Taliban Shura. Denial by the Pakistani side is not accepted on its face value and the commander of Nato-led coalition in Afghanistan, Gen John Nicholson, said that Pakistan has not changed in its support for the Haqqani Network and the Taliban Shura, the very groups that they are fighting. The secretary of state and senior members of the department of defence have made similar scathing statements. This accusation clearly implies as if Pakistan is not an ally but working against the US's interests.

The visit of Secretary of Defence General Mattis was rightly given great weightage, as he is one of the few members of the administration that enjoys the confidence of President Trump. The way the state department has been sidelined and the secretary of state apparently on the way out, the department of defence has assumed great importance.

Pakistan's relations with the US are going through a difficult and unpredictable phase. The warnings by the state department and General Nicholson's statement

preceding Gen Mattis's visit shows that either the US does not believe in the veracity of Pakistan's version or deliberately accuses us to scapegoat its failures. In fact, it is more of the latter. For in recent months, Pakistan has taken effective measures to ensure that the Haqqani Network and the Taliban leadership do not use Pakistan's territory. It is clear that our army has taken very concrete steps that the Taliban or its ally the Haqqani Network does not operate from the Pakistani soil. But surely, it does not want to antagonise the Taliban leadership to an extent that should make them its enemy, as Pakistan is already facing the challenge of coping with Indian and Afghan hostility. Moreover, Pakistan's contention is that the Taliban are a significant force in Afghanistan and merely relying on military force to subjugate the insurgency is unlikely to succeed. The solution lies in giving greater weightage to political engagement.

The visit of Mr Tillerson, secretary of state, and the recent one of Secretary of Defence General James Mattis suggests the pressure Trump administration is mounting on Pakistan. Indications are that the Pakistan Army will go only to some extent in meeting the US's demands. As the Foreign Office spokesperson stated recently Pakistan would try to seek common ground. This point has been reiterated during the middle-tier talks that took place recently as well.

Withholding of the Coalition Support Fund of \$700 million by the US has also not been well received, as this is the amount that Pakistan has already spent in providing services. If unfortunately, measures taken by Pakistan are unable to satisfy the Pentagon and the Trump administration it could lead to the US stepping up drone attacks. It could also withdraw the Non-Nato ally status and completely cut off aid. The worst-case scenario would be if the US's expected winter offensive against the Taliban fails. In its frustration, it could unjustly blame Pakistan as sponsor of terrorism and apply strict UN sanctions. Pakistan understands all this but can only go that far while protecting its national interests. If the unfairly US pressure on Pakistan continues it will only push it more into the fold of the Chinese. Pakistan, meanwhile, is also trying to improve relations with Russia and Iran and focus more on Muslim countries. Its efforts to a large extent have been fairly successful. Furthermore, with the US engaged in serious confrontation with North Korea, having extremely tense relations with Iran and deep involvement in Syria, will it be prepared to open another front against Pakistan? However, President Trump and his team in the interim will keep the pressure, blowing hot and cold but keeping the channels of communication open. Despite the US's present attitude it

understands Pakistan's value in the region and will only go that far. Meanwhile, it is expected that the Pakistan Army will keep a tight leash on the Haqqani Network, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and Lashkar-e-Taiba so that it does not provide the US any excuse to malign it. Pakistan understands that there are mandatory obligations based on the UN resolutions 1267 and 1822 that compel it to take effective measures against these organisations. Meanwhile, civil and military leadership are likely to step up efforts to improve relations with Afghanistan by removing their misgivings.

Despite recent setbacks Pakistan needs to make every effort to improve relations with Washington. It ought to step up the channels of traditional diplomacy — mutual visits by political and military leadership. Pakistan in the past has neglected public diplomacy, which too could play an effective role in correcting our image. This would require greater interaction at the civil society level. Pakistani intellectuals and diaspora need to be more active in their interaction with US think tanks such as Brookings, Carnegie, Hudson Institute and American Enterprise. These institutions play a major role in influencing American policy at the White House, the state department and the department of defence.

Published in The Express Tribune, December 6th, 2017.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1576806/6-delicate-pakistan-us-relations/>

Terrorism: A Geopolitical Malaise By Mohsin Raza Malik

Yet another bloody wave of terrorism has just swept across Pakistan, leaving many Pakistanis dead and many more wounded. Pakistan has lost three brave and ablest senior police officers in three separate terrorist incidents in Quetta and Peshawar. Last week, four TTP terrorists stormed Agriculture Training Institute in Peshawar, killing at least nine people. Had the local police and security forces not timely thwarted this attack, death toll would have risen manifold. On last Wednesday, two worshipers were gunned down in an Imambargah in Islamabad by two unidentified riders. Last month, in another gruesome incident of terrorism in Turbat (Baluchistan), as many as 20 young men were shot dead by the BLF separatists. Similarly, a number of young military officers and personnel have also embraced martyrdom while fighting against the militants across the country during the last few months. Noticeably, Pakistan's internal security is currently in disarray.

Undeniably, there is a visible reduction in the intensity of terror incidents in the country as a result of Pakistan's domestic counter-terror measures. However, these measures have yet not succeeded in completely eliminating this menace from the country. With a score of 8.4 out of 10, the Australia-based Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) has recently ranked Pakistan fifth on the Global Terrorism Index (GTI). This situation is still quite worrisome. According to DG ISPR, the recent terrorist attack on Peshawar Agriculture Institute was planned by the terrorists based in Afghanistan, and the attackers were also in contact with their abettors in Afghanistan. As a matter of fact, a hostile Afghanistan, sharing more than two thousand Kilometers long but porous border with Pakistan, is currently posing the greatest threat to Pakistan's internal security. Most of the terrorist attacks in Pakistan are planned in Afghanistan under the very nose of anti-Pakistan intelligence agencies, namely the RAW and NDS. Most of the miscreants fled to Afghanistan as soon as Pakistan military formally launched Operation Zarb-e- Azb in June 2014. Now these 'broken backed' terrorists have recovered to attack Pakistan afresh, thanks to numerous 'rehabilitation facilities' in Afghanistan.

There have been certain conspiracies theories that the US is desirous of undermining the conventional military strength and nuclear capacity of Pakistan as part of its 'Greater Middle East' initiatives. It is also believed that the US is playing

a game of run-with-the-hare-and-hunt-with-the-hound in this region in the name of War on Terror. Now Pakistan is also an important component of its so-called China containment policy since the CPEC, a flagship project of China's One-Belt One-Road (OBOR) initiative, is just situated in Pakistan. In fact, the broader US strategic interests have somehow converged with India's security doctrine in this region. Therefore, we can observe both 'strategic partners' jointly calling the shots in Afghanistan to the disadvantage of Pakistan. It is a fact that militancy has mushroomed in Pakistan since the US invasion in Afghanistan.

The CPEC route largely passes through the provinces of Baluchistan and KP. So both troubled provinces have become the primary target of terrorism and militancy. Pakistan Army has raised a Special Security Division (SSD) to secure the CPEC route and its accompanying projects in Pakistan. However, it is not humanly possible to fully secure every inch of the CPEC route. Indeed, Pakistan will have to evolve a comprehensive security strategy to improve the general state of its internal security. Pakistan's domestic counterterrorism policy includes a number of kinetic military actions (Operation Zarb-e-Azb, Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad, IBO's, Combing Operations etc.) besides some preventive measures in the form National Action Plan.

The primary focus of NAP is on containing sectarianism and religious extremism in Pakistan. In fact, sectarianism is just one of many aspects of the phenomenon of terrorism. Noticeably, the pattern of terrorism has transformed from the traditional sectarian and jihadist model to an anti-state model, which primarily aims at destabilizing Pakistan. Moreover, most of the suicidal attackers are not the students of religious seminaries, but usually are the tender-minded young boys who have been brained-washed for this particular purpose. Similarly, their facilitators are generally the rouge criminal elements who only work for money. Therefore, now Pakistan should seriously focus on evolving a multi-prong external strategy to adequately tackle the geo-strategic dimension of terrorism.

Pakistan currently doesn't possess any significant external strategy or regional policy to counter or neutralize anti-Pakistan elements in Afghanistan. Instead of proactively endeavouring to force Afghan government to abandon its hostile and cunning policies against it, Pakistan has mostly been seen defending itself against the terror allegations level by the US and Afghan government. After every major terror incident in Afghanistan, Afghan government readily blames Pakistan.

Similarly, the US has also started holding Pakistan responsible for its current Afghan woes. It has long been asking Pakistan to eliminate terrorist sanctuaries inside its territory. So, during their recent visits to Pakistan, both the US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and US Defense Secretary Jam Mattis just resorted to the US typical 'do more' rhetoric.

Pakistan needs to initiate a 'strategic dialogue' with the US to marginalize anti-Pakistan forces in Afghanistan. The US has visibly failed to accomplish its desired objectives in Afghanistan despite fighting the longest and most expensive war in its history. So now the US-India 'strategic partnership' would also get it nowhere. Instead, the US may lose the confidence of its important 'non-NATO ally' in this region. Moreover, Pakistan should also try to engage India through back-channel diplomacy, preferably at the NSA-level, to negotiate the terms of peace on reciprocal basis.

Iran is another key player in the region. Following the US Invasion in Afghanistan, Iran helped the US topple Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Iran has influence on certain non-Pashtun Afghan groups. Following the development of Chabahar Port, Iran occupies a crucial position in the regional connectivity. It also has an important role in connecting Afghanistan to the outside world. Pakistan can hardly afford an unfriendly Iran alongside a hostile Afghanistan in this region. Therefore, Pakistan should focus on improving its long-strained relations with Iran. Iran can help Pakistan in stabilizing its troubled province Baluchistan. COAS General Qamar Bajwa's recent official visit to Iran is a positive step in the right direction. This process should certainly be intensified through a serious diplomatic maneuvering.

A harmonious civil-military relationship is a sine qua non for devising a comprehensive strategy as well as foreign policy to combat terrorism inside and outside Pakistan. But regrettably, at the moment, there exists a considerable mistrust between these two crucial state institutions. Both are trying to establish their respective institutional superiority in the wake of current political turmoil. So the civilian and military intelligence agencies are just busy in spying on each other rather than penetrating into the terrorists' network to pre-empt terror attacks in the country. The recent wave of terror in Pakistan signifies, among other things, the dilapidated state of our intelligence apparatus. Last week's humiliating capitulation of Federal Government before the TLY's clerics in Islamabad is really worrisome.

If Pakistan can't handle a few fanatics in the capital city, how can it overcome terrorism and militancy, involving a large number of state and non-state actors?

Considering Afghanistan and Pakistan a single war theatre, the term "AfPak" has been coined by the US military strategists and formulators of foreign policy. Now The Office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan has been established in the US to safeguard the US broader strategic Interests in both countries. Probably influenced by this US geographical division, the Islamic State militants have also recognized Afghanistan and Pakistan a single region- "Khorasan". Therefore, Afghanistan and Pakistan are now the 'Area of Responsibility' of ISIS-Khorasan. In fact, the so-called AfPak region became volatile and destabilized as soon as US invaded Afghanistan in 2001. This region has turned into a battleground where a number of proxy wars are being fought. Now the fate and future of both troubled countries are interlinked. Therefore, there can be no peace and stability in 'AfPak' unless the 'friendly occupying forces' leave Afghanistan for good.

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Source: <http://nation.com.pk/07-Dec-2017/terrorism-a-geopolitical-malaise>

US Needs to Change Mindset By Muhammad Usman

US is at loss not to find any practical change in attitude of Pakistan despite flurry of high profile visits and overtures of late. Last one in series was visit of US Secretary of Defence, James Mattis to Pakistan. No agonising wait or worry was witnessed as used to be the case in past. Calm and composure marked the atmosphere. Visit started at low key and ended equally unceremoniously. Earlier visit of Secretary of State, Tillerson also bore similar look and end. Tipping point hit mutual relationship when US announced new South Asia policy wherein, Trump blithe fully and summarily ticked Pakistan part of problem and required Pakistan to change and change immediately.

Instead opposite happened. No more do more. No more lopsided relationship. Pakistan does not need US money. It wants understanding of its concerns, not symbolically but substantively. Quid pro quo is the key. In case of Pakistan, US is not accustomed to this kind of behaviour however, since then, US is soft, civil and conciliatory. Much to their chagrin, all this is falling as if on deaf ears. National leadership of Pakistan of present times is neither frantic nor foolhardy. They have given and seen blood. They are wide awake and understanding but also know limits of flexibility. Pakistan does not want confrontation. It wants friendship but parity is the condition. To the contrary, US wants us callously to stretch beyond our redlines. It was just matter of time when impasse envelopes because divergent paths part only. It has not happened first time. Past history is replete of such galling mishaps. A mindset born of notions of a big super power is the chief cause; it arrogates to itself the right to impose own will and preference. It abhors home grown solutions.

A big super power could wrench out big advantages without responding in sufficient, leave alone equal measure. They draw wish list and own calendar. Impatience is abiding habit. World politics resembles a village politics where mighty overrules and weak submit or leave. Former holds weak at allure or gun point. They could take them on ride and off load when not needed without admitting liability of any sort. Even their peripheral interests reign supreme regardless of what it costs to weak. They have temerity to relegate weak even for something mere fanciful. Weak is taken for granted and forced to serve meekly. Subsistence

to weak is considered a largesse. Unbounded bounty/booty to powerful is as of divine right. In case of equals or relatively stronger, tone and behaviour of a big power change to mild and conversational.

At quick glance, one would find almost all in history of Pak US relationship. US new policy is the latest edition. In its aftermaths, US is increasingly growing anxious and impatient. Notwithstanding conciliatory tone and tenor of US officials, content still remains of coercion, intimidation and censure. Few examples are; US is willing to work one more time with Pakistan before taking whatever steps are necessary to address issue of safe havens for terrorists in Pakistan. US would love Pakistan to do that. Safe havens inside Pakistan have worked to detriment of our capacity to do what we needed to do in Afghanistan. Pakistan has not yet taken steps to satisfy US. Pakistan has to act indiscriminately. Pakistan has much to lose if does not change path.

Admittedly, US has also grown stubborn partly because of our undue acquiescence. It was unfortunate for Pakistan to continue so even after becoming a nuclear power and reduced dependence on US. It was bad part nevertheless, now in Pakistan, new winds have started blowing. It is shaping a landscape which is largely opposed to what Pakistan had yesterday. A new political force PTI, whose leader has emerged. Imran Khan stands firm and resolute after what Pakistan has done to safeguard its supreme national interests. Pakistan is becoming fast an open society which undoubtedly, is a repository of new sources of energy and solution. Faced with unending travail of formidable odds, people of Pakistan have learnt art of living in extreme times. They display great resilience and ingenuity to survive.

This is the ability which our adversaries ought to account for. People at large are critical of US and its policies regardless of perception in corridors of power, still held by our ruling elite. It becomes readily a national rallying cry when Pakistan is confronted with India and US. With new US policy in force, US and India would gain. Pakistan is sheer loser. Pakistan is a credible nuclear power. It may be a sheer lunacy if a nuclear power like Pakistan is pushed to wall. In nutshell, dynamics in Pakistan have changed. It calls for fresh approach, not in form only but in substance also. It would in interests of collective good in region if US understands new phenomena and changes its mindset/approach.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/us-needs-change-mindset/>

Pakistan-China Ties In Focus By Khalid Saleem

THERE are no two opinions that the twenty-first is destined to be Asia's century. Asian states, therefore, particularly ours that is so strategically situated geopolitically, have to keep this in mind while doing their calculations. Some of our relationships in the Asian context are of vital importance and no one should be allowed to tinker with them. The relations between Pakistan and China fall in this category. Before going further, some incontrovertible facts need to be put on record. Firstly, Pakistan is a proud nation of some two hundred million people rather than the collateral appendage of some outsiders' scheme of things. China is heir to an ancient civilisation and, as a friend and next-door neighbour, Pakistan has a lot to learn from it. Despite its inexplicable propensity to go gaga over anything that is West-oriented, Pakistan must not lose sight of the reality that its ultimate destiny may well be linked with its neighbourhood to the East.

Talk of Pakistan-China friendship has by now become something of a cliché. And much like a habit of long standing, it comes naturally to most pen-pushers who don't even bother to delve into what they are driving at. Extolling of Pakistan-China close ties has, therefore, become something of a *de rigueur* in press parlance as well as after dinner repartee. This tendency, though natural in many ways, does have its pitfalls. An unpardonable error countries are apt to commit is living too much in the past. Most references to the subject in this blessed land begin by highlighting the ups of our bilateral ties in the past and end with a string of clichés. The pity is that what most people have settled for is to relive the high points of the past of this glorious relationship embellished merely with hollow expressions of pious hopes of its continuation in the same vein. It needs to be reiterated that International relations must never be allowed to stagnate, but should rather be in a state of constant evolution.

The international scene has undergone a sea change over the turn of the millennium. Paradigms, such as they were, have lost the glimmer of old and, in most cases, will need to be formulated anew. It is in this context, that the relations between Pakistan and China in the twenty-first century would deserve to be re-evaluated, re-oriented and, indeed, re-vitalised. CPEC is an outstanding case in point. This promise of this visionary project must not, under any circumstances, be

allowed to wither on the vine. By the same token, age-old parameters must not be allowed to crumble. One of the constants in the ever-evolving Pakistan-China relations has been the resolve not to interfere in each other's internal affairs. It may not be incorrect to surmise that it is this constant – underlining the course of this relationship – that has aroused the wonder and, at times, the awe and jealousy of several interested outsiders.

China has been witness to several upheavals inside Pakistan over the decades. Besides its benevolent interest, China has scrupulously avoided any move or observation that could even remotely be construed as interference in this country's internal affairs. Pakistan has responded in kind. There is no reason to alter this equation. Needless to state, Sino-Pakistan relations must continue to evolve with the times. Nonetheless, there would be no justification in moving the goal posts. For one thing, Pakistan has much to learn from China. China appears to be a country in a hurry, bent upon making up for the lost time. Development is taking place at a feverish pace. What is more, the development activity is not at all haphazard but is extremely well-planned.

The infrastructure, the development projects and the industrial complexes are all parts of a giant jigsaw puzzle that appears to be emerging out of the landscape as a well-choreographed whole. Nothing appears to be either incongruous or misplaced; each piece of the puzzle is meticulously planned to fit in its proper place. There is much for Pakistan to learn from this. China is like a sleeping giant that has woken up. Through its pragmatic policies over the past several years, China has successfully shifted its emphasis from political issues to economic development. Not that China has sacrificed any of its principles in the process; just that it has taken a conscious decision to reorder its priorities to conform to its national interest.

Coming back to Pakistan-China relations, time is ripe to break out of the strait jacket of hollow slogans and come down to brass tacks. Realism demands that our friendly relations be given stronger economic, commercial and cultural moorings. While we have been expending our energy in raising hollow slogans, other countries of the region have left us far behind. India, for instance, has continued to develop its economic and commercial ties with China that is today India's biggest trading partner.

One must not lose sight of the fact that Pakistan started with an initial advantage, but we have not done enough to strengthen the foundations. One notices in particular the paucity of mutually beneficial joint ventures. Commercial exchanges too have become a little too one-sided. We have failed rather miserably to expand our exports base. The Free Trade Agreement that was heralded as a landmark can be effective only if we put our own house in order. And we must do it quickly or we are in imminent danger of missing the bus. That, needless to add, would be horrible to even contemplate!

— The writer is a former ambassador and former assistant secretary general of OIC.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/pakistan-china-ties-focus/>

Pakistan Dismisses India's Stance on Jadhav in ICJ By Hasnaat Mailk

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan dismissed India's plea for consular access to Kulbhusan Jhadav, on Wednesday, at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), saying the provision of such an access under the Vienna Convention is only for legitimate visitors and not for spies.

Submitting counter memorial in the ICJ, Pakistan said that since India did not deny Jhadav was travelling with an assumed Muslim name, they have no case to plead. India has sought consular access to Jadhav repeatedly but Pakistan turned down its requests, citing bilateral accord that did not permit such an access to spies.

According to sources, Pakistan has stated that "the Indians have not denied that Jadhav was travelling on a passport with an assumed Muslim name."

"Lack of explanation on how a serving naval commander was operating under secondment to Indian spy agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) was travelling under an assumed name leads to only one conclusion that India wanted consular access to the information he had gathered."

Sources further added that since Jhadav was on active duty, it is obvious that "he was a spy sent on special mission". Pakistan stated that "a state which does not come with clean hands cannot get any relief".

"Only a state which adheres to legitimate actions can request the court to intervene in a matter between two states," Pakistan has stated, adding that "a state which does not come with clean hands cannot get any relief".

Pakistan will argue that sending Jhadav for espionage, funding terrorist activities are some of the reasons that dis-entitle India from invoking the jurisdiction of the ICJ.

Sources further added that Pakistan will also highlight constant violations of human rights committed by India in occupied-Kashmir including the use of pellet guns.

Pakistan allows wife to meet Jadhav on 'humanitarian grounds'

On December 8, Pakistan granted permission to the mother and wife of the Indian convicted spy to meet him later this month.

"Pakistan has informed India that it is ready to allow the visit of the mother of Commander Jadhav, along with his wife," said Spokesperson Dr Muhammad Faisal at a weekly news briefing.

He had added that the visit should happen on December 25. A diplomat from the Indian high commission in Islamabad would be allowed to accompany the visitors. "Requisite security will be provided to the visitors."

Jadhav was arrested from Balochistan in March 2016 in a joint counter-intelligence operation. Few days later, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) released his recorded statement in which the naval officer-turned-RAW agent confessed to have been working for the Indian secret service.

Family allowed to meet Jhadav on Dec 25

He admitted that he was working for RAW, which had given him the task to carryout subversive activities in Pakistan, particularly in Balochistan. Jadhav was later given the death sentence by a military tribunal.

India then moved the ICJ, which after preliminary proceedings, issued a stay order till the case is decided.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1583031/1-pakistan-dismisses-indias-stance-jadhav-icj/>

The Pakistan Phobia in India By Javaid Iqbal Bhat

Pakistani generals who are otherwise not shown in good light by the politicians of the country must be secretly enjoying the importance given to them by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It is the first time in recent memory that PM of India has openly stated that Pakistan is trying to influence the elections in India.

The occasion was that of a 'private party' in which the guest, former Foreign Minister of Pakistan Khurshid Kasuri met with some top dignitaries from India. The news of this meeting has gone viral, with the PM hinting at a conspiracy. The word 'Pakistan' did come up previously in other election but not with the same intensity, and in this manner.

Gujarat is forcing a change of benchmarks. The state elections have opened the can of name-calling. The sheaths are off the swords and tongues are afire all around. In this scenario, the conspiratorial air has wrapped the private party of Khurshid Kasuri. The question being asked is why top figures of Congress met with Kasuri. Even if the participants of that party swear that Gujarat did not come up in the party, let alone decide who should be the next Chief Minister, the atmosphere is so polarised that belief is based on perception and not on reality. Mr Kasuri, as an ex-Foreign Minister and a well-known author and diplomat, is not supposed to meet a three-wheeler drivers in old Delhi or the fruit-vendors of Sabzi Mandi to discuss the rates of travel and vegetables. If the current regime is so touchy about his meetings in India, at a time when he is also promoting a book of his own, it was better to prevent him from coming into the country. Since he came inside India under the gaze of Modi, more than Manmohan, it is Modi who should be asked questions, unless of course he thought that there is a line of auto-drivers waiting to meet him.

The response from the former PM is what the critics term as 'hard', but it reveals the level of prejudice towards Pakistan in India. When the current and the former PM invoke Pakistan to settle scores, what comes out is the normalisation of hate and prejudice against Pakistan in India. Both mark their purity by their distance from the neighbouring country. Both use harsh language to show the depth of their disgust with that country to come out clean on each other's allegations. All this is

the result of desperation produced by the urge to win an election. To win an election, the extent to which one can go is unlimited. Because with the win from a prestigious election arrives the power to bend the levers of powers and write the fate of millions and cast the country in its favourite ideological colour. The opposition in mimicking the behaviour of the ruling regime, and it not confined only to the invocation of Pakistan.

The word 'secular' has become so accursed that Rahul Gandhi is putting an extra effort to appear more like a proper Hindu than a secular person

The new President of the Congress is running from one temple to another in Gujarat with the hope of washing off the image of being 'anti' or 'non-Hindu' if not anti-Hindu. The word 'secular' has become so accursed that Rahul Gandhi is putting an extra effort to appear more like a proper Hindu than a secular person. To appear more Hindu than the PM, Rahul Gandhi's 'tilak' looks like a permanent birth mark.

A principled stand on secularism is off the page and the opposition is trying to act 'more' than what the ruling regime does. With his passion to be a 'Hindu' growing it shouldn't be a surprise if Modi reduces the number of visits to temples and invokes another pet animal of Pakistan. The former PM in his response has not disappointed by charging with an extra bit of effort at the neighbouring country. But all is not over.

Even if Mani Shankar Aiyar has been suspended from the primary membership of the Party, there is reason to listen to him. In him and his ilk, there is a ray of hope. He represents the rebellion to the surrender inflicted on the grand old party of India. His statements may not be politically correct, but his position resonates with the deeper impulses of his party, which will probably revive once the flash of Modi is off the landscape.

His 'chai' and 'neech' remarks, especially the former and not the latter which was conveniently interpreted by Modi, are in poor taste but they reflect the essential disgust with the politics of polarisation made normal by the BJP. He was also part of the private party, mainly perhaps because both Kasuri and Aiyar are friends and have been proponents of dialogue to resolve differences between the two countries. Whether Aiyar along with others was trying to influence the results of

Gujarat elections is a moot point but what is certain is that he believes in an 'uninterrupted and uninteruptible' dialogue with Pakistan.

In Pakistan, the rumour is that the elections are influenced by the 'third umpire,' a reference to the establishment which includes army and intelligence agencies. By saying that Pakistan is trying to influence elections, the weight and influence of Pakistan's establishment has been elevated and doubts cast on the cardinal component of democracy in India. Pakistan seems to be more shrewd, witty and cunningly intelligent and India as a naïve malleable entity. Can anyone have the courage to ask why Modi visits temples if he feels Pakistanis will make Ahmed Patel the Chief Minister of Gujarat? Will not the Gods favour him? Or is he afraid that the Gods may also have been under influence of the 'rogues' across the border?

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Russia Supports Pakistan's Bid to Join Elite Nuclear Trading Club

ISLAMABAD: Russia has thrown its weight behind Pakistan's efforts to become member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), an exclusive club of nuclear trading nations.

The support for Pakistan's bid came from a Russian diplomat, who told a conference on Friday that Moscow was not opposed to Pakistan's NSG candidature and had no intention to block it.

Speaking at a seminar on 'Disarmament, Non-Proliferation and Strategic Stability' that had been organised by the Strategic Vision Institute (SVI), Pavel Didkovsky, First Secretary at Russian Embassy, underlined the possibility of a criteria-based approach for inclusion of non-NPT states in the group. He said Russia along with China and others were working for a formula that could be acceptable to all. Stalemate on Pakistan, India NSG membership likely to continue

The Russian diplomat praised the steps taken by Pakistan for strengthening its national export control programme that complied with the spirit of international regimes and conventions.

He also acknowledged the efforts undertaken by Pakistan for stability in the region, including unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing and its support for Russia's stance on the prevention of arms race in outer space.

Speaking on the occasion, Pakistan's former permanent representative to Conference on Disarmament and United Nations in Geneva Zamir Akram said Pakistan was seeking to maintain strategic stability in South Asia by having credible deterrence.

He underscored that stability and deterrence were shifting in the region because of India's acquisition of triad of delivery systems, the region's political dynamics, uncertain situation in Afghanistan and Indian hostilities along the Line of Control and its sub-conventional war against Pakistan through Afghanistan-based proxies and terrorist groups.

NSG membership: Pakistan to accept non-discriminatory conditions

Pakistan's response strategy, he recalled, had been to develop low-yield weapons, sea-based deterrent, and long-range ballistic missile; and achieve MIRV (multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicle) capability, and an effective counterterrorism undertaking.

"But still we are ready for dialogue and more confidence-building measures to stabilise the situation," he emphasised.

Former Defence Production secretary Lt Gen (retd) Syed Muhammad Owais agreed that regional stability was being disturbed by India. He said India was being encouraged in its weapons build-up by the United States, whose government's 'erratic and incendiary' policies were destabilising the world at large.

Netherlands backs India's bid for entry into NSG

Meanwhile, Ambassador of Iran Mehdi Honardoost met National Security Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Nasser Khan Janjua to discuss bilateral relations, economic prospects of CPEC, Gwadar, Chabahar and matters pertaining to regional and Muslim world's security situation.

An official handout said the NSA, while welcoming the guest, said: "Iran is our brotherly Muslim neighbouring country to which Pakistan has always extended a friendly hand and is keen to strengthen these ties in future."

The ambassador said the Muslim world was passing through challenging times and added that Iran believed that Pakistan could play a very constructive and balanced role in the given scenario.

While stressing the need for consolidating regional cooperation, the envoy said that cooperation was the only way to achieve sustainable peace in the region, particularly in the Muslim world.

He regarded CPEC a game-changer endeavour for the region and said that Iran was keen to be a part of it.

Pakistan urges NSG to adopt non-discriminatory criteria for membership

Discussing the importance of Chabahar and Gwadar ports, the envoy reiterated that Iran would never let its resources used against Pakistan and that both the ports would complement each other in a cooperative framework.

Both sides agreed that Pakistan and Iran shared a common future. “The most valuable part of the Pakistan-Iran relations is the mutual feeling of brotherhood among the people of both the countries,” he added.

Broader understanding of each other’s stance regarding key regional developments could consolidate Pakistan-Iran relations and pave the way to enhance bilateral engagements further, they agreed.

The ambassador extended an invitation on Regional Security Seminar to the NSA scheduled to be held early next year in Iran which the NSA thankfully accepted.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1584950/1-russia-supports-pakistans-bid-join-elite-nuclear-trading-club/>

Pak-Afghan relations: yet another round of optimism by Imtiaz Gul

Kabul: A meeting with Chief Executive of the Afghan National Unity government Dr. Abdullah Abdullah and Abdul Raof Ibrahimi, the speaker of the Afghan parliament – Oolassi Jirga – left us wondering whether recent exchanges between Kabul and Islamabad at the Directors General Military Operations (DGMOs) level and the obvious restraint of hostile rhetoric reflects yet another round of optimism in the chequered Pak-Afghan relations.

In a first unusually long and passionate interaction with Pakistani and Afghan members of Beyond Boundaries – a Track 11/1.5 initiative at his sprawling palace in Kabul (December 16), Dr. Abdullah Abdullah was all ears for Pakistani delegates including MNAs Rana Afzal Khan (PML-N) and Shazia Marri (PPP) and senators Shibli Faraz (PTI) and Murtaza Wahab (PPP).

Dr. Abdullah, in what was certainly a departure from the past, looked extremely engaging and kept asking the Pakistani visitors as to what they and their compatriots thought of the present-day Afghanistan. He was curious to know the status of Pakistan-funded development projects in Kabul and elsewhere.

MNAs Shazia Marri and Rana Afzal, alongwith former defense secretary Asif Yasin, explained to him that most Pakistanis ask as to why despite decades of hospitality, Pakistan is still viewed negatively in Afghanistan. They also mentioned the ‘unusual Afghan tilt towards India’ as mindboggling for most Pakistanis.

Dr Abdullah looked visibly upset when informed of certain bureaucratic bottlenecks that were impeding the import and installation of crucial medical equipment at the Jinnah Hospital in Kabul.

Early this year, Dr Abdullallah had instructed all relevant departments to remove all tariff impediments and expressed his displeasure over non-compliance by his bureaucracy.

Dr. Abdullah welcomed recommendations to both governments by the Track-11/1.5 but sounded extremely cautious in his responses, and appeared to be

groping for the right words to explain the Afghan point of view. He blamed the current situation on the 'absence of political will', without naming names. "I welcome private Track 11 initiatives but am concerned that whatever happens on government-to-government level, almost every time we have to start from the scratch because of negative occurrences that overtake everything else," said the CEO.

"It is a tragedy that terrorist violence consumes all our energies and focus. The fact that every round of engagement sparks hopes but then is eventually overtaken by violence and bilateral acrimony."

Here, one could discern that the Chief Executive was keen to see forward movement in bilateral relations but felt hamstrung by the circumstances. "We want to engage but then every now and then the environment gets vitiated." Without being rhetorical and in an extremely restrained manner, Abdullah Abdullah underlined that phenomenon such as Taliban and Haqqanis were not a mechanism to fix our bilateral security problems. "We need political will to find common solutions to common threats," he underscored – an indirect dig at Pakistan's continued insistence on border management mechanisms that it says will help stem the cross-border movement of terrorists.

"We need to relieve our younger generations of the baggage from the past by displaying courage and political will," said the CEO, when talking of issues in bilateral ties.

To drive home his point, Abdullah also recalled the role that Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani and Ahmed Shah Masood had played to bring the Tajik government and the opposition face to face for successful negotiations in the mid 1990s. "Although Taliban were in control of some 70 percent of the country's territory, our leaders still considered it crucial to offer what they could even in times of political troubles at home," he said. Abdullah's talk to the Pakistani and Afghan delegation was a mix of frustration, caution, measured optimism and an eagerness to do something to extricate Afghanistan out of its current security crisis as well as improve relations with Pakistan. But whether Afghanistan's present internal political polarisation and external (i.e. geo-political) factors will permit any forward movement is a huge question mark.

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source: <https://dailytimes.com.pk/161885/pak-afghan-relations-yet-another-round-optimism/>

As history proves, presidents will come and go, but Pakistan's relationship with the US will always hang by a thread

By Sarah Alvi

The relationship between the US and Pakistan today is the diplomatic equivalent of a miserable marriage, where neither partner is ready to divorce the other, yet there is persistent bickering.

Can't live with each other, can't live without each other either.

Earlier this year, Islamabad watched with anxiety and horror as President Donald Trump called on India to deepen its influence in Afghanistan in his speech outlining the Afghan policy. India's presence in Afghanistan has been a long time worry for Pakistan, and Trump's speech earlier this year only reinforced that fear.

By pitting two arched enemies against each other, President Trump aimed to draw greater favours from both countries – a policy tried and tested by his predecessors. Less than two months later, Pakistan miraculously rescued an American woman and her family from the Haqqani network, and President Trump tweeted his approval the very next day.

Donald J. Trump Tweet

Starting to develop a much better relationship with Pakistan and its leaders. I want to thank them for their cooperation on many fronts.

The downward spiral of the US-Pakistan relations dramatically took an upward turn, but this is hardly comforting. We have been here before.

Phases of active cooperation, visits by delegations and strong promises raise hopes on both sides, and then something outrageously silly happens, tipping the scales, heralding a new round of the blame game.

When President Barack Obama assumed office in 2009, he was keen to refocus on the war in Afghanistan. He deployed more troops in the region and offered Pakistan more than \$7 billion in civilian aid packages. He wanted to turn the Bush

era, security driven, transactional relationship with Pakistan into a deeper strategic partnership by strengthening the civilian democracy in the country. His efforts, however, did not bear the fruits he desired.

In January 2011, Raymond Davis shot and killed two Pakistanis in Lahore. President Obama's initial reluctance to admit that Davis was indeed a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agent, and his subsequent release, caused an outrage in the country.

The dust hadn't settled yet when the US Navy Seals captured and killed Osama bin Laden in an Abbottabad compound. Bruised, angry and hurting, Pakistanis mulled over their country's sovereignty. Islamabad hadn't quite recovered from the fallout when North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) helicopters accidentally killed 24 Pakistani soldiers at Salala the same year.

Pakistan had had enough. It shut down the NATO supply line in protest.

It took eight months of going back and forth on negotiations, and finally, a formal apology from the Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, for Pakistan to reopen the NATO supply line.

Pakistan's denunciation of the American leadership reached a record low as nine out of 10 of its citizens (92%) expressed disapproval of President Obama's presidency. Pakistan's confidence in American presidents has historically stayed low. According to Pew Research Center's Global Indicators Database, on average about 60% of Pakistanis have expressed no confidence in the US leadership, from President Bush to present.

The relationship hasn't truly recovered yet. Pakistan, named a "major non-Nato ally" by President Bush, is consistently losing US favours. An already questionable US aid is fast plummeting due to Islamabad's inability to satisfy Washington's insatiable demand to "do more".

Pakistan is wary of this demand. After losing over 80,000 people as a direct result of growing terrorism in the country post 9/11, and bearing losses of over \$120 billion, a majority of Pakistanis suspect that the US has no real interest in the country's development.

US suspicions are also whetted over Islamabad's reluctance to deal with the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani network. President Bush had suspected during his time in the Oval Office that Pakistan was either incapable or negligent about uprooting the Taliban from the region all together. He wrote in his memoir, *Decision Points*,

“Some in the Pakistani intelligence service, the ISI, retained close ties to Taliban officials. Others wanted an insurance policy in case America abandoned Afghanistan and India tried to gain influence there.”

Pakistan's reluctance to control the influence of the Afghan Taliban stems from its nervousness over India's presence in Afghanistan. During his visit to the US in 2010, General Pervez Musharraf said,

“If I'm allowed to be very, very frank, India's role in Afghanistan is to create an anti-Pakistan Afghanistan. There are consulates in Kandahar and Jalalabad (which) are actually involved in creating trouble in Pakistan. They have no other role.”

And so, for President Trump to formally call upon India to strengthen its presence in Afghanistan, and strongly rebuke Pakistan's inability to crack down on terrorism spawning within its territory, has considerably angered Islamabad. The National Security Committee, in its rebuttal to the speech, blamed the US for failures in the war in Afghanistan, and declared,

“To scapegoat Pakistan will not help in stabilising Afghanistan. In fact, being its immediate neighbour, Pakistan has an abiding interest in peace and stability in Afghanistan.”

This, too, is a place where we have been before.

The US has historically used Pakistan's antagonistic relationship with India to its advantage. Prior to 9/11, President Bill Clinton's visit to India signalled warming ties with the country but Pakistan, with its new military government under Musharraf, was a virtual non-entity.

After months of uncertainty, the US announced that President Clinton would also visit Pakistan, though only for a few hours. A visit to India alone would have left Pakistan feeling snubbed. Musharraf allegedly secured the US state visit by guaranteeing President Clinton a live televised address to the nation. And so, in an unprecedented move, President Clinton addressed Pakistanis for 15 minutes, chastising the country for supporting insurgency in Indian-occupied Kashmir. There was nothing promising for an ordinary Pakistani. It was once again, a detached, impersonal, cold American president, scolding them to get their affairs in order.

Now, President Trump is reaching out to India in order to coerce Pakistan to behave. By deepening ties with India, the Trump administration also wants to counteract China's growing influence in the region.

Pakistan, however, is also using its strong ties with Beijing to deflect unnecessary pressures from the US. More recently, it invited Washington's wrath over the release of Hafiz Saeed – wanted by the US over masterminding numerous terrorist attacks, including the 2008 Mumbai attacks. Saeed has a \$10 million reward on his head. But despite this, he announced, fresh out of detention, that his party Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) will contest the next general elections in Pakistan. Talk about adding barrel loads of fuel to President Trump's fire of Islamophobia.

When it comes to Muslims, President Trump isn't exactly a fan. As a Muslim majority country, Pakistan closely watched his election campaign and is fully aware of him retweeting Islamophobic videos earlier this year. Most recently, Trump's announcement to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel created an uproar in Pakistan. So, after all this and more, even if he conjures a magic wand and miraculously strengthens American ties with Islamabad, President Trump would still stay a 'he-who-cannot-be-trusted' for a majority of Pakistanis.

The clock is ticking. The US Defence Secretary, James Mattis, on a recent visit to Islamabad, said he believes in finding a "common ground" for cooperation. Pakistan should seize the moment and redesign a proactive foreign policy for the region by collaborating with the US for some concrete confidence building measures.

There are only so many times that you can pass through the same point without realising that you are stuck in a maze, and a relationship as fractious as this can only take so many blows before it collapses all together.

Source: <https://blogs.tribune.com.pk/story/61368/as-history-proves-presidents-will-come-and-go-but-pakistans-relationship-with-the-us-will-always-hang-by-a-thread/>

Policy of Full Spectrum Deterrence by Beenish altaf

PAKISTAN is pursuing Full Spectrum Deterrence (FSD) which is described in the larger philosophy of Credible Minimum Deterrence (CMD). It, by no means, intends to seek parity with India in terms of nuclear weapons, instead the full spectrum deterrence is to ensure that there are no gaps in Pakistan's deterrence capability. At the outset, FSD was approved by the National Command Authority on Sept 5, 2013. It is the principal body involved in policy making on research, development, production, use and security of the country's nuclear program. This strategy was taken-on in response to India's war fighting doctrines known as 'Cold Start Doctrine' and its proactive operations, in order to offer a range of options to the decision-making bodies. Basically, it guides the development of nuclear capability, aimed at bringing every Indian target into Pakistan's striking range.

Noticeably, India has taken an announced sub-conventional route due to which the region has entered into the Cold War sort of phase, striving for regional supremacy through several treacherous means. These means include different proxy wars on border areas between India and Pakistan. Similarly the Western border with Afghanistan is also under a full show of sub-conventional kind of conflict. For that reason, the likelihood of a full scale conventional war is no more a viable option between the two countries because of the concept of mutually assured destruction. There is a constant reverberation by top Indian leadership in their public statements of using terrorism to destabilize Pakistan. India is evidently, engaged in continuous surgical strikes on the LoC, time-in and time-out, which in any case would be strongly retaliated by Pakistan. The Cold Start Doctrine or a strategy is actually a war fighting scheme that calls on India's conventional forces to perform holding attacks before international intervention or before nuclear retaliation from Pakistan.

Hitherto, it is believed that this doctrine is a step that would breakdown the deterrence between both nations ending up in serious consequences, including the potential use of nuclear weapons. This proactive strategy option is actually a more aggressive move and is an action having more offensive lines. It is worth mentioning here ironically, that India has a declared policy of no-first use of nuclear

weapons but India's all the belligerent steps are pointing towards offensive moves and strategies.

It actually threatens Pakistan from its conventional asymmetric superiority relationship. Genuinely narrating Islamabad must be prepared for Delhi opting to nuclear first-use and ever more so with the hardliners like Manohar Parrikar, Ajit Davol and Sushma Sawraj at the helm of dictating country's nuclear policies / moves. In this regard, on the global level, India's constant aggressive steps and statements, one after the other, gives appalling signals to the international community that the South Asia region is in a state of permanent shackles of regional conflicts. However, due to above mentioned espousing weaponry expansion and military enlargement by India, it became compulsory for Pakistan to move towards full spectrum deterrence in order to respond to these threats at the tactical level, the counter-force level, and the counter-value level. It needs to cover all levels of threat. Pakistan calls its weapons as Weapons of Peace that reduces the threat and probability of a full-fledge war. It should be taken into account that the strategic stability in South Asia was not just about Pakistan and India; instead it involves China and the US into the sphere.

Few salient features of Pakistan's full spectrum deterrence policy have been highlighted recently by National Command Authority's adviser, retired Lt Gen Khalid Kidwai. He said that 'it envisages possession of a full range of nuclear weapons that could reach every part of India, having enough yield and numbers to deter rival from its policy of massive retaliation and having liberty of picking targets including counter-value, counter-force and battlefield.' Indian growing efforts for getting into all the export control cartels specifically its recent inclusion in the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and speculations of entering into the Wassenaar Arrangement (WA) could disturb the strategic balance in the region. It would lead in triggering an arms competition in the Indian Ocean region as well. Therefore, reassurance of Pakistan's full spectrum deterrence is the need of hour while observing Indian nuclear politics rhetoric' about the introduction of new and advance technologies, and sophisticated nuclear weapons.

— The writer works for Strategic Vision Institute, a think-tank based in Islamabad.
source: <https://pakobserver.net/policy-full-spectrum-deterrence/>

IT in Pakistan: challenges and solutions by Syed Hassan Murtaza

For the last two decades, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have come a long way in the world and Pakistan has not lagged too far behind. Today in Pakistan, there are about 140 million telephone connections and about 48 million broadband internet subscribers, predominantly relying on 3G and 4G mobile technologies. After a somewhat delayed start in the case of mobile broadband, the numbers are rapidly increasing, catching up with countries more technologically advanced.

As a result, a number of online services are becoming available to users. Awareness related to the recent unprecedented cyber-attacks and some other cyber-crimes like for the purpose of extracting ransoms, is essential to address at every level. With ICT becoming an enabler for everything, Pakistan has yet to devise cyber security framework. Pakistan must prepare and be ready to successfully meet all future cyber threats to public and private institutions and it must ensure safe and secure use of information and communication technologies in region.

Pakistan has come a long way on its Information and Telecom journey over the last 70 years. The country has gone from having three percent tele-density to 73 percent. There is some progress in digital economy and mobile banking. The contributions of this sector to the national exchequer are significant. But, where do Pakistan's IT and Telecom industries go from here? There are important gaps to be filled. IT and telecom technologies are changing rapidly. Entry into advance internet services, big data, and cloud computing would be good, but our vulnerability to hacking and cyber-attacks would increase.

IT and Telecom also pose dangers to our national security as well. Although the PTA has achieved some important milestones including 3G and 4G auction which was stalled for many years, enactment of Prevention of Electronic Crime Bill, Implementation Plan of Pakistan Telecom Sector Computer Emergency Response Team to cope with cyber- attacks are some very important achievements.

Pakistan should focus on a comprehensive approach and rationalisation of taxation on information and communication technologies. Any progress in this vital sector is unthinkable without the consideration of these two approaches. We must look into the ways to localise the utilisation of ICT. Pakistan ICTs are highly taxed which is hampering its growth, without ICTs Pakistan's vision 2025 will remain a dream. It is imperative that the government should take the lead to promote ICTs in socio-economic, education and health sectors as no single action can resolve all the problems, there is a need to incorporate innovation policy development in planning and development sector and must develop policies, comprehensively.

There are important gaps to be filled. IT and telecom technologies are changing rapidly. Entry into advanced internet services, big data, and cloud computing would be good, but our vulnerability to hacking and cyber-attacks would increase

With the launch of 3G/4G technologies in 2014, the number of internet users has increased to 48 million which is about 27 percent of the population, but Pakistan is still a long way in matching up with the Asian average of 45.6 percent. Cellular phone users from 2003-2008 have increased from 2.4 million to 89.6 million. Since 2007, the telecom sector's contribution to GDP has been increased from almost negligible to over 3 percent per year whereas, broadband subscribers has been increased to 42 million in 2017. Mobile operators paying US\$ 1.2 billion in taxes each year, about 30% of total revenues, survey shows that 31.6% of a mobile's cost is taxes, third highest level of taxation in Pakistan. Just because of this figure, we can consider high taxes on ICTs as the greatest barrier to the promotion and utilisation of ICTs at the local level such that the community is unable to pay taxes on it.

Pakistan's present status of digital economy does not inspire confidence among businessmen and investors. Gaps need to be filled in order to compete with other regional countries in digital adaptation and usage. Digital Economy is not just a part of the economy, it is known as the full economy now. It is also called the internet economy because all financial and administrative activities are happening on the internet with the help of smartphones, computers, applications and software.

The government must be proactive and lead the way by increasing its own usage of information technology. Measures focused on enhanced adaptation of digital

economy will not only result in a quantum jump in the country's GDP but will also open up vistas of increased domestic market whilst creating more business and employment opportunities, especially for the talented youth of Pakistan. Digitalisation allows enterprises to manage their businesses cost effectively using business solutions like Enterprise Resource Management (ERM).

A digital enterprise attracts the best available human resources and talent. It also helps to attract and retain talented fresh graduates that can be used too and they will also like to work with digital tools. Automation and digitalisation allows end to end close monitoring of human resources of any enterprise which is particularly important where the customers expect immediate response to their queries and provision of error free services on competitive rates.

Pakistan's current ranking is at 144 in World Bank's Ease-of-Doing Business 2017 which does not inspire the confidence among overseas investors, lack of digitalisation in the country's economy is also the main factor in the lack of foreign investment. Unfortunately, no authentic data is available regarding the size of Pakistan's digital economy, but rough estimates place our digital economy at \$ 100 million, which is pitifully small.

We should also have to be more focused on running awareness campaigns for SMEs and Private business owners, who do not believe in digitalisation of their businesses, guided by the fact that digitalisation has always brought risk free profit to the business and combat myths. Provision of tax incentives can also play a significant role in shaping the digital economy. The federal and provincial governments initially may find it difficult as it appears to be losing revenue in short term but as various studies quoted above demonstrate, any transformation to digital economy will help the economy and bridge any temporary deficits.

We should emphasise on the importance of Internet in achieving Sustainable Development Goals. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) and the internet of things (IoT) can transform economies and societies by reducing the gap between the Internet and physical world. Utilisation of internet can brought efficiency in governance and collaborative approach must be followed to reduce cyber-crime. All users should be able to control how their data is accessed, collected, used, shared and stored. They should also be able to move their data between services seamlessly. We must adopt collaborative approach for online security and it must

be made easier for users, Industry and government should invest in the creation of usable tools and information to help users and to make informed decisions about privacy, rights and security.

Talented youth must be promoted and authorities must implement awareness campaigns about IT at the national level. When we look at other developing countries, they have followed the holistic approach to succeed using ICTs and have combated cyber-crimes. Government must focus on the strict legislation and policies such that the hackers and attackers, who are likely to enjoy advantages of anonymity and asymmetry must be punished and discouraged. Coordinated efforts at the national and international level will be needed to face the menace.

To discuss all this on Information and Telecommunications Journey in Pakistan: Future Directions, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) arranged seminar and invited most experienced professionals to share their knowledge with audience. Top management of some relevant multinational corporate companies also attended this seminar and shared their expertise.

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A Great Leader of A Great Nation By Imtiaz Rafi Butt

On 28th November, 2017, the mayor London, Sadiq Khan, unveiled a bronze statue of Quaid-e-Azam in the British Museum. The statue was unveiled to commemorate the 70th Independence year of Pakistan and the tremendous personality that was Muhammad Ali Jinnah on the occasion of 25th of December, his date of birth. The bronze statue will be on display till end of January and thereafter, it will be moved to Lincoln's Inn in recognition of Quaid-e-Azam's excellence. The man that became a father of a Nation but at the same time paid due dedication to the cause of democracy, freedom, human rights and justice. He was a champion like no other, a persona that defied weaknesses of compromise and bargaining.

Quaid-e-Azam and his achievements can be aptly described in a dual categorisation; first, his prowess and competence as a lawyer and a jurist and secondly, as a leader and a statesman. In times when Muslims of the subcontinent were branded as the enemy of the Imperialist British Empire, achievers like Muhammad Ali Jinnah were a rarity. As a lawyer, his cases bore his signature of unique and out of the box interpretations of law. His concepts and style of conducting legal practice was admired even by his opponents. On his return of the United Kingdom, Muhammad Ali Jinnah became one of the most sought after lawyers in India. His cases and his arguments regularly became the subject of discussions among the most learned sections of the society, which resulted in even more acclaim. As the saying goes, "fate conspires to arrange its battles", perhaps it was destiny that a man who was to become "father of a Nation" was being forged in strict measures of law and jurisprudence, that too, in the heart of the system that he was to oppose to one day ;Lincoln's Inn. Even though, Jinnah was a lawyer was exceptional, his achievements as a leader have overshadowed his professional expertise. His life's work was on a case that made a homeland for Muslims of the sub-continent. In this capacity, the Quaid started off as an ambassador of Unity and cooperation. The historian has no right to say that the atrocities of partition can be attributed to Muhammad Ali Jinnah, instead, it was the transition from Indian Nationalism to Hindu Nationalism that coerced leaders like Jinnah to seek the route of partition. This was a dictate of the dignity and honour of the Muslims. The sacrifices laid down in that path of independence and partition was an ordeal

that the people of Pakistan had to suffer in order to give a dignified tomorrow to future generations. Quaid-e-Azam never chose a path of glory and grandeur for himself that lead to partition, but he opted for it in the name of liberty and freedom.

Pakistan came into being in rags. The role of the leader turned into a script of statesman and administrator. It was not just the creation of Pakistan but its foundations that owe a debt to the Quaid as well. Muhammad Ali Jinnah paved the path towards making Pakistan a welfare democratic State based on the principles of Islamic Jurisprudence. It was a dream that had never been realised in the history of the sub-continent. Fair play, justice, equality, religious freedom, mutual respect, hard work, integrity and discipline were to be the philosophy of the citizens of this great country. On the day of Quaid's birth, it is an opportunity for every Pakistani to review the ideals on which this modern Islamic State was founded.

Pakistan, as of today, is facing grave challenges. However, it would be a fallacy to say that this country has never seen such grim circumstances. On the other hand, it was born with fatal anomalies, declared and doomed from the very start. But as Shakespeare puts it, "there is a tide in the affairs of men", we were able to catch a few tides of our own. With remarkable resilience and against heavy odds, we survived; a nation of crises and upheavals. Pakistan faces hurdles and hindrances on every nook and corner. Hostile neighbours, clash of institutions, corruption, political instability, sectarian divisions and growing violence, insurgency, economic downward spiral are a few of war fronts that we are enduring. With the panama case judgment against Nawaz Shareef resulting in his disqualification, and rumours of destabilisation, have once again pushed the country back from realising its dream of becoming a mature democracy. But all is not lost yet, there is a flip side to the story. With the ouster of Nawaz Shareef by the Supreme Court, there is hope of a revival of better politics. Beneath the rumours politicisation of judiciary and tacit role of the armed forces to take down corrupt politicians; it has become evident that any corruption or any financial malpractice will not be neglected in the long-run. The governance machinery will not work without integrity. Pakistan is falling short in its financial reserves and is unable to pay its debts, relying mainly on IMF assistance. Falling exports and hike in the prices of fossil fuels are another alarm to the failing economy. But, on the other hand, there are initiatives like CPEC that can offset the outgoing cash flows with Foreign Direct Investments. A 62 Billion Dollar deal with China has the potential to cater to any shortcomings in the long

run for Pakistan. In short, the Government of Pakistan has made a mess but it is not without cure.

China has its sights set on Gwadar. An economist from Harvard has rightly referred to the phenomena as, “the Game of Ports”. While Iran has inaugurated its own deep sea port, it is not match for Gwadar considering that Chinese exports will transship through Gwadar and fuel supplies to China will flow through on sea and land into China. International trade organisations like World Trade Organisation(WTO) and World Customs Organisation(WCO) have issued reports favouring Gwadar as the port of the future set to become even more important than Jebel-e-Ali port. The reason is the consumers connected through Gwadar; the world’s largest population China and Pakistan. This could give an extraordinary boost to flow of goods and services creating jobs and opportunities throughout both countries. As a result, developed countries like France, Germany and the United Kingdom have indicated active participation in CPEC. On the other hand, growing need of transparency, anti-corruption movement by new political entities like PTI(Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf) are signs of an improving scenario. A philosopher once wrote, “sometimes, hope is all you have.” With this positivity and initiative, it can be concluded that the dream of the Quaid is still within reach. And it is our duty and prerogative to muster all our energies to realise that dream, for ourselves and for the coming generations, just like our great leader imagined for us.

Source: <http://nation.com.pk/23-Dec-2017/a-great-leader-of-a-great-nation>

Can Pakistan Sideline the US and Pursue an Independent Foreign Policy? By Umair Jamal

Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Khawaja Asif, said the following in a statement made earlier this month,

“Pakistan's foreign policy has for long remained US-centric. However, the time had come to review the policy and shift its focus towards Russia and China.”

At the rhetorical level, Pakistan's commitment to shifting its foreign policy focus away from Washington has been in place for quite some time. In this regard, these recent changes that Islamabad has touted by and large deal with the country's increasing economic dependency on China, as well as Russia's growing interest in Pakistan.

Arguably, Pakistan may have gained some tactical leverage vis-à-vis the US by increasing its economic dependency on other regional states, but that in no way demonstrates that the country is in a position to follow an independent foreign policy.

Pakistan cannot fully exercise the options of a sovereign state that can pursue an independent foreign policy, unless the country overhauls a prevailing national narrative that propagates the idea of a clash of civilisations between Islam and the West. It must also end existing institutional confrontations in the country and become economically independent. Pakistan's foreign policy is hostage to an ad hoc process, dominated by special institutional interests that continue to exploit systemic ignorance to bend the country's foreign policy to their advantage. The use of excessive rhetoric dealing with an independent foreign policy remains one of the common tools that Pakistan's ruling elite employ to demonstrate the country's military, economic and political strengths domestically.

Declarations at the state level that Pakistan can shift its international relations at will are then nothing more than the chest-thumping and posturing of a country that remains hostage to the entrenched interests of the political and military establishment, which continue to remain at loggerheads with each other. The country's civilian and military elite remain divided over the question of who can

effectively manage strategic affairs related to Pakistan's foreign policy. While the country's foreign minister might believe that his country needs a strategic shift in its foreign policy, it's unlikely that his constitutionally mandated role and office can take any credible action of introducing such changes.

Besides domestic institutional divisions, Pakistan also remains hostage to its Islamic identity and associated ideologies that remain a considerable hindrance in the way of pursuing a more rational foreign policy. Among other things, the deep Islamisation of the country doesn't allow Pakistan's ruling elite to freely follow an independent foreign policy without worrying about a widespread backlash at home.

For instance, a section of Pakistan's ruling elite believe that good economic and diplomatic relations with India, and perhaps Israel too, which Pakistan doesn't accept as a state, can serve Islamabad's national interests better than the on-going perpetual hostility towards them. However, popular public opinion in Pakistan continues to cast these two states and the West, in general, as an enemy of Islam, of Pakistan, and its national interests. Therefore, any action by the state proposing good relations and exchange is likely to be contested in streets, mosques, schools and political gatherings.

So far, not a single government in Pakistan has openly and aggressively pursued a policy that demonstrates rationalism in domestic politics that can create an environment where domestic and foreign policy issues complement each other.

While Pakistan may have found new partners to carry its monetary baggage, particularly China, the country is not in a condition to stand on its own economically, let alone thrive as a regional economic power that can make independent foreign policy choices. While Beijing has leveraged its recent economic investments in Pakistan to its advantage, Pakistan has not been able to leverage China's economic concentration in the country to its favour.

Moreover, Pakistan's dependency on China has put it in the role of Beijing's camp follower, rather than a country that is willing to negotiate on equal footing to protect its national interests. Certainly, China's rhetorical flourishes regarding Pakistan's likely rise as an economic power will not impart Islamabad the status of a regional power.

Over the last couple of years, Russia has been making overtures toward Pakistan. However, this growing closeness is hardly the result of Pakistan's strategic alignment. Rather, it's the result of Moscow's own calculated efforts, also known as the "look east" approach, to deepen economic and security ties to prevent the recent western blockade. Moreover, Russia is willing to invest billions of dollars in Pakistan's market – both countries recently agreed to a massive gas pipeline venture – because the country's budding economy has vast potential for foreign companies. Russia may have located some shared objectives with Islamabad, where it still remains to be seen which country stands to gain more.

On the other hand, however, Pakistan has to work on its domestic economic base to boost its local economic output, build institutional strengths, and improve living standards of common citizens to become a state that is respected regionally and globally and can pursue its national interest vigorously.

The country needs to demonstrate that it has the necessary national consensus and institutional unity to secure its national interests without any domestic political, ideological and institutional handicaps derailing the policy process. For now, any so-called change in Pakistan's foreign policy will only be an empty commitment based on rhetoric rather than actions.

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Source: <https://blogs.tribune.com.pk/story/61872/can-pakistan-sideline-the-us-and-pursue-an-independent-foreign-policy/>

Can 2018 Be Any Different? By Talat Masood

As the year comes to a close and the new year is about to dawn live nations both at the personal and national level retrospect for what they have achieved and what they lost during the year. More importantly, they resolve to work for a better if not a glorious future. And wiser leaders like the present Chinese leadership take a longer perspective stretching over decades.

For the last several years, Pakistan has had its ups and downs and this year was no exception as it remained largely in a state of crisis. What then is preventing us from coming out of this endless crisis and what would take Pakistan to be a normal and prosperous state? Do our people not deserve a better future? Why is it that the two civilian governments in succession and before that the military rulers were unable to unlock the vast human and resource potential of this nation? These are some of the basic questions that we need to address.

First and foremost the responsibility for steering the nation on the path of stability and prosperity rests in a democratic milieu with the political leadership. In our context for reasons well known this onerous obligation falls on the military leadership as well.

Security in the foreseeable future will remain a central challenge but this responsibility has to be shared by the civilian government with the armed forces. More importantly, the National Action Plan needs to be taken seriously and its implementation monitored periodically. The security situation has improved considerably, but a more consistent and widespread effort is needed. Incidents of terrorism continue to bedevil Fata, K-P and Balochistan resulting in loss of armed forces personnel and civilians.

Pakistan's future security prospects will also depend on how our political and civil society leaders live up to the vision of its founding fathers. Regrettably, the vision of political leaders and their party policies remains myopic and excessively personalised. In addition, pressure of militant groups and religio-political parties promoting the concept of a theocratic state is increasing and there is hardly any check. Meanwhile, the leadership of main political parties is focusing aggressively on personal humiliation of opponents. This trend has a severe down side as it encourages deep cleavages in society.

Imran Khan's crusade against corruption needs to be appreciated. But when it is used excessively to destroy the image of the opponent and less to achieve institutional strength to tackle the genuine menace of corruption it becomes counterproductive. The general discourse of politicians is primarily focused on undermining the other party and its leadership rather than bettering their own image through good governance and better leadership.

Nawaz Sharif to wipe the stigma of corruption is dragging the PML-N to defend him politically. Instead, he should be fighting his legal battles in courts so that the party does not suffer.

Unfortunately, Prime Minister Abbasi despite his fairly impressive performance has to lean on Nawaz Sharif as real power resides in him.

An interesting characteristic of Prime Minister Abbasi is that he can interact with the military with far greater ease and subtlety than his predecessor. It is expected this positivity would be beneficial in bringing greater harmony among state institutions. More significantly, the prime minister has revived functioning of major state institutions and committees that were lying dormant during his predecessor's period. If this practice is maintained it will contribute towards better governance through greater coordination and cooperation. It should also, hopefully, reduce the gap between the civil and military leadership.

The casual interest of political parties in legislation and perfunctory treatment of certain vital national issues does not speak well of them. Most glaring manifestation of it was lack of serious debate on the current budget even when there is possibility of an impending financial crisis. Lack of interest further exposes poor state management. Fortunately, despite these lapses economic fundamentals remain strong.

The standing committees of the National Assembly and the Senate need to be more active in future. These have a critical role of exercising oversight and monitoring the working of relevant ministries. Apart from the Public Accounts Committee and a few others most of them remained dormant or underutilised.

The current emphasis of political parties on holding large public meetings to impress the electorate is not enough. Cavalier attitude of Imran Khan and certain parliamentarians towards Parliament undermines the very basis of democracy. Nawaz Sharif has remained equally dismissive of Parliament if his attendance is any indicator. Politicians fail to comprehend that if they are interested in empowering themselves then they will have to strengthen Parliament. Improved governance and interest in legislative business is the only way of gaining the confidence of the people. It would also speed up the process of correcting the civil-military power imbalance.

The military in Pakistan is engaged in activities that go far beyond the normal functions of armed forces. This has been the result of several contributing factors that have been widely discussed. Apart from defending external borders from hostile neighbours, they are performing more or less on a permanent basis security duties in Karachi, Balochistan and Fata. They are protecting polio workers, engaged in conducting census, creating and managing housing societies, running educational institutions, hospitals, industries, agricultural farms, banks and a central role in CPEC. And the list is long. Indeed, their contribution in nation-building is commendable but the flip side is that civil institutions are taking a back seat. It is time that they shared the burden of the military as well.

If our leadership is sincere about changing course then it will have to formulate domestic and foreign policies that are compatible with genuine national interests. It must shed the past of elite-based patronage politics to performance-oriented criterion. And strengthen economy that serves the interest of its people and is self-sustaining. It is only then will Pakistan be able to live up to the dream of its founding father and the expectations of the vast majority of its people.

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Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1593432/1-can-2018-different/>

India Accusation Of Disrespect | Editorial

Indian Foreign Minister, Sushma Swaraj, on Wednesday claimed that Pakistan used Jadhav's family meeting as a propaganda tool. According to them, it was neither a humanitarian gesture nor goodwill which pushed Pakistan to take the action, rather it was the urge to be painted as the champion of human rights which made the meeting possible. At the same time, they have also pointed out that Jadhav looked tense and under pressure and seemed tutored by Pakistani authorities. They also went on to criticise the intelligence agencies for asking the wife to change her shoes.

These allegations are not only baseless but mere attempts to stir up controversy and propaganda. The Indian authorities have not provided any evidence to support their claims and are using the emotional sensitivities of their people to build a narrative against the goodwill of Pakistan. The move is not only unnecessary but will only create further tensions between the two nations. This meeting was meant to be a moment of cooperation between the countries but the entire effort is being marred by the Indian authorities.

Such naivety must end right away because Pakistan stands right in its stance. India cannot expect Pakistan to let go of its security measures to give more value to the emotional sentiment attached to the gesture. Any country would have done the same. At the same time, asking someone to take off their shoes is no disrespect . It happens all around the globe – millions take their shoes off at airports for inspections – for security reasons and cannot be painted as disrespect . She was provided new shoes as well. Again, it is not disrespect , unless India decides to paint it as such.

Had the treatment been unfair, Jadhav's family would have expressed their discomfort. Jhadav's family was only gracious. This shows that this is a wholly contrived issue. It needs to be put to rest, and the best way to do this is to take it off the air. After giving our public reply, the FO needs to stop publicly discussing this and discuss any future developments directly with Indian officials. Media houses, from both sides of the border, should refrain from unnecessary speculation as well.

This is slowly turning into an ugly spat with no opinions aplenty on each side. Trying to answer back to allegations will only mire us into it further. The best course of action is to withdrawn from this media circus and let it die a natural death.

Source: <http://nation.com.pk/29-Dec-2017/india-accusation-of-disrespect>

ECONOMY

Iran-Pakistan Ties: Impact on CPEC By Asia Maqsood

Since the inception of Pakistan, relations between Iran and Pakistan were on even keels throughout the early decades. The two countries were cooperative from 1947-1979, while the Shah of Iran still reign. Pakistan's Balochistan province is pivotal in relations between the two countries because the Baloch population is present in both countries. Even in the 1971 war, Pakistan was provided assistance through the provision of military hardware, intelligence and logistics by Iran along with Syria and Jordan. Furthermore, Pakistan also played an influential role in ending the Iran-Iraq war. Unfortunately, relations between the two countries declined during the 1990's.

The Afghan Taliban's sectarianism was one of the reasons relations between the two countries failed to remain cordial. The fact that the Taliban (which was backed by Pakistan) was targeting Shias in Afghanistan put Pakistan in the spotlight. The situation deteriorated further when the Taliban killed Iranian diplomats in northern Afghanistan in 1998. Following this, many prominent Shia figures were targeted in terrorist attacks. The Iranian consulate was targeted twice in Peshawar. A senior Iranian diplomat was abducted from the same city in 2009. It was obvious to Iran that the group behind these attack was being funded by the Saudis and supported by Pakistan. Pakistan was accused of not providing sufficient security to Iranian diplomats.

As a result of this, Indo-Iran ties emerged on one side, whereas Pakistan-Saudi ties emerged on the other. India's desire to engage with Iran is fairly obvious; it would lead to the isolation of Pakistan and decrease Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan, while increasing India's. It is pertinent to discuss Pakistan's two main concerns here. These are growing Indo-Iran ties in Afghanistan and the development of the Chabahar port.

However, the dramatic turn in Iran-Pakistan relations came in 2016 when Indian agent Kulbushan Jadhav was arrested in Balochistan and it was claimed by Pakistan that he attempted to cross into Balochistan through Iran. Following the arrest of this Indian agent, Iran's President visited Pakistan and Lt. Gen Asim Bajwa shared the text of the former Army Chief of Pakistan General Raheel Shareef, "There is one concern that RAW (India's intelligence agency) is involved in Pakistan, especially in Balochistan and sometimes it also uses the soil of our brother country Iran." Furthermore, the killing of Mullah Mansour in 2016 near the Iran border which the Pakistani military was suspicious about considering that Mansour has just crossed the border from Iran and was hit by a drone attack. Another sticking factor is that the Balochistan border is infested with drug smugglers, Baloch insurgents and pseudo-Taliban militants. These factors have instigated more mistrust between the two countries.

Talking about recent times, the last two years have witnessed more cross-border fire between Pakistani military and Iranian forces than the entire 68 years of bilateral relations.

India's desire to engage with Iran is fairly obvious; it would lead to Pakistan's isolation and decrease Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan, while increasing India's

On Nov 6, 2017 Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa visited Iran. Focusing on the regional realities of South Asia, there are two paramount concerns to be discussed in this visit. First is Pakistan's concern against the India and Iran's role in Afghanistan and second is Iran's apprehension on the terrorist attacks on its security forces allegedly from Pakistani soil. Both countries have different viewpoints on the Middle East but they have not allowed this to undermine the bilateral agenda of the visit. In one of his earlier meetings with Ambassador Honardoost, Gen Bajwa had told him that "enhanced Pak-Iran military-to-military cooperation will have positive impact on regional peace and stability" with regards to Pakistan's defence diplomacy. The entirety of this visit secures the trust between the two countries and at least Pakistan is safer from any effort or threat by Iran to sabotage the huge development of CPEC and Gwadar Port.

A well-known historian and Oxford University academic Peter Frankopan said, “At the moment, there is a talk of Chabahar and Gwadar complementing each other, and being peers rather than rivals. This scenario is entirely plausible and possible. Whether it is likely or not is another question.”

In nutshell, it is pertinent to focus on the two developments of two belligerent countries of South Asia (India, Pakistan) have two equations; one is China-Pakistan with the development of Gwadar Port and China Pakistan Economic Corridor. Second is the India-Iran with the development of Chabahar Port and India's growing influence of Afghanistan. It could be inferred here that Iran is not the sole neighbour who is assisting India to access Afghanistan but US is relatively playing more active role in uplifting India in this region. Hence on Pakistan's side, the Chinese investment is facing more challenges than India's investment in Chabahar Port. CPEC is an inclusive project and welcomes all states to be part of the project by investing and open up more opportunities of prosperity for the whole region. Pakistan's Army Chief's visit substantially has proven a catalyst for amending the mistrust between the two countries which eventually further supported each other's development plans. It could also be infer optimistically that Gwadar could have benefits for Iran and CPEC can provide more trade opportunities for Iran. Moreover, China's investment in Pakistan could be the pioneer to broader Chinese regional infrastructure investments, including in Iran. Chinese may make contributions to Chabahar.

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Rupee's Devaluation Dilemma | Editorial

UN Report warns artificial rate policy unsustainable

Among the economy's bugbears, and there are many 'usual suspects' among them, the actual ground strength of the rupee precipitates a raging debate over allowing it to float freely making market forces sole arbiter of its actual value, or keeping it pegged down by State Bank intervention. Now, the country's forex reserves situation has reached a crunch stage where, considering the myriad formidable factors ailing the economy, this crucial matter needs to be resolved.

That stern financial headmaster, the IMF, to whom we are an irritating borrower, has on various occasions advised, admonished, warned and appealed to the absent common sense of our policy makers to swallow the bitter pill of devaluation, which would lead to better economic health, but to no avail. Now the 2017 report of UN's Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific has cautioned Pakistan that its current policy of artificially deflating the rupee may not be sustainable particularly if interest rate on dollar is hiked, ending the glut of cheap international global liquidity, formerly so easily soaked up by our Sukuk and Eurobond 'road shows', the latest on December 5 netting \$2.5 billion. This stop-gap measure enabled the debt-burdened economy to offset the outflows of \$886.8 million in one week alone, and pushed total liquid forex reserves up to \$20,986.4 billion. The State Bank needs to keep a sharp eye on key indicators, such as overall domestic and external debt, tax revenues, exports, imports and trade deficit, and current account deficit, all highly vulnerable areas. Pakistan's 2017 growth rate is projected at 5.3 percent, inflation at 4.2, and little else to write home about, with the current account deficit a nightmarish \$12.1 billion.

The debate boils down to whether devaluation would actually benefit exports and offset the increased cost of imports (of which oil guzzled \$10 .60 billion in FY17), and of astronomical debt -servicing surge. A speculative investor market raid on July 5, 2017 which caused inter-bank dollar rate to rise from Rs104.90 to Rs108.25, 'added Rs230 billion to the national debt within hours'. Devaluation is a double-edged weapon and must be governed solely by well-considered long and short-term national interests.

Source: <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/12/09/rupees-devaluation-dilemma/>

Pakistan's Economic Promise By Munir Akram

THE recent oversubscription of the foreign loans sought by the Pakistan government, and the relatively favourable rates on which these were obtained, indicates that lenders seem to have shrugged off this year's sharp (20 per cent) fall in the Pakistan Stock Exchange and concerns about widening trade and budget deficits, domestic political turmoil and threats of US sanctions.

The market's optimism about Pakistan's economy is well placed. Despite bad or indifferent management, the country's GDP has grown, in nominal terms, from \$80 billion in 2002 to \$300bn in 2017. In Purchasing Power Parity terms, the Pakistani economy's size is \$1 trillion. And, these statistics do not count the estimated 36pc of the economy which remains undocumented.

The planning minister asserted a few days ago that economic growth this year would have reached the 6.5pc target (instead of 5.3pc) were it not for the domestic political turbulence. But the government's economic decisions appear to be clearer and quicker under the stand-in prime minister. And, the blockade of the capital by religious zealots was too recent to affect the growth statistic. It is investment which largely determines the rate of growth.

The market's optimism about the country's economy is well placed.

Until two years ago, growth in Pakistan's economy hovered around 4pc or less. It rose to 5pc last year and 5.3pc this year mainly due to the investment in energy and infrastructure under the CPEC project.

It is estimated that to eliminate extreme poverty and double per capita income (from \$1600 to \$3200) in a decade, Pakistan's economy should grow at 7pc annually. To achieve this level of growth, investment in the economy (external and internal) should be around 20pc of GDP ie around \$60bn annually, equal to the entire amount committed so far under CPEC.

Most of this \$60bn in annual investment will have to be mobilised by Pakistan itself, from its domestic revenues, national capital markets, the private sector and external earnings.

Although tax collection has increased recently, Pakistan's tax-to-GDP ratio is still much lower than the global norm of 16-18pc. Well managed, tax revenue can be doubled.

Apart from enlarging the tax net, the government can effect enormous savings by selling off or shutting down the dozen or so state-owned corporations (white elephants) which are costing the exchequer around 2pc of GDP each year.

Similarly, subsidies (for electricity, water, fertiliser production, textile and other exports), unless efficiently provided for specific development goals, encourage 'rent-seeking' and corruption, distort the economy and waste precious state resources. They must be progressively eliminated.

Third, once fully developed, Pakistan's capital markets can be a significant source of investment.

Fourth, a well-conceived and energetic effort is required to mobilise domestic and foreign private investment.

While money can be mobilised, investment must be deployed strategically to create sustained growth, employment and development. There are five areas which deserve to be accorded priority: physical infrastructure, social development, agriculture, manufacturing and technology.

Under CPEC, Pakistan's energy and transport infrastructure requirements are being addressed with China's cooperation. Hopefully, this vital enterprise will not be derailed by malign internal or external intervention. CPEC should be enlarged, as envisaged, to encompass cooperation in the industrial and other sectors of the economy.

However, building Pakistan's 'social infrastructure' — education and medical facilities; water and sanitation; urban and rural transport systems — is equally if not more important than physical infrastructure. This is essential to create the human foundation for modernisation of the economy and should have first call on the national development budget. Some progress in these sectors has been made in Punjab and KP; not so in Sindh and Balochistan.

Agriculture contributes 25pc of Pakistan's GDP and absorbs 40pc of its labour force. Pakistan possesses the largest integrated irrigation system in the world. Yet its per unit agricultural output is one of the world's lowest. It wastes over 30pc of its water and food production. Unless agricultural production grows at more than the present 2-3pc, Pakistan will be unable to feed its growing population. What is required is clear: more equitable land distribution (to smaller, more productive farmers, 50pc of whom do not own any land); upgradation of the irrigation system; focused financing of advanced techniques for efficient water use, improved seeds, cultivation and harvesting, storage, transport, marketing and processing of agricultural products.

Likewise, unless it industrialises, Pakistan will be unable to grow rapidly or provide employment for its 'youth bulge'. Since Pakistan's growth is driven mainly by domestic demand, it is well placed to develop its textiles, steel, heavy machinery, engineering goods, automotive, electronics, petrochemical, consumer goods, and food-processing industries, without relying on exports.

As every industrialised country has done historically, Pakistan will need to 'protect' its nascent industries from external competition for a time. The WTO rules permit developing countries to do so. If a foreign company can sell a product in Pakistan, it is unlikely to invest in producing it there. Premature trade 'liberalisation' is a recipe for deindustrialisation. Pakistan's access to foreign markets in any sector will be meaningful only once it is competitive in that sector. Islamabad should renegotiate all so-called FTAs and review its trade regime to build in the protections required by its industries.

Technology is key to economic dynamism. Every industrial process, every business model, is being transformed by the application of digital and other technological innovations. Pakistan must absorb these developments like a sponge, mobilising public and private entities, at home and abroad, to find the most efficient and productive ways to promote growth and development in targeted areas, often leapfrogging the existing techniques applied in advanced countries. In the final analysis, this will be one of the two decisive factors in Pakistan's economic success or failure.

The second is the quality of Pakistan's governance. A modern state requires a functionally competent, honest system of governance which can set the rules,

create capacity, ensure fair competition and equitable distribution of the fruits of growth and development. After decades of misrule, the people must accord first priority to evolving an answer to the question: how to secure a leadership that is dedicated to Pakistan's national interest, not its own; one that is enlightened, honest and accountable; one that can respond to the enormous challenges and opportunities that face Pakistan today?

The writer is a former Pakistan ambassador to the UN.

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Source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1375641/pakistans-economic-promise>

Tehran won't allow India to use Chabahar port to undermine Pakistan, say Iranian diplomats

By Kamran Yousaf

ISLAMABAD: On December 3, Iranian President Hassan Rowhani inaugurated the first phase of Chabahar port. Pakistan is not part of the project, yet its minister for ports and shipping was standing next to the Iranian President during the ceremony. This was no coincidence, as Hasil Bizenjo was asked to stand next to Rowhani in a carefully choreographed move.

Days before Iran started preparations for the inauguration ceremony, it invited Pakistan to send a ministerial-level delegation for the event. Tehran followed up with not only the formal invitation but used all available diplomatic channels to make sure that the Pakistani delegation attends the ceremony.

The objective behind this move was clear – Iran wanted to send a message that it would not allow India or any other country to use Chabahar against Pakistan, said a senior Iranian diplomat, who requested not to be named so that he could speak freely on the subject.

Such a firsthand account of close cooperation between Pakistan and Iran is unusual and represents a significant shift in the two neighbours' ties, which have often been marred by a trust deficit and mutual suspicion.

The turnaround is also important when seen alongside Pakistan's participation in the Saudi-led counterterrorism coalition. Iran, which is not part of the grouping, considers the initiative an attempt to further Saudi Arabia's agenda in the region.

That is one of the reasons that Pakistan has been treading a careful path on the issue as it has the potential to undermine ties with Iran.

Iranian president inaugurates first phase of Chabahar Port

Despite any allusions to a gulf, Islamabad and Tehran have been moving closer to each other, and diplomats on either side feel that the two sides understand and appreciate each other's perspective.

Pakistan, according to official sources, has given firm assurances to Iran that Islamabad would not become part of an initiative that targets the Islamic Republic.

Tehran, in return, has pledged that it would not allow any regional country including India to undermine Pakistan's interests.

Far from India's portrayal of Chabahar Port, Iran does not see it as a rival to Gwadar Port.

After the inauguration of the first phase, Indian officials and commentators began presenting it as a major strategic victory to sidestep Pakistan.

But the Iranian diplomat played down the India hype as 'psychological warfare.' He said the Iranian president has already mentioned that Chabahar and Gwadar ports would complement each other in the future and that a memorandum of understanding to this effect has already been signed.

Chabahar port will enhance trade ties among regional countries, says Rouhani

This unprecedented bonhomie did not happen overnight but after months of rigorous efforts from both sides. The visit of army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa was the culmination of those efforts.

"It was an excellent, excellent visit," emphasised the diplomat. The two sides developed a broader understanding of bilateral ties and key regional developments.

He added that military and intelligence cooperation have deepened greatly in the past few months as officials from the security establishments on either side of the border speak to each other more often, something that was not possible just a few years ago.

Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1580891/1-tehran-wont-allow-india-use-chabahar-port-undermine-pakistan-say-iranian-diplomats/>

Fiscal Outcome 1st Quarter, 2017-18 By Dr Hafiz A Pasha

The information on fiscal operations in the first quarter of 2017-18 of the federal and provincial governments has been released recently by the Federal Ministry of Finance (MoF). The figures have been obtained from the AGPR, Provincial AGs, SBP and EAD. As such, they continue to be fairly authentic and reliable indicators of the short-run developments in public finance, especially since the so-called 'statistical discrepancy' is very small this time.

The headline number is the size of the consolidated fiscal deficit. During the quarter, it is estimated at 1.2 percent of the GDP. Sometime ago, the first estimate by the MoF was that it was down to only 0.9 percent of the GDP. Apparently, the quantum of borrowing was underestimated then.

The deficit in the corresponding quarter of 2016-17 was only marginally higher at 1.3 percent of the GDP. Therefore, the reduction achieved is very marginal. For the year as a whole, the deficit reduction is expected to be much larger of 1.7 percent of the GDP, on the average quarterly of 0.4 percent of the GDP. As such, this is the first indication that the target deficit will be significantly exceeded in 2017-18.

There are a number of positive and negative developments behind the fiscal numbers. On the plus side, there is, first, an exceptional performance in the growth achieved in tax revenues, especially by FBR and the four provincial governments of 22 percent and 35 percent respectively. The latter have launched a vigorous resource mobilization effort particularly in the sales tax on services, following its transfer to them after the 18th Amendment. An extraordinarily high growth rate of 54 percent has been achieved in this tax during the quarter.

FBR's performance must be recognized especially in the high growth rate of 24 percent achieved in direct taxes. Also, import duties have shown exceptional growth of over 28 percent. A major factor contributing to this performance is the big rise in imports of 22 percent in the first quarter. However, only 19 percent of the annual target of Rs 4013 billion has been met. There is still a long way to go.

The negative factor on the revenue side is the very poor performance of non-tax revenues, with a growth rate of only 2 percent. The Federal Budget of 2017-18 targets an increase of 10 percent in these revenues. In particular, mark-up and dividends from PSEs have, more or less, disappeared as a source of revenue.

The big mystery is why, despite the phenomenal growth in revenues from taxes in the divisible pool of 22 percent, the revenue transfers to the four provinces combined have increased by 3 percent only. They should have been even higher, given the backlog in transfers from 2016-17. On top of this, there have been delays in the remittance of outstanding hydro-electric profits to Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab.

A province-wise analysis of the transfers reveals that the growth in transfers has been marginal in the case of the two provinces, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Is this a conscious attempt on the part of the PML(N) Government in Islamabad to squeeze provincial governments of opposition parties in the year of elections?

The consequence of lower transfers, than required under the 7th NFC formula, is that the federal government has been able to show a smaller deficit, while the provinces have been unable to generate significant cash surpluses. The Federal deficit is 1.4 percent of the GDP in the first quarter while the Provincial surplus is only 0.2 percent of the GDP. The latter magnitude is targeted at almost one percent of the GDP in 2017-18.

Turning to the expenditure side, the first quarter has witnessed for the five governments combined a growth rate of 12 percent in current expenditure and 16 percent in development expenditure, implying an overall increase in total expenditure of 13 percent.

There has been a 11 percent increase in Federal expenditure. The federal budget of 2017-18 envisages that current expenditure will in aggregate terms actually be curtailed by 1 percent. Clearly, much more economy will have to be exercised in the remaining months of 2017-18. On top of this, there is even more concern about a tendency towards runaway spending in current expenditure by the provincial governments, with an extremely high growth rate of almost 26 percent. There is need to understand why this has happened.

The inevitable result is that despite ambitious targets for growth in development spending, this has not been reflected in the rise in PSDP expenditure. The federal government has increased the actual outlays on projects by a sizeable 57 percent in the first quarter. As opposed to this, combined Provincial development expenditure has actually fallen by 7 percent. This is a reflection of limited growth in transfers and a big jump in current expenditure, which has squeezed development spending even in an election year.

The federal PSDP is projected at Rs 1001 billion. Only 10 percent of this target has been met in the first quarter. Even the releases are for less than 17 percent of the target spending. How has this affected allocations to key sectors like CPEC, water and power? Fortunately, the National Highways Authority, with major CPEC projects, has received 17 percent of its annual allocation. However, the ports and shipping sector, with projects related to Gwadar, has received only 3 percent. Similarly, the water and power sectors have been given less than 20 percent of the committed funds by the end of September.

The overall picture of public finances that emerges from the first three months of 2017-18 is that the tax mobilization effort has been strong, non-tax revenues have, however, been slack, current expenditure has demonstrated unusually fast growth while development spending is far from the level required to achieve the size of PSDP targets. The net result is a fiscal deficit somewhat larger than initially anticipated. First, indications are that the annual consolidated deficit will be significantly larger than the target level of 4.1 percent of the GDP.

How has the deficit been financed in the first quarter? Here, two positive developments need to be highlighted. First, virtually complete reliance has been placed on domestic borrowing, as compared to a contribution of 84 percent to financing the deficit in the corresponding quarter of 2016-17. Second, within bank borrowing, both the SBP and commercial banks have been accessed to with shares of 52 percent and 48 percent respectively. Last year, almost exclusively the dependence was on the SBP, leading to a record level of printing of money.

However, there is need to recognize that the net inflow of external borrowing has, more or less, ceased not due to any voluntary restraint but because the country is very much now in the 'debt trap'. New loans are being acquired almost entirely to repay old loans.

We will watch fiscal developments intently over the next three quarters. Will the resource mobilization effort be sustained and pork barreling through political programmes remain limited as the election approaches? Only time will tell.

(The writer is Professor Emeritus and a former Federal Minister)

Source: <https://fp.brecorder.com/2017/12/20171212326486/>

CPEC: The Long-Term Plan by Ahsan Iqbal

Despite political events in the country created by some narrow vested interests, the 7th Joint Coordination Committee (JCC) meeting on CPEC was successfully held on November 21, 2017 in Islamabad.

Our Chinese counterparts showed complete resolve and commitment to successfully complete all CPEC projects in a timely manner. The 7th JCC also officially approved the Long Term Plan (LTP) of CPEC. It is a standard practice around the world that a bilateral agreement cannot be made public unless it is approved by both parties. But unfortunately some cynics in the media tried to generate unnecessary controversy by publishing an incorrect version of LTP. As we promised, we have released the LTP for the public and the media.

The development of any country is based on its industrialisation process. The qualitative difference between the developed and the developing countries is the difference in their degree of industrialisation. Where developed countries have now entered a post-industrial age, developing countries are still struggling to complete their industrialisation process and modernise their economy. The PML-N has believed in and consistently strived for industrialisation of Pakistan. In light of this vision, the PML-N government initiated work on CPEC immediately after coming into power. CPEC has assumed worldwide attention due to its significant contribution towards removing energy and infrastructure growth bottlenecks from Pakistan's economy. It provides Pakistan a great opportunity to leapfrog to expedite the processes of industrialisation.

The LTP provides a conceptual framework for CPEC up to 2030; it also gives a framework for the industrialisation of Pakistan. To finalise the LTP, the government of Pakistan consulted provinces, federal ministries and their respective technical groups. The plan is completely in line with the seven pillars of 'Pakistan Vision 2025'; these pillars are founded on the economic principles of inclusive and sustainable development. The seven salient feature of the LTP are connectivity, energy, trade and industrial parks, agricultural development and poverty alleviation, tourism, cooperation in areas concerning people's livelihood and non-governmental exchanges and financial cooperation. The spirit of the LTP is best captured in the following statement, "...CPEC will greatly speed up the industrialisation and urbanisation process in Pakistan and help it grow into a highly

inclusive, globally competitive and prosperous country capable of providing high-quality life to its citizens.”

I will briefly discuss some of the salient features of CPEC’s long-term plan to illustrate its central role in the industrialisation of Pakistan.

Connectivity is the cornerstone of development. It increases the flow of goods, information and people across regions. That is why an integrated transport system is central to the LTP. It includes the construction and development of Kashgar-Islamabad, Peshawar-Islamabad-Karachi, D I Khan-Hakla, Sukkur-Gwadar Port and Dera Ismail Khan-Quetta-Sohrab-Gwadar road infrastructure to improve inter/intra-connectivity in Pakistan and China. The development of Gwadar Port city, Gwadar airport and Easy Bay expressway are going to transform the city of Gwadar into a maritime trade hub and a new smart port city of the region. It will also lead to the industrialisation of Balochistan.

Information technology is critical for development. In this regard, we have laid a cross-border optical fibre cable between Pakistan and China, and agreed to cooperate in promoting technologies of the fourth industrial revolution in Pakistan.

In the energy sector, both countries will enhance cooperation in the fields of oil and gas, electricity and power grids. The focus is on thermal power, hydropower, coal gasification and renewable power generation and modernising power transmission networks. CPEC has already addressed the major energy bottleneck in Pakistan. Almost over half of the 10,000 MW energy added recently to the national grid comes from CPEC.

To build the industrial base of the country, new industrial parks/ special economic zones (SEZs) will be built all over the country. Both countries will cooperate to improve efficiency in the textile and garment industries, both of which are the backbone of Pakistan’s export sector. Engineering-based industries will also be developed in Pakistan.

No country has successfully industrialised without modernising its agricultural sector. CPEC will allow us to modernise agriculture through the introduction of new technologies such as biological breeding, drip irrigation etc. The emphasis is to improve incomes of small farmers by increasing their productivity and efficiency.

Coastal tourism can be a new niche for Pakistan. CPEC will allow us to build coastal leisure and vacationing centres across the Keti-Bander-Karachi, Sonmiani-Ormara, Jhal Jhao, Gwadar and Jiwani routes. CPEC is about cooperation at all levels between both countries, including non-government organisations and people-to-people interactions. For cross-fertilisation of ideas and cultures, exchange of students, tourists and academics will be an integral component of the corridor.

Pakistan and China will be enhancing monetary cooperation between their central banks. Both countries agree on bilateral currency swap arrangements and would prefer making payments in RMB and rupees regarding CPEC projects rather than any third-party currency.

According to the LTP, the implementation of CPEC will take place in three phases, with clear goals. In the first phase, that is – by 2020 – the major bottlenecks in Pakistan’s socio-economic development will be completely addressed and “CPEC shall start to boost the economic growth along it for both countries” (LTP document, p 10).

The second phase will be done by 2025, all the infrastructure of CPEC will be ready and all industrial projects will have been completed. As a result, CPEC will have a major impact on the livelihoods of people living along the corridor. The goals of Vision 2025 will be achieved and there will be more balanced regional economic development.

The third phase of the LTP will mature by 2030. The endogenous mechanisms for indigenous inclusive and sustainable economic growth will be in place in Pakistan. As per the LTP: “CPEC’s role in stimulating economic growth in Central Asia and South Asia [will be] brought into holistic play, and South Asia shall grow into an international economic zone with global influence”.

Pakistan is a democratic country where provincial governments are not just autonomous, but are also led by different political parties which are staunch opponents of each other. The federal government and all provincial governments are united in making the LTP and CPEC a game-changer for Pakistan.

Pakistan is a country full of promise and potential but due to strategic mistakes in the past we haven't realised our true development potential. The PML-N government is committed to prioritising the economic interests of the country by engaging in the geo-economics – instead of geo politics – of the region through CPEC.

CPEC is a major step taken by Pakistan to transform itself as an economic nation and become hub of trade, commerce and manufacturing in the region. Without industrialisation we cannot resolve many of our socio-economic problems and CPEC is our opportunity to become an industrialised country. The sustainability of this qualitative shift mandates the collective support of all national stakeholders, including the media, to turn this dream project of Pak-China friendship into an everlasting joint enterprise for shared destiny and prosperity.

The writer is the federal minister for planning, development and reform, and interior.

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Source: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/258413-cpec-the-long-term-plan>

Yuan Proposal Puzzles Financial Circles By Khurram Husain

THE recent announcement by Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal that all trade between China and Pakistan will now be settled in local currency, whether the Pakistani rupee or Chinese yuan, has raised some interesting questions. A swap arrangement between China and Pakistan was signed on Dec 31, 2011. Explaining the purpose of that arrangement, then governor of the State Bank of Pakistan, Yaseen Anwer, said “the principal objective of these swaps is to promote the use of regional currencies for trade settlement purposes” as well as advancing China’s aim of making the yuan into an international currency.

The size of the swap was 10 billion yuan from the Chinese side, and Rs140 billion from Pakistan (\$1.6bn). Importers and exporters could now use the facility to settle their trade in the currency of both countries, instead of relying on US dollars, where a conversion fee would attach an extra cost. But in the years since its launch, the facility was rarely used by traders. Its biggest utilisation came in 2013, when the State Bank used it to draw \$600 million to help the government tide over an emerging balance of payments crisis just long enough to get past the elections.

So when Ahsan Iqbal chose the occasion of the launch of the CPEC Long Term Plan to announce that “we are examining the use of RMB instead of the US dollar for trade between the two countries”, the first reaction amongst those who follow financial developments between Pakistan and China was: what is there to examine? A mechanism to do exactly this has existed for six years now.

Amongst those asking this question is Salim Raza, former governor of the State Bank. “I’m puzzled by the announcement,” he says. “It is not clear what exactly is being asked by the Chinese here, perhaps they’re just urging us to start using the swap arrangement, or perhaps they have asked for more” than just settlement of bilateral trade in local currency.

So long as the use of the yuan is restricted to settlement of trade-related payments, it has little impact on Pakistan’s economy. The fact that Pakistan runs a large and persistent deficit in its bilateral trade with China means that the supply of yuan will

continuously need to be replenished, either through borrowing or through an expansion of the swap arrangement, or a combination of both.

Since the signing of the swap arrangement, Pakistan's bilateral trade deficit with China has more than tripled, going from \$4bn to more than \$12bn today. Imports from China were \$14bn last fiscal year, whereas exports stood at \$1.5bn.

"If this is to extend beyond trade-related payments," says Mr Raza, "then we have to be mindful. If it extends to commercial banking, or payment for services in the local market, then it runs the risk of introducing a parallel currency."

In the fall of 2008, then finance minister Shaukat Tarin travelled to China as Pakistan was in the midst of a large balance of payments crisis of the sort that have episodically afflicted the economy. He returned bearing \$500m as balance of payments support from the Chinese government, along with a missive from them, saying "we don't usually do this sort of thing".

To him, the proposal of conducting bilateral trade in local currency is a good one, "provided they are willing to commit to advance placement of yuan within Pakistan to support the move", he says.

A high-level source in the Planning Commission, who could not speak for attribution, could only say that the proposal is still at an early stage and has some way to go before it is finalised. The Long Term Plan of CPEC, under which the proposal is being advanced, specifically mentions tripling the size of the swap arrangement to 30bn yuan in order to facilitate local currency settlement of all trade transactions.

China has been on an accelerating drive to globalise its currency for many years now. It has sought to encourage the use of the yuan as a reserve asset, meaning central banks of other countries can hold their foreign exchange reserves in yuan rather than dollars. It made a strong bid to include the yuan in the IMF's basket of Strategic Drawing Rights (SDR), the currency the fund uses for its lending operations. But its strongest push towards the goal of globalising its currency has come in the form of massive swap arrangements with central banks of more than 30 countries around the world, totaling almost \$490bn according to Bloomberg.

There is little data on how much these swaps have actually been drawn down though. Perhaps it is its reliance on Letters of Credit as the only mechanism to effect payment that serves as a disincentive for many traders to use the swap, since importers of Chinese goods rely on other channels to make payment. But how exactly the proposal will be effected, and how it will plug the persistent shortage of yuan in local foreign exchange markets, remain central questions as it moves forward.

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Source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1377691/yuan-proposal-puzzles-financial-circles>

Outlook Uncertain | Editorial

As the year draws to an end there are some positive indicators on the economy — but risks and vulnerabilities as well. On the positive side there has been a revival in manufacturing and agriculture, and a slightly unexpected rise in tax revenues which has fed through to a strengthening of public finances. The Institute for Policy Reforms (IPR) has reviewed the economy for the first quarter of the financial year 2017-18 and it fingers a complex downside.

The headline story for months has been the current account deficit which has grown by 120 per cent over the same quarter of the last fiscal year, exceeding the overly-optimistic target the government had set itself. Foreign reserves continue to dwindle despite further borrowing to service the debt — robbing Peter to pay Paul has never been a viable strategy — and the government trying to dodge the bullet by saying that the deficit has grown because of the import of growth-producing machinery sounds thin. That said the import of power generation machinery fell by 17 per cent.

The coming year is thick with risks. Dependence on external savings and the recent revaluation of the rupee are likely to reduce imports. Missing the fiscal target this year is going to knock-on to next year and the foreign financing gap is both significant risk and burden with no obvious way of shedding the load. All of this, asserts the IPR, is the result of successive governments being firefighters rather than effective strategic planners — an argument difficult to refute. Structural issues remain unresolved very long term and the weight of historical mismanagement and poor decision-making is coming now to be perhaps the major impediment to national growth and development. It is craven politics that hobbles us today, and the economic structure does nothing to encourage the economy to increase investment and — opines the IPR — favours the privileged and elites at the expense of the rest of the populace — again an argument virtually impossible to refute. Pakistan is politically on rinse-spin-repeat, the victim of a chronic inability to reform. It could all have been so much different.

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Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1592086/6-outlook-uncertain/>

CPEC, SCO Side By Side | Editorial

CPEC is a project that the entire world has its eyes on. No one can refuse its importance for Islamabad and Beijing and of its potential to usher in a new era of prosperity and economic stability in Pakistan. This is not an exaggeration of the benefits of the project, for different participants who attended SCO conference held recently in Russia also discussed CPEC and its potential to change the lives of millions of people in the region.

Pakistan's Prime Minister, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, while addressing the participants of the conference expressed Islamabad's desire to see CPEC's connectivity with SCO's corridors. If Pakistan's desire of such connectivity materializes, the long dream of connecting Europe, South Asia, China, and South East Asia will come true. CPEC and SCO's platform, if deliberated upon cleverly and tackled with adeptness, hold enormous gains for Pakistan. In fact, the whole region and people living here can enjoy the fruits of such development and cooperative schemes. The Chinese Premier while referring to One Belt, One Road project's initiative CPEC, mentioned Pakistan and South Asia as massive economic markets for the SCO as the region has a significant population.

It is true that with the completion of projects like OBOR and CPEC South Asia and Southeast Asia can rise as the driving engines of global economic growth. Countries in these two regions complement each other economically; thus there is an excellent possibility of regional cooperation as well.

While there are some fears among critics of the CPEC project; that Chinese products will leave local manufacturers devastated, Chinese Ambassador, talking to Waqt News, opined that China understands that Pakistan will face difficulties in the trade with China. And to boost up Pakistani business, China is identifying areas within Chinese markets where Pakistani exports can be adjusted. The next phase of the scheme will empower Pakistani investors to raise their production capabilities and to increase their exports to Chinese and other regional markets.

PM, Abbasi in his address stressed upon the need of not politicizing projects like CPEC and OBOR for such projects will prove helpful in taking out people from abject poverty. Needless to say that development projects like CPEC and platform like SCO change the fate of the regions long suffering from poverty, hunger,

insecurity. Instead of criticizing, states should consider the broader benefits attached to such schemes. Pakistan has already taken such an initiative, where instead of objecting to SCO's decision of making India a full member, Abbasi congratulated India on the achievement. It is time for India to return the gesture.

Source: <http://nation.com.pk/04-Dec-2017/cpec-sco-side-by-side>

EDUCATION

Higher Education: The glass Ceiling By Irum Maqbool

“Education then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equaliser of the conditions of men, the balance-wheel of the social machinery.” — Horace Mann

In metropolitan cities of this country, a seemingly large part of the population is pursuing education. Some have dreams of their own, others have to fulfill their parent’s dreams. Pakistan has often been called the society that is seeing the rise of the middle class. An average urban student undergoing higher secondary education attends a school or college in the daytime and complements it with a tuition academy in the evening for extra coaching. The person in question aspires to become something worthy, in economic terms the person would most likely wish to either maintain his socioeconomic level or preferably rise a level or two. Admission into a ‘better’ university is a priority but ‘better’ is also expensive and getting in is not easy, sometimes owing to rather expensive entrance tests or admission forms. With public-sector universities not a priority for those who have sought a private-sector education finding funds for university is hard. The results of this disappointment are many, most of these average urban students enter adolescence with a sense of failure, injustice, anger towards those who can get what they desire and not wish to excel or work hard in an unjust world.

Pakistan is a ‘like father like son society’, there exists a low level of intergenerational earning mobility. The research conducted by Pakistan Institute of Development Economics using Pakistan Panel Household Survey 2010 is a case in point. The rate of urbanisation in Pakistan is 3-4% annually, one of the factors behind urbanity is social mobility and education. The two are interlinked but the fruits are not being equally divided.

The job one lands is determined by the university one attends which depends on the school one went to or their route of education, ie, local examination or

international ones at higher secondary level which in turn are predicted by the depth of the pocket of those the student banks on. This year for instance a student in Punjab should have fallen somewhere between 96% and 89% to become a doctor from a government-run medical college, otherwise he or she should attend a private-run one. For some students, either the bar is set very high or the alternative is obscenely expensive. Either way the second question they ask is, what else should we do? The subject of study is chosen according to its 'scope', loosely understood by the inquirer as to how much money will we make afterwards? The value of education is calculated in monetary terms, a belief reinforced by the fact that jobs are contingent upon the label of the university which needs to be paid for by money not everyone residing in the same city can afford. Some students find solace in entrepreneurship but here too the same rules apply, the source of funding depends on how many strings one can pull or the income level or savings of the father.

This situation will and can produce a lethal mix of a disenfranchised youth whose dreams are shattered so early in life, with little hope for change and lack of motivation or drive. The race is being lost by many before it has even started. The fact that the inequality which is breeding through education is bewildering, for it is education that one can look up to for it to end. For many of the average urban students, the cycle of impoverishment will continue and perhaps, even pass on to the next generation. Pakistan may be a nation of young people, but will they make satisfied and content adults? If more and more suffer disappointment at the futility of ambition then the answer is sadly, no.

China and Pakistan share a friendship based on common things. This predicament is also common between the two as pointed out by The New York Times in the article titled 'Stuck at the bottom in China'. With burgeoning poverty and erosion in the value of money, the urban middle class might be the new lower-income class. However, it will be one which tried and failed because the system was rigged against them.

Finding a solution to this problem will be an uphill task. A few steps that can be taken are the improvement of the public-sector universities, keeping the fees to a minimum and the teaching of soft skills to students in government universities. The chances of employment are a major factor in choosing a university, and the privately-run institutes have well-established links with the industry, a privilege not

offered to the alumni of state-run institutes. If the situation is not remedied the glass ceiling and economic barriers will continue to shackle those who long for better days. Rapid urbanisation is a national issue; social mobility is a right that should not be denied. Thus, if the immobility continues with it urban poverty and subsequently urban crime will too. Social inclusion will work for many so will leveling of the playing field.

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Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1577834/6-higher-education-glass-ceiling/>

Higher Purposes of a University Education By Dr S Zulfiqar Gilani

Universities in Pakistan have mushroomed and there are an ever-increasing number of individuals with university degrees. Before we start celebrating, we need to probe the intellectual development and quality of learning of our graduates.

The generally accepted higher purposes of a university education are the development of critical-analytical thinking and seeking evidence-based knowledge. These purposes are achieved through a curriculum that includes one academic year of exploration, before the student decides on a major area of further study. Students can then make an informed choice about pursuing a subject area that is in line with their aptitude. Obviously, the motivation level of a student who is studying an area of his own choosing will be much higher. This exploration and choice process fosters the development of the crucial values of self-reliance and informed decision-making.

Even after choosing a speciality, the student is required to study compulsory courses in other areas. This ensures a well-rounded education and widens the student's intellectual horizon. More importantly, the student learns that for a deeper and full understanding, matters have to be examined in their multi-dimensional complexity.

The most important aspect of developing the student's critical-analytical abilities is achieved by structuring the courses in a manner that to get good, or even passing, grades students have to read more than a textbook, engage in research and critically apply their mind to the content. Pedagogical methods are also central to achieving this goal. The critical-analytical habit of mind is further ensured through assessment methods that not only evaluate remembering the subject matter, but also the critical application of the mind to the content. Someone with a critical-analytical habit of questioning things doesn't passively accept and memorise received information. Such a habit results in a greater depth of knowledge and understanding of subject areas, but is also transferable to learning about all other matters in life, resulting in a lifelong learning.

How does our university education measure in terms of achieving the higher purposes? First, two interlinked contextual realities need to be kept in mind. Our university education seems to be infected with the 'Diploma Disease', where the end-purpose is obtaining the degree. So, we have a large cohort of individuals who have degrees, but have poor and superficial understanding of their subject-area. The entire focus seems to be the completion of the required number of courses needed to obtain a degree, never mind whether anything substantive was actually learned.

Further, the primary purpose of a university education is to increase the students' earning potential. So, one witnesses a huge demand for areas which the parents and/or the students consider to have a high market potential. In itself, this isn't a problem, but when real learning isn't occurring even in those areas, it becomes one.

Given the prevailing curriculum structure, course design, pedagogical approaches and assessment methods in our universities, the probability of achieving the higher purposes of university education is negligible. Our typical university curriculum is rigid. Students are admitted to university departments (read: subject-areas), and even if some soon find that they don't have the aptitude and/or interest to continue studying that subject, they can't change to another, plummeting their motivation. Further, there are massive firewalls between subject-areas. The student is exposed to courses of a single speciality and has no knowledge of other areas, however relevant and important those may be.

Even that narrow learning is superficial. Reading requirements are minimal and course-based research is almost non-existent. The pedagogical emphasis is on remembering course content and given our assessment methods, grades are primarily based on a regurgitation of the memorised material. Thus, students get a degree, but the higher purposes of university education aren't achieved.

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Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1526294/higher-purposes-university-education/>

Uniform System of Education For Pakistan By Abdul Hadi Imran

One of the primary elements that make man a league apart from God's other creations is knowledge. The basis of all knowledge is learning through formal and informal education. The vastness of knowledge available in this universe demands that the process starts from the cradle to the grave and yet it is never complete. Quality education is the backbone of a nation in terms of its financial and emotional health. However, unfortunately one of the most important issues that still remains unattended and needs to be addressed swiftly in Pakistan is its education system which, even after almost seventy years of its inception, remains in shambles with ad hoc education policies followed by all the governments and with the absence of a uniform system of education throughout the country.

Presently, there are three parallel streams of education systems prevalent in our country i.e. the elitist having English as their medium of instruction, the public school system catering to the needs of the middle and lower middle class families having Urdu as medium of instruction, and the third is the seminaries or madrasa school system for those who cannot or do not want to finance their children's education. Sadly, there is serious lack of harmony and integration among all three streams and instead they have a negative interaction with each other and would like to discredit each other's efforts in imparting education. The nation is already divided in three segments pursuing education in three different directions; yet the hostile relationship between these systems further divides the nation and is providing little or no hope for human resource development in the country.

English medium schools are the only go-to choice for the upper and middle class families for the education of their children. Despite the fact that they are running on their own terms and conditions and are charging exorbitantly high fees, our educated class would like to send their children to these schools. There is a big dilemma with these schools. The youth coming out of these schools after secondary level education does not have a very bright chance of getting tertiary level education in this country. Majority of them fall short of merit required for admission in medical and engineering colleges in Pakistan despite being the distinction holders at the Cambridge level. With the result being that they resort to leave the country to seek better opportunities for higher education. However, after

spending a good five to six years in the top universities, they are offered high paying jobs abroad and, therefore, are able to resist the urge to come back to their homeland when they see greener pastures in other countries with opportunities for better life. Hence, we lose a good chunk of best of the brains at the very early level of their lives.

Presently, three parallel streams exist within our education system. Sadly, there is neither harmony nor integration between them. Rather, all remain distinct, and any interaction that does take place is overwhelmingly negative in nature

The Urdu medium schools are yet another story to be told. All the public schools in Pakistan are imparting education in Urdu medium and the children only find themselves studying English as a subject very late in their secondary level education. However, this renders them incapable of mastering either of the two languages, and English becomes a nightmare for most of the Urdu medium students. Urdu medium schools also promote a system of rote learning which teaches children that memorizing something rather than understanding it is the more feasible and easier solution. The quality of public school facilities, lack of discipline, and untrained teachers in these schools produce a lot of youth who – despite being equally intelligent – are conceptually weaker, ill-disciplined, under-confident and incapable of competing internationally due to their weak language skills.

The third stream of education is of the children who are educated at seminaries or madrassa schools. Education in these madrassa schools is imparted with only one perspective i.e. the religious perspective. The youth coming out of these madrassa schools have a very narrow world view and, therefore, are unable to acquire education that is necessary for them to sustain themselves and their families, and make a positive contribution to the economy.

One of the main reasons for this sad state of affairs is that education has been given least priority in the budgetary allocations and the policy decisions. With regard to education and how the federal government has completely absolved its responsibility from education as per the 18th amendment, education became a subject controlled by the provincial government. Provinces do not have adequate and uniform infrastructure or resources to handle educational issues; the case in point is Balochistan.

In Pakistan, the children who excel most and are the brightest prefer to seek a career in engineering or become a doctor; their secondary options are quite often CSS or joining the armed forces; and once they are unable to seek a career in these fields they pursue a job in other professions such as law, journalism or teaching. Unfortunately, how much a person is respected in our society owes to either how much their job pays, or how much they can evade the law and how capable they are of harming someone. Thus, professions in the fields of law, judiciary, armed forces and police are sought after primarily due to the social status they provide. However, an equal level of importance should be provided to professions in the field of education.

Children from English medium schools face a comparative disadvantage in the field of medicine due to there being an unfair system of equivalence. Likewise, children from Urdu medium schools are at a comparative disadvantage when it comes to jobs in the private sector.

Another issue is that we, despite having spent sixty nine years developing this nation, have not accepted English in a wholesome manner. English is now a globally spoken language and a medium of communication, thus it should be taught to children. The importance of English is testified by the fact that an economically stable nation and a trading giant such as China is struggling to teach its people English. Thus, Pakistan needs to realize that a separation from English means seclusion and isolation from the rest of the world. Even religious scholars, being some of the most relevant and important people in our society, must also try to accept English as a source of development and prosperity for the nation.

One of the most challenging aspects with regards to education is Pakistan's youth bulge, which is why there is a need to channelize their energy and harness their potential. If this is not done, this – one of Pakistan's biggest assets – would become Pakistan's biggest problem. The youth needs to be trained and well educated so they can contribute to the nation's productivity. They can, as a result, also go abroad and bring in foreign exchange.

Almost fifty percent of Pakistan's population is young, and what better way to provide youth with employment opportunities than to create polytechnic institutes. This will cause a further increase in the availability of jobs in the form of skilled

craftsmen and workers. After their basic education, children should also be encouraged to go to polytechnic institutes. The government should provide the nation with more polytechnic institutes, and attach these institutes to industries, so that these children can be adjusted in these industries.

Education is one of the basic foundations of nation building. We need to provide a system of education that is free and universal, and the government must make sure that every child who is of school going age goes to school. This will ensure a brighter future for our younger generation and provide them will equal opportunities, so that they are not forced into a specific profession due to a non-uniform system of education or financial issues. Almost seventy years have passed and education remains a primary issue. If Pakistan is to be made into a prospering nation, we must put aside class discrimination and sectarian feuds and decide on, once and for all, a sound education policy. This policy must be decided by national consensus and then be followed religiously, and protected by the Constitution. If we start now, it will take at least an entire generation's time to transform Pakistan into a nation where the education system is uniform.

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Source: <https://dailytimes.com.pk/116683/uniform-system-of-education-for-pakistan/>

Quality of Literature Counts, Not Language By Farrukh Kamrani

“English is my own language but it is my own language by imposition. I don’t feel English belongs to me in the same way it must belong to the English [people]... I think a lot about whether I am writing in my own language — it must be because this is my only language — but there is a sense of loss that I have there having only English to work with.”

This is Tayari Jones — an African-American writer — who, during a panel discussion at the 36th edition of the Sharjah International Book Fair (SIBF), was telling the audience why she greatly admired an African author who refused to give up on his native language. Tayari’s words remind me of Haider Ali Aatish, who once said: *Payaam Bar Na Mayassar Huwa To Khoob Huwa, Zaban-e-Ghair Say Kia Sharhe Aarzoo Kartay* (It was all to the good that the messenger was unavailable, for how would I communicate my ardent desire [to my beloved] through someone else’s tongue.)

But a good number of Pakistani writers particularly those writing fiction have now adopted this ‘imposed language’, this ‘Zaban-e-Ghair’ — English — for self-expression. At the SIBF, which is one of the biggest cultural and literary events of the region, all the writers, who represented Pakistan, were writers of English. The emergence of this ever-growing group of English writers from Pakistan might be a positive thing if a matching number of writers were also taking up Urdu as their medium for expression. But this unfortunately is not the case.

Urdu has not received any good novel or short story collection from young people for quite some time. There has been some growth in Urdu fiction thanks to the works of ‘digest writers’, including Umera Ahmed, and I do regard their work as a contribution of sorts in the present situation; but our authors of high literature are a gradually shrinking league of grey-headed men. This is a very alarming sign both for Urdu and the Pakistani culture, primarily due to four reasons.

First, our creative talent is grappling with the difficulty of presenting a ‘local’ reality through a ‘foreign’ language. And while it is a fact that there is a whole new generation of authors for whom English is more like a mother tongue, our life here

has certain shades and meanings that can only be expressed in a native language. Second, our creative talent is shifting to another language which, despite all the globalisation, is part of a separate culture; thus our writers are actually contributing to another culture.

Third, while our English writers have now an international audience, they have sort of alienated their own people — the local audience, which knows and speaks Urdu. This loss of contact is a loss both for the writer and the reader. Another problem related to the first issue is that writing for a global audience skews our style. We tend either to become over-explanatory or to skip intimate cultural details and allusions that might otherwise make our work richer.

Fourth, a language grows and enriches through work of its poets and writers. As Urdu is not receiving much new talent, it is shrinking in its modes of expressions. If the situation persists and no step is taken to stop and reverse this process, then Urdu might soon become a language incapable of expressing any complex idea or feeling. This would turn us into a cultural cesspool of raw thoughts, raw feelings and raw expressions and might also lead us to more chaos and more violence.

That is why I regard shifting of our creative talent to English as a cultural crisis. However, this crisis has not emerged all of a sudden and one could see it coming for a long time. In fact, the first people who 'lost faith' in all manifestations of our pre-British era culture, and by extension also in Urdu and its literature, were our first reformers — Sir Syed and Haali. Ironically, both of them were also founders of the new-era Urdu literature.

Particularly Sir Syed, after the fall of Delhi in 1857 to the forces of East India Company, had urged 'his nation' to shed its 'outdated' culture, including the Oriental languages, for the sake of 'progress'. Apparently, this attitude of our national reformers later turned into our 'national habit' of looking down upon our own cultures and regarding them as symbols of 'backwardness' and 'decadence'.

Needless to say, this behaviour stemmed from our long and devastating colonial experience of seeing a Gora Sahib wielding unimaginable power over a vernacular speaking population of defeated people. That Gora Sahib has already packed up and gone to his isle and a good 70 years have elapsed since, but unfortunately, we have still not woken up to the new realities.

I think Pakistanis must be among the world's very few nations who tell you with a sense of pride that they are "really bad at Urdu." For us, Urdu is the language that we generally want to get rid of and take 'out of our system' whenever we resolve to 'progress'. However, it is about time we rejected this dangerous recipe for progress prescribed by our 19th-century reformers and started seeking progress through our culture. We must now re-educate ourselves to respect and celebrate our language, which still has lots of potential to dazzle the world.

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Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1584227/6-quality-literature-counts-not-language/>

Education Crisis | Editorial

Pakistan District Education Ranking 2017 have been made public this Thursday by the Alif Ailaan education campaign. According to the report, Azad and Jammu Kashmir (AJK) ranks first in the provision of quality education; followed by Islamabad, Punjab, Gilgit Baltistan (GB), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Balochistan, Sindh, and FATA. If you compare the result from last year, Balochistan has significantly jumped up two places in the ranks.

While certain areas of Punjab and KP has shown significant improvement, the pace of improvement in FATA, GB and Balochistan is still a concern. At the same time, another huge concern is the preference of quantity over quality. The education budget provincially is being spent on building new schools but it does not focus on what is actually being taught in the schools. A case in point is KP, where last year the province could not make it to the top 10 districts for education . This year nine out of ten districts are from KP but what these numbers fail to highlight is the quality of education . The only district in KP which scores good in terms of the overall education is Haripur – the rest are only included in the list because of the growing number of schools. The fact that you find such disparity between district of the same province reflects the lack of planning in terms of providing quality education and highlights how the focus at this point, of not just KP but Punjab government as well, is to provide more infrastructure; irrespective of what goes on inside.

The number of primary schools in the country has certainly increased but the problem that children face now is not having a school to go to once they graduate from Grade 5. The report shows that for every four primary schools in Pakistan, there is only one school above primary level. Hence, a major chunk of school dropouts is because of the absence of schools above primary levels.

When talking about education , we cannot ignore the gender gap at all. According to the report, there are more than 55 districts in Pakistan where the total number of girls enrolled in high schools is less than one thousand. This should be a cause of concern for the relevant authorities. Pakistan, in terms of education , is not going on the right track. If children do not have access to quality education , there is no ensuring that the country will fully progress. The report is a proof of how misplaced our priorities are, and that education as a sector is conveniently ignored.

Source: <http://nation.com.pk/17-Dec-2017/education-crisis>

WORLD

What We Really Know About North Korea's Nuclear Weapons By Siegfried S. Hecker

In January 2004, the director of North Korea's Yongbyon Nuclear Scientific Research Center handed me a sealed glass jar with plutonium metal inside in an effort to convince me that his country had a nuclear deterrent. To make the same point last week, Pyongyang lofted a missile 2,800 miles into space and declared it had a nuclear-tipped missile that could reach all of the United States. Has the country's nuclear program really come that far?

As global anxiety over North Korea grows and the war of words between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un escalates, it is more important than ever to be precise about what we know, and what we don't, about Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program and delivery systems. In 2004, nothing I saw on my visit persuaded me that Pyongyang could build a bomb and deliver it. But more recent visits, along with several kinds of open-source analysis, leave little doubt of North Korea's impressive progress in producing bomb fuel, building powerful nuclear devices, and test-launching a wide variety of missiles—and its determined efforts to integrate all three into a nuclear-tipped missile.

Extensive experience with shorter-range missiles and 11 years of nuclear tests most likely enable North Korea to mount a nuclear warhead on missiles that can reach all of South Korea and Japan. That capability, along with massive artillery firepower trained on Seoul, should be enough to deter Washington. By my assessment, however, North Korea will need at least two more years and several more missile and nuclear tests before it can hit the U.S. mainland.

WHAT IT TAKES

A credible nuclear deterrent requires not just fuel for a nuclear bomb, but also the ability to weaponize (that is, design and build the bomb) and to field delivery systems that can get the bomb to a target. It also requires demonstrating these

capabilities—and the will to use them—to an adversary. There may be little doubt of Kim’s willingness to use a nuclear weapon if the situation required it. Assessing his exact capabilities, however, has been a greater challenge, even for the U.S. government.

Pyongyang has often aided such efforts by allowing peeks at its key assets. It has built much of its nuclear and missile complex in full view of satellites and routinely released footage of its leaders’ inspections of weapons and facilities. It has also allowed foreign, nongovernment specialists to visit those facilities. My assessment of North Korean capabilities is based on my own seven visits and ongoing analysis of all open-source information.

There are two basic types of nuclear fuel: plutonium, which is produced in reactors, and uranium, which is enriched to weapon grade in centrifuges. North Korea’s plutonium inventory can be estimated with high confidence because the design details of Yongbyon’s 5-megawatt reactor are well known, and its operation is easily monitored by commercial satellite imagery. International teams have inspected North Korea’s reactor complex during times of diplomacy, and I have visited the plutonium facilities and met Yongbyon’s very capable technical staff several times. I estimate that North Korea has 20 to 40 kilograms of plutonium, sufficient for four to eight bombs.

Estimates of highly enriched uranium are much less certain. Centrifuge facilities are virtually impossible to spot from afar. Yet in November 2010, during my last visit, North Korea allowed me to view its recently completed modern centrifuge facility. (To my knowledge, no outsider aside from those on our small Stanford University team has seen this or any other North Korean centrifuge facility.) Based on that visit, satellite imagery, and probabilistic analysis of the import and production of key materials and components, I estimate that North Korea has 250–500 kilograms of highly enriched uranium—sufficient for roughly 12 to 24 additional nuclear weapons. (This assumes the existence of one or more covert centrifuge facilities, necessary for testing technology before deploying it in the large-scale facility I saw.)

North Korea likely has the ability to produce a small number of hydrogen bombs. North Korea also likely has the ability to produce a small number of hydrogen bombs. These require heavy forms of hydrogen—deuterium and tritium—for the

fusion stage of the device, which is triggered by a plutonium or uranium fission bomb. North Korea has demonstrated the ability to produce deuterium and tritium, as well as a lithium compound, Lithium-6 deuteride, which can produce tritium in situ in the fusion stage of a hydrogen bomb's detonation.

THE MAKING OF A NORTH KOREAN BOMB

Since 2006, North Korea has conducted six underground nuclear tests. Seismographs around the world have picked up the tremors, allowing estimates of the likely explosive power of each bomb. Two of the most recent tests, in 2016, have had a destructive power of 10–25 kilotons, equivalent to the bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The sixth test, on September 13, 2017, was 10 times stronger, with a probably explosive power of 200–250 kilotons—suggesting the successful detonation of a two-stage hydrogen bomb. (Pyongyang's claims that its fourth test, in January 2016, was a hydrogen bomb did not appear credible at the time.) A few hours earlier, the government had released photos of Kim with a mock-up of such a device. Though such designs are generally considered to be among any government's most closely guarded secrets, North Korea has publicized them more than once.

This record of tests conclusively demonstrates that North Korea can build nuclear devices with the power of the fission bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as bombs with the destructive power of modern hydrogen bombs. Given that record, and estimates of nuclear materials inventories, I estimate that the upper range of nuclear materials inventories is sufficient for roughly 25 to 30 nuclear weapons, with an annual production rate of 6 to 7. (David Albright of the Institute for Science and International Security has come up with a similar estimate: 15 to 34 weapons and annual production rates of 3 to 5.) This assessment is lower than a leaked U.S. intelligence community estimate of 60 weapons.

A view of the newly developed intercontinental ballistic rocket Hwasong-15's test that was successfully launched is seen in this undated photo released by North Korea's Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) in Pyongyang, November 2017.

THE MISSILE IS THE MESSAGE

It is another question whether those weapons are small enough to fit on short- and long-range missiles. (Official photos of nuclear devices are strategically positioned in front of diagrams of re-entry vehicles, but there is no way of being sure that the photographed devices are really identical to those tested, whatever the claims from Pyongyang.) For many years, North Korea's missile program appeared to lag far behind its nuclear advances. Although the acquisition and development of short-range missiles dates back to the mid-1980s, work on longer-range systems has started to speed up only recently. In the past two years, North Korea has test-fired more than 40 missiles, most of which were of intermediate or long range.

Today, missile tests are the most visible part of North Korea's nuclear weapons quest. Successful launches are easily picked up by international monitors and featured in official North Korean photos and videos, many showing Kim Jong Un present and in charge. In July 2017, North Korea passed an important milestone with the test of two Hwasong-14 missiles—intercontinental ballistic missiles, or ICBMs, that have a range greater than 3,400 miles. Last week, it tested an even more powerful missile, a Hwasong-15, with an estimated range of 8,000 miles, capable of reaching the entire continental United States. Such tests have been accompanied by diversification of North Korea's missiles, allowing it to progress toward a stated goal of launching at any time and from any place, including submarines.

Such impressive progress at producing fuel, building devices, and launching a wide variety of missiles begs the question of whether North Korea can put it all together in a single package that can deter Washington. At the time of my 2004 visit, the leadership in Pyongyang may have believed that a handful of primitive bombs was deterrent enough. By 2009, it felt the need to conduct a second nuclear test to prove it had a working bomb. More recently, it has focused on missile delivery of growing reach. And this year, as leadership in Washington changed, it focused on a more ambitious goal: demonstrating the ability to reach the entire United States with an ICBM, possibly one tipped with a hydrogen bomb.

There is little doubt that North Korea could mount a nuclear warhead on a missile that could reach South Korea or Japan.

There is little doubt that North Korea could mount a nuclear warhead on a missile that could reach South Korea or Japan. But ICBMs require smaller and lighter

warheads that are nonetheless robust enough to survive the entire flight trajectory, including re-entering the atmosphere. And acquiring that capability will, by my estimate, take at least two more years of tests.

READY TO TALK?

How has North Korea, one of the most isolated countries in the world, been able to make such progress? It got some outside assistance. Beginning in the 1960s, the Soviet Union helped Pyongyang pursue peaceful applications of nuclear technologies and educated its technicians and scientists. After 1991, collaboration with Russian and possibly Ukrainian missile factories continued for some time, and North Korea has also taken advantage of a leaky international export control system to acquire key materials for the production of fissile materials, particularly for gas centrifuges to enrich uranium. But for the most part, Pyongyang has built its nuclear facilities and bombs on its own. Its program is now mostly self-sufficient.

After the most recent missile test, North Korea declared that it had achieved its “goal of the completion of the rocket weaponry system development” needed to deter U.S. aggression. Domestically, this was an important milestone, because the regime had stated in 2013 that it would develop a nuclear deterrent so it could turn its focus to economic development. With this achievement, will Kim be ready to engage in diplomacy with Washington? Although he needs more time in order to be able to credibly threaten the entire continental United States, the fact that Kim can already inflict enormous damage on American allies and bases in Asia may give him sufficient assurance to start a dialogue, in an effort to reduce current tensions and head off misunderstandings that could lead to war.

Washington should be ready to reciprocate—or if necessary, to initiate the discussion. Talking would not represent a reward or concession, or a signal of U.S. acceptance of a nuclear-armed North Korea. It would instead be a first step toward reducing the risks of a nuclear catastrophe and developing a better understanding of the other side. Ultimately, that understanding may even help inform a negotiating strategy to halt, roll back, and eventually eliminate North Korea’s nuclear program.

Source: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-korea/2017-12-04/what-we-really-know-about-north-koreas-nuclear-weapons?cid=int-lea&pgtype=>

The Jerusalem Decision | Editorial

The Presidency of Donald Trump has been beset by controversy from the outset. The decision to move the American embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem at the same time as declaring that the US recognised Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, may prove to be the defining controversy of his first year in office. The decision was not unexpected, in large part because it was a prominent campaign pledge and one that he has decided to redeem. He made the announcement, Vice-President Pence standing behind him, in a short speech that superficially sought to appease the Palestinians — who also claim Jerusalem as their capital — and lay to rest the fears and concerns of a wider world that is made up of the adherents to the three Abrahamic faiths — Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Judging by the response around the world he failed to mollify, satisfy or appease a basket of nations and leaders of all three faiths.

The decision by President Trump usurps the precedents that have become normative for decades and in the opinion of many has put the Two-State Solution into deep freeze. Eight countries of the 15-member United Nations Security Council, including the UK, France and Italy, have called for an emergency meeting on Friday 8th December. Palestine and Turkey claim that the Trump recognition and the decision to move the American embassy are in breach of international law and the UN resolutions. The Palestinians have promised days of rage and most American allies in the Middle East, including and crucially Saudi Arabia which called it “unjustified and irresponsible” — have expressed varying degrees of dismay. The decision was welcomed by Israeli PM Netanyahu who called it a “courageous and just decision” and “historic.”

Thus far all of the above was entirely predictable. There was almost unanimous global opposition to the move but Trump had a domestic audience to please and a promise to keep. His negligible grasp of the subtleties of foreign policy was never more evidently displayed, and is not necessarily reflected by his close advisers such as Jared Kushner, his son-in-law who currently holds the portfolio for peace in the Middle East. There had been back-channel preparatory work anticipatory of reactions. Reuters is reporting that the US had asked the Israelis to be moderate in their response, and that the Europeans were to understand that the Trump decision was in no way a prejudgment of the ‘final status’ of Jerusalem and its sovereignty. If the Europeans got the memo they clearly decided not to read it.

What is not predictable, in virtually any direction one cares to look, is what happens now. The physical move of the embassy to Jerusalem is going to take at least two years even if construction starts this year. The peace process had to all intents and purposes been moribund since John Kerry failed to revive it in 2014. All sides are saying that the Jerusalem question has to be resolved between the Palestinians and the Israelis before any peace moves are even thinkable never mind possible. The illegal Israeli settlers on Palestinian land will be buoyed up, the Palestinians confounded and downhearted. An unknown number of extremist groups across the Arab world are going to be preparing reactions that are unlikely to be peaceful in intent or execution. A broadside from a long deck of loose cannons may be expected. The American relationship with Nato may be threatened if Turkey decides to pull the plug on the agreements that allow American airbases on Turkish soil. There are implications for trading relationships too. The post-Brexit trading environment between the UK and the US is already deeply speculative and the British PM has called the Trump decision “wrong.” This is not the end of civilisation as we know it, but the outcome is going to be suffering. A lot of suffering.

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Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1578771/6-the-jerusalem-decision/>

Concluded War Against IS? | Editorial

Declaring the end of the war against IS, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al Abadi announced on Saturday that Iraqi forces were in complete control of the Iraqi-Syrian border; hence the war against IS was ended. The announcement came once the Iraqi forces recaptured the town of Rawa. For the last few months, Iraqi troops had been fighting to retake the small pockets in the border area that were still under the control of IS. Abadi's announcement marks the end of the war against IS that last for almost three years.

With the latest defeats that the group has suffered from, IS's control over large territory in Iraq proved to be a house of cards. While the Iraqi people will find some peace, as the terror group is defeated, at least, for now, peace is still fragile in the region.

Other reports coming from the region suggest that war is far from over. The terror outfit has seized territory in Syria's Idlib province after four years. IS took the village of Bashkun. With the regaining of villages in the northeast of the region, it is hard to believe the claims of Iraq's PM. Though Daesh has seen the so-called caliphate it declared in 2014 across parts of Syria and Iraq crumble in recent weeks, the group's ability to retake territory make them a constant danger.

It can be said that while current war has come to an end but non-state actors prefer to vex governments and states with guerilla warfare. This means the conflict will continue, as the organization will carry on attacking public and private instalments and spaces, as they are operating in Africa.

The gains by Iraqi governments will force IS to move towards irregular and asymmetric warfare. With foreign fighters to reach the battlefield, IS leaders can instruct them to remain home and launch attacks there. Thus the idea of the group's demise is not a plausible one.

Source: <http://nation.com.pk/11-Dec-2017/concluded-war-against-is>

Time for OIC to act | Editorial

THE Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is all set to meet in Istanbul on Wednesday in a bid to coordinating a response to the US decision to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital — a move that has triggered a wave of anger in Asia, Middle East and North Africa with the European countries also voicing serious concerns, warning it will undermine all prospects of peace in the Middle East region.

Over the years, we have seen the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan taking a bold stance on matters involving Muslim Ummah including that of Palestinian. The same strong reaction came from him even before President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital describing the status of the city, whose eastern sector Palestinians see as the capital of their future state, as a red line for Muslims. Indeed Erdogan has come in the fore as a champion of the Palestinian cause and spearheaded the Muslim reaction to the US decision by convening the OIC meeting in Istanbul to formulate a joint plan of action. Needless to say the OIC is meeting at the most difficult times and it needs to chalk out a firm action while rising above mere passage of condemnation resolutions. Though we do not want any confrontation with the US or Israel but the OIC should formulate a befitting response implying that the Muslims are not only united but are ready to protect the rights of the Palestinian people who are facing oppression at the hands of Israeli forces over the last many decades. Fallout of the US decision, as was expected, has already started showing its violent impact as on Sunday about 157 armless Palestinian people were injured in clashes with the Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza. It is time that all the OIC countries practically demonstrate that they stand by the Palestinian people while rising above mere lip service or rhetoric. Erdogan has already warned of cutting ties with Israel. We understand such a decision should collectively come from the OIC platform in order to give a strong message of unity and unanimity.

Source: <https://pakobserver.net/time-oic-act/>

Russian Advice For India | Editorial

Whether its opponents like it or not, the China's 'One belt, One road' (OBOR) initiative is getting global traction. The plan envisages connecting economies of over 65 countries through trade and transport links across Asia and beyond. A number of countries have already signed up to the project while others are lining up to join it. The only country, which has so far been reluctant and in fact opposed the OBOR publicly is India. The Indian opposition stems from its claims that part of the project — China, Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) — runs through a disputed territory. China, however, dismisses such assertions and is adamant that the OBOR would be beneficial for the entire region. New Delhi, nevertheless, is not convinced as it takes Beijing's argument with a pinch of salt given its uneasy relationship both with China and Pakistan.

But what about the word of advice from Russia, the oldest and long-term strategic partner of India? After a three-way meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj in New Delhi on Monday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said India should not let political problems deter it from joining the project, involving billions of dollars of investment, and benefiting from it. Russia, all the countries in Central Asia, and European nations had signed up to the Chinese project to boost economic cooperation, he said.

The question is: will India pay heed to Russia's word of wisdom? It doesn't seem to be the case given its current state of ties with Pakistan. Secondly, it is a matter of record that the Indian government has allocated billions of dollars to disrupt CPEC. Thirdly, it has still unresolved border dispute with China. And last but not the least its ever-growing strategic and defence ties with the United States. But having said that India and as a matter of fact neither country in the region can afford perennial tensions. One way to reduce the friction is to create inter dependencies. And the 'belt and road' plan may provide us that window of opportunity.

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Source: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1582408/6-russian-advice-india/>

Putin's Plan For Syria By Dmitri Trenin

After nearly seven years, the Syrian civil war is finally winding down, and the Middle East's various powers are looking ahead to what comes next. On November 22, the leaders of Iran, Russia, and Turkey met in the Russian resort town of Sochi to discuss Syria's future, and on November 28, the latest round of UN-sponsored talks between representatives of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and the opposition began in Geneva. Another round of talks in Sochi is planned for early next year.

Through military intervention and diplomatic maneuvering, Russian President Vladimir Putin has made his country into one of the major players in the Syrian conflict. Russia went into Syria in September 2015 to defeat the Islamic State (ISIS) and to block an attempt at regime change by outside powers such as the United States and Saudi Arabia. More than two years later, Moscow's military engagement has paid off. Assad's regime has survived and ISIS has been defeated. The war is still not over, but the focus is increasingly on a future political settlement. Russia will not be able to impose this settlement alone, or even together with its allies, Iran and Turkey. But it will be as involved in the Syrian peace as it was involved in the Syrian war.

A TANGLED WEB

Among the issues now at play in Syria, the fate of Assad stands out. During the war, Moscow saw him as someone to be bailed out for the sake of preventing chaos. Now he looks and behaves like a victor, and may be thinking that he does not need the Russians as much as he used to. Assad looks down on the opposition and wants his Baath Party to become dominant again. The Kremlin, however, understands that restoring his control over all of Syria is impossible and even undesirable, since other groups, from the Sunni opposition to the Kurds, adamantly reject this outcome. Assad may stay in power in Damascus, but the country's political landscape has changed irreversibly. Still, Moscow has to deal with a recalcitrant Assad while taking account of the influence exerted by its other ally, Tehran.

Even without formal federalization, Syria is de facto divided into several enclaves controlled by different forces: the Assad government; anti-Assad opposition

groups; pro-Turkish and pro-Iranian militias; and the Kurds. Russia has worked with many players, both on the ground in Syria and across the region, to create several de-escalation zones, where fighting has stopped and the opposition has been allowed to remain in control. Through its efforts in Astana, Geneva, and Sochi, Moscow has sought to build common ground between all of the country's contending factions, paving the way for some form of a coalition government. Assad is reluctant to agree to genuine power sharing, and Iran has its own reservations. Thus Moscow will have to do a lot of persuading and occasionally pressuring to achieve its preferred outcome. The Russians believe, however, that a communal power-sharing arrangement akin to Lebanon's could be a recipe for stability.

Russia insists on the territorial unity of Syria. Moscow takes a similar attitude toward Iraq, where it recently refused to support independence for Iraqi Kurdistan. In Syria as in Iraq, however, Russia favors real autonomy for the Kurds. Over many decades, Moscow has had a long-standing relationship with the Kurdish groups in the Middle East, sometimes assisting them politically and militarily. Russia is used to balancing its relations with the Kurds and with their Arab, Turkish, and Iranian neighbors, and is itself home to a small Kurdish diaspora that facilitates Russian-Kurdish contacts and lobbies for Kurdish interests. In the end, however, it is Russia's national interest in maintaining contacts with all the relevant players that will win out.

Russia, of course, is not the only outside power in Syria. Even as Moscow supported the Assad regime with its air power, Iran and its allied militias were fighting on the ground. After the war, Tehran wants to institutionalize its presence on the ground in Syria, both to influence the future of that country and to maintain a physical link to its main regional ally, Hezbollah.

Russia understands Iran's interests without sharing them, but it also understands Israel's, and it seeks to strike a balance between the two. Moscow empathizes with Israel's security concerns about the presence of armed Shiite groups too close to its border, and hopes to use the Russian diaspora in Israel for economic, financial, and technological benefit. But it cannot ignore Iran, a regional power and a neighbor that also offers opportunities in a number of areas, from arms sales to nuclear energy. Thus in Syria Russia will seek to broker a compromise between

Iran and Israel based on the legitimate interests of each. Iranian Shiite allies might stay in Syria, but they will have to keep their distance from Israel.

Russia's interaction with the United States in Syria is largely focused on military deconfliction, which is aimed at preventing incidents between the two countries' armed forces. Moscow and Washington have also cooperated on the establishment of de-escalation zones, but the Kremlin's diplomatic coordination with the United States is much less intense under the administration of President Donald Trump than under his predecessor, Barack Obama. In 2015 and 2016, the Russians still entertained the thought of jointly developing and implementing a diplomatic solution with the Americans. But today, thanks to waning interest in and a lack of engagement from Washington, Moscow has teamed up with the Turks and the Iranians instead.

THE LONG ROAD AHEAD

Russia realizes that with the war waning and reconstruction looming, others will begin to step forward in Syria, including China, Europe, and Japan. Moscow will seek to partner with them to secure a piece of the lucrative reconstruction effort, which will be financed by international donors. Russia's main asset is its influence in Damascus, where it remains the prime guarantor of the Assad regime's security. This influence may wane over time as direct threats to Assad become less relevant. But for now, with the situation in Syria likely to remain precarious for years, Russia is set to be a major player in the country for the foreseeable future.

Moscow, moreover, means to secure its own core interests in Syria, whatever the balance of political power in the country. Among these is a permanent air and naval presence in the country. Under the lease agreements signed in 2015 and 2016 with Damascus, both the Khmeimim air force base and the Tartus naval facility, which is being upgraded to a regular naval base, will stay in place for decades after the end of the war. The Syrian armed forces will continue to rely on Russian weapons and equipment, and Russian military specialists will continue to advise and train their Syrian colleagues. This will seal Syria's role as Russia's main geopolitical and military foothold in the Middle East.

Bringing peace to Syria will be no less difficult than winning a war there. Russia faces another uphill task, one where its assets are less compelling, and where its

competitors have more resources, and its situational allies—in Damascus, Tehran, and Ankara—will seek to promote their own agendas, which are sometimes at odds with Moscow's. Succeeding on the diplomatic front will be even harder than winning on the battlefield.

Source: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2017-12-13/putins-plan-syria>

How America Became An Imperial Power By Dr. Syed Amir

A little over two centuries ago, America gained its independence from Britain and in time became the United States of America. The country's founding fathers, having suffered under foreign rule, enshrined the sanctity of the principle of self-determination in their Declaration of Independence, which defines "liberty as an inalienable right." Thomas Jefferson, the third US president, was insistent that "we should have nothing to do with conquest." Later events showed that the vision of the founding fathers did not endure.

Starting with thirteen original states in 1776, the US vastly expanded its size over the next century. In 1803, President Jefferson bought nearly 828,000 square miles of territory from France that had fallen on hard times because of the Napoleonic wars in Europe. For the 15 million dollars that was paid for the land, the president doubled the area of the country. Known as the Louisiana purchase, it is considered one of the most profitable real-estate deals in history.

In 1867, the US made another lucrative purchase when it bought the vast territory of Alaska from Russia for the bargain price of \$7.2 million. The land was unexplored, sparsely populated and comprised largely frozen wilderness. Many Americans were unhappy that the then Secretary of States, Willian Seward, wasted money on worthless wasteland, and disparagingly dubbed the deal as "Seward's Folly". They were proven wrong, however. Alaska endowed with rich mineral resources, including oil, now has a thriving population and a major tourist industry.

Following the 1492 discovery of America, several European powers had carved out large chunks of land in the newly-discovered continent. Spain acquired vast areas in North, Central and South America. Its colonies and the quantum of wealth extracted from them, catapulted Spain to the status of a leading global power in the sixteenth and seventh centuries. But its power and glory did not last long. Beset by political conflicts in Europe and buffeted by powerful national liberation movements in the Americas, Spain lost control of most of its far-flung domains by the early nineteenth century. In 1819, it agreed to sell Florida to the United States, and then in 1821 was forced to grant independence to Mexico.

Newly independent Mexico soon became embroiled in a territorial dispute with its powerful neighbor to the north, the US leading to the Mexican-American war (1846 to 1848). Weak and still recovering from the aftermath of its debilitating freedom struggle, Mexico was forced to cede to the US a number of western states, including California, New Mexico and Arizona.

The history of US imperialism has been different from the European colonialism, since, unlike European colonies, most of the territories US captured have become part of the country of their own freewill

By the end of the 19th century, the US had become an industrial and military power of some significance and had been asserting itself on the world stage. Gone were the days when a much weaker America in the late 18th century under President Thomas Jefferson which could not even protect its merchant ships from the barbary pirates in the Mediterranean. With power came new ambitions. A heated debate was set off in the US whether, following the example of European countries, it should also acquire an overseas empire. Powerful politicians argued passionately for and against the proposition.

Theodore Roosevelt, the future president, emerged as a fervent advocate for the projection of American power and spread of western civilization far and wide. His equally persuasive opponent was Mark Twain, the famous humorist, author and travel writer. Twain upheld the doctrine of human equality and right of all nations to rule themselves. The movement against colonization notwithstanding, the strident voices in favour of acquisition of territory won out. In a recent book, *The True Flag*, author Stephen Kinzer describes in exquisite details how the US was transformed from a peaceable nation state to an imperial power.

For European powers, Britain, France and Spain, building an empire had been a slow, arduous process. The history of US empire building followed a different trajectory. The story of how America became an imperial power in just one short year in 1898, is fascinating and unprecedented. It also illustrates how unscrupulous politicians and news media could manipulate and sway public sentiments in favor of war. Roosevelt, who had long been looking for a war to fight to assert the new American power, soon found a new opportunity to fulfill his aspirations. Installed as assistant secretary of the navy by President McKinley, he

zealously embarked on a mission of building warships to boost US naval power. Now he was faced with the decision of where to deploy this force?

By the late 19th century, Spain had been reduced to a second-rate power, a pale shadow of its former grandeur. Yet, it still possessed Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines. Spain's overseas possessions offered tempting targets for any powerful adventurer. Spain's hold on Cuba was already shaky in the face of continuing agitation against its rule. A movement emerged in America to dispossess Spain of its colonies. Alleging mistreatment of American citizens and native Cubans, the US news media started a campaign urging military intervention in the island. If any immediate excuse was needed to initiate hostilities, it was provided by the explosion on the US naval ship, the USS Maine that was anchored off the coast of Cuba, ostensibly on a goodwill mission.

Three weeks after its arrival, for reasons still unknown, the USS Maine suffered a huge explosion on board and sank, taking 258 American sailors with it. The ship was loaded with ammunition and most likely exploded because of some mechanical problem, but the press and the hawkish politicians immediately branded it as an act of sabotage and held Spain responsible for it. Emotions were raised to a fever pitch and soon the senate passed a resolution declaring war against Spain, demanding that it vacate the island. A bedraggled Spain was hardly able to resist. Nevertheless, it refused to comply and an American flotilla was dispatched to expel it.

Theodore Roosevelt, the future president, emerged as a fervent advocate for the projection of American power and spread of western civilisation far and wide. His equally persuasive opponent was Mark Twain, the famous humorist, author and travel writer. Twain upheld the doctrine of human equality and right of all nations to rule themselves. The movement against colonisation notwithstanding, the strident voices in favour of acquisition of territory won out

The ensuing conflict known as the Spanish-American War was mostly a one-sided affair, although the US newspaper, motivated to sell papers falsely portrayed the battle as "an epic conflict." The newspapers were filled with "delirious reports of battlefield victories in Cuba." Spain capitulated in just over three months and was forced to sign the Treaty of Paris in 1898, with Spain agreeing to surrender its possessions, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines to the US in exchange

for a paltry sum of \$20 million. Cuba finally won its independence from the US in 1902.

American occupation of the Philippines proved far more troublesome than Cuba. The Islands had been under Spain for over three centuries, since Ferdinand Magellan discovered them in 1521. In the year 1898, this far flung outpost of the empire was only lightly defended by a feeble, demoralized Spanish garrison. A week after the declaration of war, on 1 May, 1898, an American fleet of six warships streamed into Manila Bay to threaten the Spaniards. They were opposed by a “slow-moving, poorly armored Spanish fleet.” The captain of the American fleet, Admiral Dewey, relishing the lopsided contest and aware of the weakness of the opposing side, gave an order that has gone down in military history: “you may fire when you are ready.” The battle was over in hours, and at the end nine Spanish ships had been sunk or damaged with no American losses.

There was great jubilation in America on receiving the news and, as is often the case, the victory was taken as a sign that God was on the side of the Americans. The next question was what to do with the new territory? Even President McKinley had only a hazy idea where the islands were and is quoted as saying “somewhere away around the other side of the world.” Yet, the American occupation of Philippines proved very costly. As the US attempted to pacify the island and consolidate its hold, it met a fierce resistance from the local population. The war continued for ten years and cost 600,000 Pilipino lives. The conflict finally ended after the US withdrew following the second world war.

Having captured both Cuba and the Philippines, the US expansionist lobby was pining next for the island of Puerto Rico in the Caribbean. Roosevelt urged, “Don’t make peace until we get Puerto Rico. “In July 1898, American forces took possession of the island without encountering much resistance. The territory is now part of the US; however, it has remained relatively impoverished. Nearly two months have passed since the a devastating hurricane hit the island, but the people have still not received adequate help to recover.

The Hawaiian Islands in the Pacific were a big prize at the time, defenseless, without a central authority or administration. American sugar plantation owners and protestant Christian missionaries were already well established there, supposedly on a mission to Christianize and civilize the native population. The United States

annexed Hawaii in 1898. Initially, in 1900, its status was defined as a territory, but in 1959 both Hawaii and Alaska were given the status of full states and since have been integrated with the rest of the country.

The history of US imperialism is has been different from the European colonialism, since, unlike European colonies, most of the territories US captured have become part of the country on their own freewill.

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Trump, Jerusalem and the OIC Summit by Sajjad Haider

The emergency summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states was held in order to collectively condemn the American decision of making Jerusalem, the capital of Israel. Pakistan Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi along with other state dignitaries represented Pakistan at the conference. The Trump's decision not only sparked the condemnation from the Muslim Ummah, rather global leaders criticize such decision that can further instigate the regional instability. The decision, according to global leaders and various prominent scholars, is a clear violation of existing international law.

OIC, which has completed 40 years of its failure and has been ineffective to secure Muslim rights or failed to raise voice against the brutality on Muslims over the globe, precipitously called for an emergency meeting to condemn Trump's decision. Tangled in the shackles of western system and dependent towards the west in terms of military and economic means, Muslim states somehow break the restraints to raise voice for Palestine. Similarly, Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition IMCTC recently held its first meeting where the broader contours of the Saudi-led Islamic coalition were finalised. Defence Ministers of the 41 coalition states unveiled their mandate that envisages joint military operations against terrorism through mutual co-operation. The core spheres of this military alliance were deemed as to combat terrorism in the Ideological, Communication, Financial and Military domains altogether which will weaken the terrorist and extremist factions. In the context of such awareness in the Muslim leaders, one can assume sign of buoyancy in the Muslim world to demand their rights and liberty wherever they are oppressed.

However, there are still internal issues that might halt process of Muslim unity against oppression on Muslims over the globe or stabilizing their regional politics. One of the foremost factors is the consigned interest of many Muslim states with the United States. It is pertinent to mention that many Arab states has military and economic relations with United States, they may oppose the US decision to a certain level unless their relations are not in jeopardy. History itself has been an example of events where Muslim states remained silent on US invasion in Iraq and Afghanistan. Similarly, the issue of Indian held Kashmir has never gained much

attention in the Muslim countries. All over the globe, Muslims remained victims due to their religion, yet their issues has not been voiced on international forum.

Furthermore, another reason of the failure of Muslims countries is their own differences and religious animosity. On one hand, Iran is considered as the epitome of Shia power in the Muslim world with major followers over the globe especially in Pakistan. Conversely, Saudi Arab supports and promotes the Wahhabi school of thought along with other Arab states. Additionally, Saudi-led alliance has been created where Iran has not been provided membership along with Syria and Iraq. This can create wide repercussions as Shia followers may oppose this alliance. Similarly, Pakistan has a vast majority of Shia population that follows Iranian Shite doctrine which may confront such an alliance formation. The religious differences within the Muslim countries have become one of the key factors that serve as an impediment towards Muslim unity.

Though the emergency OIC summit condemns the Trumps' decision regarding Jerusalem , there must be some concrete policy that can raise voice against oppression to support Muslims. Moreover, Muslim states must create policies to make themselves more politically and socially stable along with the economic lines so their opinion can be heard at the international level. It is widely believed that future of OIC might be gloomy as interest of countries diverge in taking measures to secure Muslim Ummah, still, there is enough possibility for optimism that one can envision for better security of Muslims under the umbrella of OIC. Moreover, the organization must also seek to initiate joint economic co-operation programs which will boost their economy and also make them less dependent on Western or European states.

source: <https://thecsspoint.com/trump-jerusalem-...by-sajjad-haider/>

Palestine and peace by Ashraf Jehangir Qazi

THE Trump decision to move the US embassy in Tel Aviv to Jerusalem confirms the obvious. The US has no respect for international law, UN resolutions or international agreements. It has zero credibility as an honest broker anywhere. Its credibility is its power not its leadership. The clash of civilisations may have been intellectually debunked, but it is alive and well in American strategies that serve its ruling military-corporate-finance complex (MCFC.)

None of the above should hide the truth about the degraded state of the Muslim world today. So many of its rulers are in league with enemies of their own people! They conspire against their human and political development which they fear would challenge their arbitrary power.

Despite the salience of other crises in the Middle East, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is the 'mother' crisis. Over the past seven decades, it has directly and indirectly inflamed the region, and in varying degrees, the whole Muslim world. Other crises in the region from time to time eclipse the Israeli-Palestinian issue in their savagery, bloodshed, and regional and international impact.

But without a just settlement of this mother issue, the people of the region will remain targets of increasingly barbaric and murderous assaults by the US and Israel; by their panicking monarchies and corrupt dictatorships; and by the terrorist reactions of radicalised and traumatised victims of domestic and external state terror. This hell for the Palestinians, Arabs, Muslims and other victims is a paradise for the American MCFC and their regional minions!

The US and its satellites are ensuring a century of more terrible state and non-state terrorism.

Israel has made it absolutely clear it will never allow a win-win peace settlement which would benefit both Israelis and Palestinians. With US and regional minion support, it is bent on a final solution in which the Palestinians will either be progressively expelled from Palestine or reduced to a meaningless and totally dependent existence in a few non-viable cantons separated from each other by ever-expanding Israeli settlements and corridors that cut the West Bank in pieces. Moreover, the West Bank will be permanently cut off from Gaza. Palestinians will

be imprisoned between Israel and Egypt in Gaza, and between Israel and Jordan in the West Bank.

The Palestinians will never be allowed space to become an independent political community. Regular military assaults are expected to reconcile them to their hopeless situation. Those who refuse to be reconciled to a life of hell on earth will automatically qualify as terrorists to be taken care of through Global Assassination Programs (GAP) ie murder by drones and black-ops. This Israeli/US final solution is aided and abetted by regional flunkies.

Modi has a somewhat similar plan in mind for a final solution in India-held Kashmir. He has similar American support. Pakistan is entitled according to international law to assist a Kashmiri armed freedom struggle for the exercise of their UN-recognised rights which have been denied them by Indian occupation. This, of course, does not justify any support for acts of terror. However, there are other more effective options to explore to help the Kashmir cause including effective and relentless diplomacy, engaging with India for a settlement acceptable to Kashmiris, implementing Kashmir and India-Pakistan CBMs, making permanent a LoC ceasefire, increasing trade and other exchanges with India, etc.

The OIC is politically dysfunctional. But under President Erdogan's leadership the Istanbul Summit made a new beginning. Saudi Arabia sent a lower-level representative. Sadly, along with Egypt it is in alliance with the US and Israel, ostensibly against Iran, but in effect against the Palestinians and the people of the entire region, including their own. Erdogan's call for the formal recognition of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its occupied capital is an important step. He also called Trump's provocation a "turning point" for the Muslim world. Unfortunately, the Muslim world today is of little use to itself as it is mostly governed by elites who fear the potential of their own people.

In a globalising world, the basic norms and obligations of international conduct which are enshrined in the UN Charter need to be universally practised. The West, including the US, prides itself on being a culture and civilisation that developed and embodied these "age of enlightenment" norms and obligations. But in a world overtaken by technology, power and greed, they no longer hold despite all the fine talk about the imperative of collectively overcoming the challenges of global survival.

The UN Charter was the world promising itself that the evil ideologies and policies that led to the indescribable horrors of two world wars and the Holocaust would never be repeated. The charter lies in tatters today. This is largely because of the policies of “the sole hyper-power”. Since the end of the Cold War, and particularly 9/11, UN peace-keeping, peace-restoring and peace-building operations have had some successes. But they have been rendered politically redundant where US military assaults and black operations have destroyed entire political societies.

While 9/11 was one of the most egregious acts of terror, it pales into insignificance compared to the state terror the US and its allies have unleashed upon the Muslim world since that fateful day. The latest Trump decision regarding Jerusalem threatens to open up an even more traumatic chapter for Muslims and other peoples of the world. India’s obduracy or political opportunism over Kashmir represents a similar threat, especially given the nuclear factor. Pakistan’s policies in support of a just Kashmir settlement must factor in these risks and realities.

In the name of counterterrorism and regional peace the US and its satellites are ensuring a century of more terrible state and non-state terrorism, ever more devastating conflicts, and human displacements on an unprecedented scale. There are powerful low lives that plan to profit from such an end-of-the-world prospect!

Solutions to dangerous issues, including Palestine and Kashmir, can only emerge from an international consensus in support of an overriding and enforceable commitment to uphold human dignity and human rights everywhere, without exception. A UN-centred new world order including an amended UN Charter is the 21st-century imperative.

The writer is a former ambassador to the US, India and China and head of UN missions in Iraq and Sudan.

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Trump's Afghan policy and ground realities by Mohammad Jamil

PRESIDENT Donald Trump's decision to recommit the United States to the war in Afghanistan, what he said, on the basis of the ground realities, is reflective of the fact that he does not understand the ground realities. When more than 130,000 troops from 51 NATO and partner nations that conducted security operations and helped build up the Afghan security forces could not defeat the Taliban, how a few thousands of addition to already 8400 US forces could defeat the Taliban? There is a perception that few thousands of US and NATO troops will not have much of an impact on the conflict's trajectory. The security situation in Afghanistan is worrisome. Amid persistent problems within the Afghan security forces, Afghanistan's political system remains in dysfunction. Anyhow, the US failed to achieve its principal objective since the 9/11 attacks i.e. to ensure that the country does not become a haven for terrorist groups.

Another flaw in Trump's Afghan strategy is that President Trump wants India to play a more active role in finding a political solution in Afghanistan. He has sought an enhanced role for India in bringing peace in Afghanistan while announcing his Afghanistan and South Asia policy in his inaugural address. The question is what role India can play in bringing peace in Afghanistan when Afghans in general and the Taliban in particular would not accept India's role in Afghanistan. Of course, India has clout in groups that were once part of Northern Alliance; it has its proxies in National Directorate of Intelligence, and has been able to cultivate relations with President Ashraf Ghani, thus India can only play a negative role in creating problems for Pakistan. India is reportedly financing the TTP leaders that are ensconced in Kunar.

According to a report, Indian forces have started participating in military operation in Afghanistan against the Taliban. A few Indians are present in US Camp Dwyer in Gramsier district of Helmand along with 2 Indian MI-25 gunship helicopters, participating against militants in Helmand. It is pertinent to mention here that officially Indians deny any participation in operations against Taliban to avoid direct confrontation and response from them. In fact, Indians were hand in gloves with former President Hamid Karzai, who was spiritedly berthing the Indians overbearingly powerfully in his state structure, while keeping the shrill on noisily

that Pakistan was supporting the Taliban. From the very start, Karzai had two Indian Advisors occupying key positions in his own office. There was a proposal at that time that drew very serious consideration in New Delhi in 2008, which was held back by some wise Indians, who warned that India could bog down in Afghanistan.

Recently, a major medical treatment facility used by the Taliban has been discovered by Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) during an operation in Syedabad district in central Maidan Wardak province on 7 Dec 2017. Afghan officials claimed that the facility was used for the treatment of Taliban insurgents from different provinces including Paktia, Ghazni and other parts of city. Facility was well-equipped and was used for treatment of wounded Taliban insurgents including performance of sophisticated surgeries”, the officials said. Taliban rejected any links with the facility while claiming that the clinic was providing healthcare services to the local residents and was approved by International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Afghan authorities have long been making accusations regarding use of medical treatment facilities by Taliban insurgents inside Pakistan, and the above information is a proof that rejects such allegations against Pakistan.

Afghanistan is not a secure place either to live or to work in because of ongoing war between the Taliban and the Afghan National Force, which is being advised and supported by the 8400 American troops. Security is now a serious challenge not only in districts and sub-districts but also in small and major towns including the capital. There have been suicide bombings, attacks of civilian and military installations, assassinations, kidnappings, summary killings by the Taliban and also Daesh terrorists on a daily basis. The country has politically been further destabilised by a bunch of former warlords. Last week, militants killed four policemen in the Janikhel district of Paktia province and captured the police check post. The same day, Taliban militants killed 24 police men in southern Helmand province. The Taliban confirmed the clash and having killed several security forces and captured weapons, ammunition and several vehicles from the police.

In the first week of this month, United States defence secretary James Mattis called on Pakistan to do more in its fight against armed groups operating in Afghanistan, after he concluded the latest in a series of high-level contacts between the two governments. During a visit to the Pakistani capital Islamabad, Mattis had met with

Pakistani Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa, and intelligence chief Lieutenant-General Naveed Mukhtar, with both sides pledging to continue to attempt to find common ground. “The Secretary emphasised the vital role that Pakistan can play in working with the United States and others to facilitate a peace process in Afghanistan that brings stability and security to the region,” said a US statement. Ties between the strategic allies have been strained since US President Donald Trump announced a new US policy on Afghanistan and South Asia in August, where he said Pakistan often provided safe haven to agents of chaos, violence, and terror.

—The writer is a senior journalist based in Lahore.

source: <https://pakobserver.net/trumps-afghan-policy-ground-realities/>

Another US Policy Flip-Flop | Editorial

The unpredictability of the Trump doctrine's policy on Pakistan continues; after what seemed to be some improvement in US-Pakistan relations, the Trump administration has informed Congress that it will take unilateral steps in areas of divergence with Pakistan while expanding cooperation between the two countries where their interests converge. In a report to Congress, the Pentagon delineated the need for a joint US-Afghan platform for combating more than 20 militant groups active in the region.

This stance is a curt one to take, that does nothing to counter either terrorism or cooperation with Pakistan. This is Pentagon's first report after Trump's speech in August; a speech that rattled many in Pakistan, who thought it an unfair attack against Islamabad. To take this stance now ignores the outrage and offence taken by Pakistani military and politics officials after Trump's speech; Major General Asif Ghafoor reiterated Pakistan's commitment to fighting terrorism, but never at the cost of Pakistan's sovereignty and dignity.

The report calls for a fundamental change in the strategy, but does not lay out what it means. It is true that for some time, Pakistan has been inefficient in curtailing the influence of religious parties in elections- however, the link between that and the terrorist attacks in Afghanistan are extremely unsubstantiated. If by unilateral action, US means the involvement of India, then this message will never be accepted by the Pakistan government, with Islamabad gradually reducing dependence on US , through cooperation with China, is in a position to do so.

After the ambiguous visits of Tillerson and Mattis, this move further fuddles the communication gap between the two countries and confounds effective cooperation. Considering the recent statements by the government and the military, where the army stressed an 'only cooperation will get cooperation stance, it may lead to a confrontation if attempted.

source: <http://nation.com.pk/19-Dec-2017/another-us-policy-flip-flop>

Climate Change: A Soft Threat By Zile Huma

Threats are of two kinds: hard and soft threats. Hard threats are in forms of weapons, enemy forces and weapons of mass destruction. However, soft threats are any tool or actor killing masses but in an indirect way. Climate Change is a soft threat, working like a slow poison for our planet and people. Climate Change is considered more dangerous than terrorism as the number of deaths caused by climate change are more than through terrorism. The Ex-President of United States of America Barak Obama in his interview with Vox highlighted “there are many more people on an annual basis who have to confront the impact of climate change or the spread of a disease than have to face terrorism.”

Although, climate change impacts are widely spread and affect every sector especially the health sector which is directly related to physical problems and the precious lives of the masses. Any harmful consequences of climate change create health issues both for humans and animals. Twenty governments commissioned an independent report in 2012 from the group DARA International to study the human and economic costs of Climate Change. It linked 400,000 deaths worldwide to climate change each year, projecting deaths to increase to over 600,000 per year by 2030.

Pakistan has been declared among the top ten countries most affected by climate change issues. This means health problems are being generated in the country due to this looming danger. According to World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2010, Pakistan had been experiencing an epidemic of dengue fever that caused 16 580 confirmed cases and 257 deaths in Lahore and nearly 5000 cases and 60 deaths reported from the rest of the country. One of the important causes for breeding of dengue mosquito is a warm and humid temperature.

The long summers and short winters in the country are provide favourable conditions for nurturing this species. Similarly, the increased average temperatures in the country is another source of spreading this disease. Pakistan is a country geographically located under glaciers. Melting of glaciers causes flooding that directly threatens the lives of masses in the form of loss of lives and physical injuries. Diseases like diarrhoea and malaria are very common in flood affected areas and after floods. Stagnant and contaminated water are the main sources for nourishing these diseases. The World Health Organisation (WHO)

estimated that floods in Pakistan reported severe health concerns, such as malaria, skin diseases, acute respiratory infections and malnutrition. Cholera is endemic and it is likely that among the many thousands of new diarrhoeal disease cases reported, some will be of cholera.

Pakistan has been declared among the top ten countries most affected by climate change issues

In 2015, heat waves in Karachi created an emergency situation. According to the National Disaster Management Authority report, the heat wave affected almost 1200 people and had impacts like stress for outdoor workers, child mortality, particularly among the elderly and stress on animals. Another heat wave issue was experienced in Karachi in October 2017. However, this time an advisory had been issued and precautionary measures were taken.

Similarly, smog is another issue severely impacting the health of humans and animals. Central Punjab was severely affected by smog in 2016 and 2017. Health issues like respiratory problems; skin diseases and eye problems were reported on a mass level by smog-affected people. Moreover, due to decreased visibility, accidents were reported, causing untimely deaths of many city dwellers.

Moreover, the ongoing drought in Thar has cost the lives of around 1500 children since 2014. The rest of the children born are mostly underweight or have diseases due lack of a nutritional diet.

Besides these physical problems, climate change also causes mental problems, paving the path for debilitating psychological diseases. Death, financial issues and economic loss in a family due to climate change leads to stress that transforms itself into blood pressure and hypertension. In extreme cases, it can lead to a heart attack or permanent mental illness as well. Some of the health challenges for animals in climate change are heat-related diseases and stress, extreme weather events, adaptation of animal production systems to new environments, and emergence or re-emergence of infectious diseases, especially vector-borne diseases critically dependent on environmental and climatic conditions.

Currently, climate change is a soft threat that has become more treacherous than terrorism, affecting people in every walk of life on an annual basis. It requires

concerted efforts at an international, regional; national and local level through deliberate planning to exterminate the menace of climate change.

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USA Against The World | Editorial

The lines for the new rules of diplomacy, and of the future of world allies, are being drawn, and needless to say, the tides of world power are changing, along with the faces of their pawns. The National Security Strategy (NSS) of the United States of America, released Monday, makes it clear that the Trump doctrine's vision for the future power structures is very different from Obama's.

When the 2015 version of NSS was released under Obama, it hinted towards a blossoming bilateral relationship between the US and India, which had potential of growing into a relationship of convenience. The Trump report leaves no doubts that a US-India strong partnerships is in the works, with the report stipulating that the US will "expand its defence and security cooperation with India, a Major Defence Partner of the United States, and support India's growing relationships throughout the region".

This is by no means just an understanding between India and United States, rather it signifies a major shift in power, which will impact China, Russia and Pakistan. US's strong references to "encourage India to increase its economic assistance in the region", and allusion to quadrilateral cooperation, is unmistakably linked to having India as a dependable ally in any confrontation with China, and to counter China's increasing economic expanding efforts. To name-drop India's growing influence is a clear signal to a potential role of India, in Afghanistan; a demand that would be unacceptable to Pakistan.

So where does Pakistan stand in this unfortunate mess? As if the glorification of India was not enough to put off Pakistan's support, our country has been treated scathingly in the report. The references to Pakistan are laced with threats at best, and condescending chiding at best. From accusing Pakistan of being engaged in 'destabilising behaviour', being irresponsible with its nukes and 'insisting' that it cracks down on terrorists, it is made clear that cooperation with Pakistan is not high priority.

The report's attack of Russia, calling its nuclear weapons the "most significant existential threat", is no coincidence in a strategy, which plays a large emphasis on India being a major Defence partner; it indicates that in the business of defence deals with the US, India is in, and Russia is out.

Unsurprisingly, NSS is being rebuked by foreign officials of most countries. China and Russia have rejected the NSS, calling it a as a “Cold War mentality” with an “imperialist character” and the Foreign Office of Pakistan retorted that “phony regional powers” are pursuing expansionism to the detriment of regional and global peace.

source: <http://nation.com.pk/21-Dec-2017/usa-against-the-world>

America Is Heading for an Unprecedented Constitutional Crisis By Max Boot

White House lawyer Ty Cobb has been attempting to keep the First Client in check by telling him that Robert Mueller's investigation will soon be over and result in his exoneration. Back in August, Cobb was confident that it would all be over by Thanksgiving. When that didn't happen, Cobb, like a millenarian cultist adjusting the date of doomsday, claimed that it would end by Christmas. Now Christmas is almost upon us, and no light is visible at the end of the tunnel. Far from it. The investigation, which has already resulted in two indictments and two guilty pleas of Trump advisors, appears to be accelerating and drawing ever closer to the Oval Office.

What will Trump's reaction be when he figures out he's been duped — and that the Mueller probe, far from a "nothing burger," is a carafe of strychnine that poses an existential threat to his presidency? The likely result is that Trump will either pardon everyone involved or try to fire the special counsel, or both. And then the nation will be plunged into a constitutional crisis the likes of which we have not seen since Watergate.

The storm is not yet upon us, but the dark clouds are already visible on the horizon. Ever since the guilty plea from former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn on Dec. 1, Trump and his enablers have been throwing a hissy-fit at the FBI, the "Justice" Department (the sarcastic quote marks are the president's own), and the special counsel's office by seizing on "evidence" that all three are biased against him.

Mueller inadvertently fanned the flames by quietly relieving a senior FBI agent, Peter Strzok, for sending disparaging texts about Trump to an FBI lawyer with whom he was romantically entangled. You would think that this would be evidence of Mueller's determination to avoid any taint of bias, even though FBI agents, like other federal employees, are allowed to express political views without fear of retribution. But no. Trump has cynically twisted Mueller's action to suggest that the removal of an anti-Trump agent is somehow evidence of ... anti-Trump bias. Strzok, a widely respected special agent, has now been elevated by the far-right

media machine into an archfiend who unfairly exonerated Hillary Clinton and framed Trump.

Trump & Co. are also in a froth about another Mueller subordinate, attorney Andrew Weissmann. His crimes? He apparently attended Hillary Clinton's election night party and sent an email to acting Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates saying he was "proud" of her for refusing to enforce Trump's initial ban on Muslim visitors to the United States — the very ban that was subsequently deemed unconstitutional by numerous courts and totally rewritten by the administration in order to pass legal muster.

Add these attacks to all the other innuendos and smears emanating from the Trump camp. There is the claim that Mueller is biased because he is friends with fired FBI Director James Comey, who is anti-Trump even though Comey did as much as anyone to elect Trump. That members of Mueller's staff have made campaign donations to Democrats. That the FBI erred in showing interest in the dossier on Kremlin-Trump links compiled by a respected former MI6 officer. That FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe's wife received money from Hillary Clinton (in fact, she received campaign funds from the Democratic Party of Virginia and a political action committee associated with Virginia's Democratic governor when she ran for a state Senate seat in 2015).

Based on such flimsy reasoning, Trump besmirches not just Mueller's team but the whole FBI, tweeting: "After years of Comey, with the phony and dishonest Clinton investigation (and more), running the FBI, its reputation is in Tatters – worst in History!" At his Pensacola rally on Friday, held to promote the Senate candidacy of an accused child molester, Trump decried the entire American government for being biased against him: "This is a rigged system," he said. "This is a sick system from the inside. And you know there's no country like our country but we have a lot of sickness in some of our institutions." It doesn't take much imagination to figure out which "institutions" he is talking about.

Naturally, the most fervent Trumpkins have gone even farther than Trump himself; in fact, they are said to be frustrated by the "restraint" he has shown in his war against Mueller. Listen to what the talking heads at state TV, aka Fox News, are saying. Sean Hannity calls Mueller "a disgrace to the American justice system" and "the head of the snake." Jeanine Piro, sounding very much like a budding

commissar, claims: “There is a cleansing needed in the FBI and the Department of Justice. It needs to be cleansed of individuals who should not just be fired, but who need to be taken out in handcuffs.” Greg Jarrett compares the FBI to the KGB, as if the G-men were running gulags in Alaska: “I think we now know that the Mueller investigation is illegitimate and corrupt,” he says . “And Mueller has been using the FBI as a political weapon. And the FBI has become America’s secret police. Secret surveillance, wiretapping, intimidation, harassment and threats. It’s like the old KGB that comes for you in the dark of the night banging through your door.”

And, right after the commercial break, the Fox hosts will excoriate Democrats and NFL players for being “anti-police” and glorify Trump for championing “law enforcement.” In fact, to judge by his public pronouncements, Trump is only in favor of enforcing the law against black and brown people. If it’s a matter of saving his own skin, he and his partisans will gleefully burn the nation’s premier law enforcement agency to the ground.

It doesn’t matter to them that Robert Mueller is a decorated combat Marine, professional prosecutor, and — ahem — Republican who has been universally revered for his probity. No less an authority than Newt Gingrich said on May 17: “Robert Mueller is superb choice to be special counsel. His reputation is impeccable for honesty and integrity.” But now that Mueller is closing in on Trump, Gingrich scoffs, “How can you seriously say this guy [Mueller] is neutral?” and claims: “At the very top, the Justice Department and the FBI became corrupted.”

If you take seriously such accusations, you would have to conclude that only Republicans are allowed to investigate a Republican president — and not just ordinary, apolitical Republicans like Mueller but very partisan Republicans. Does that mean, therefore, that only Democrats can investigate Democratic presidents? Hardly! After all, most of Trump’s defenders were also defenders of Kenneth W. Starr, an active Republican who was appointed to probe Bill Clinton in 1994 after an earlier independent prosecutor, Republican Robert B. Fiske Jr., was judged to be insufficiently zealous. So apparently the rule is that Democrats are simply not allowed to be prosecutors. Or only Democratic presidents should be investigated. Or something.

About The Author:

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Source: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/12/11/america-is-heading-for-an-unprecedented-constitutional-crisis/>

Finding Balance in KSA-Iran Tussle By Junaid Ali Malik

Relations with both KSA and Iran have immense importance for us in Pakistan. Iran was one of the first countries to recognise Pakistan. Saudi Arabia is the most sacred place for the Muslims because among others, there are two most important holy sites in the country. The two countries have long been helping Pakistan in the hour of need. Keeping them close and maintaining strong acquaintance concurrently is getting a tougher task now as both have intensified the campaigns to tarnish each other's image. This can be described in terms of instances in Yemen, Syria, Libya, Palestine and other parts of the world.

The rulers of KSA are even ready to form an alliance with Israel when it comes to isolating Iran. They have already formed a number of alliances with America to further their influence against Iran. Israel's Army Chief Lieutenant General Gadi Eisenkot affirmed that he was ready to cooperate with KSA to curtail the sway of Iran in the region. The general stated that he was ready to exchange intelligence information with KSA and other 'moderate' Arab nations. He also stated that KSA and Israel had a lot of common interests.

This is a bit shaky for the Muslim world and an authentication of the fact that KSA and Iran will remain hostile to each other. Pakistan needs to ensure that it keeps on finding balance amid the tussle going on between KSA and Iran.

The rulers of KSA are even ready to form an alliance with Israel when it comes to isolating Iran. They have already formed a number of alliances with America to further their influence against Iran

Muslim nations are unfortunately divided today. Iran is leading one side while KSA another. Before Iranian Revolution in 1989, it was in good books of western powers including USA. After the revolution things underwent a major change. It was an Islamic revolution that toppled the prevalent regime of Shah of Iran Reza Pahlavi. KSA, on the other side, remained close ally of the US — an unyielding and blind patron of Israel.

The latter option is quite perilous and Pakistan is under pressure by both the countries to pick a position. KSA is forcing Pakistan to form alliance with it and curtail relations with Iran. The supposed denunciation from Pakistan seems to be the foremost rationale for giving Narendra Modi the red carpet treatment in Saudi Arabia. India and KSA also formed a number of unexpected pacts including intelligence information sharing.

On the other side, Iran is not happy with Pakistan either and has raised objections on accepting the leadership of 41-nation Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC). Iran believes that it has been formed against it. General (r) Raheel Sharif is heading this alliance. He has clarified that it was not formed against any country but its purpose is to eradicate the menace of terrorism. Iran is also cooperating with India majorly for the construction of its Chabahar Port neighbouring Balochistan.

There are slim chances of the situation getting better anytime soon. Therefore, Pakistan should find the balance with its relations with both these leading countries of the Muslim world. Both of them have been protecting their interests, and it is time for Pakistan to protect its own. Instead of indulging into internal stifle, it is better to have a dexterous and striking team of foreign affairs led by the foreign minister. Pakistan's ties with both Iran and Saudi Arabia hold importance as the two countries supported us on different occasions.

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US Isolates Itself | Editorial

And creates more troubles in Afghanistan

What happened at the UNGA was a collective act of defiance towards Washington. By recognising Jerusalem as the capital of Israel Trump administration departed from a 50-year old international consensus on Jerusalem's status. Many Security Council resolutions since then, which have the force of international law, have warned that Jerusalem's status is unresolved, that claims of sovereignty by Israel are invalid and that the issue must be settled in negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians. Trump's Israel policy would further complicate prospects for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The US has isolated itself not only from the Muslim majority countries but also close European allies. The threats of stopping US aid have failed to work. The resolution which was passed by an overwhelming majority was drafted by Egypt and seconded by Pakistan. Major aid receiving countries like Afghanistan, Iraq and a close ally like Jordan also voted against the US stand. The Gulf states which have developed close ties with the US defied Trump's bullying. India, Trumps' new found strategic ally with a fairly large Muslim population, also supported the anti-Trump alliance.

Trump's stand has not only annoyed the overwhelming majority of the UN member countries but also justice loving people all over the world. What could be dangerous is that Trump has handed over a new issue to the TTP, al Qaeda and IS to recruit fresh volunteers to target American interests. The attempts to wean away those attracted to militant causes and mainstream those willing to change would suffer a setback.

Despite chest thumping by US generals in Afghanistan, no US dignitary feels safe while visiting Kabul. Secretary of State Tillerson held talks with the Afghan government leadership in a secure room at US controlled Bagram airbase. Vice President Pence reached Kabul from Bagram on helicopter secretly in near total darkness to meet Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah. It would not help the US to use threatening tone towards Pakistan which is doing all it can to bring peace in Afghanistan including tripartite talks arranged by China between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Source: <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/12/23/us-isolates-itself/>

Middle East in 2018: A look at Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Syria and Iraq

Will 2018 dampen the fires that rage across the Middle East? Although skepticism is understandable, there is a glimmer of change.

The fight against the Islamic State group is mostly over, and the war in Syria may finally be winding down. The region is transitioning from fighting those wars to dealing with their aftermath — the destruction and dispersal of populations they wrought and the political fallout.

Iran's influence has grown after its proxies were generally successful, and even its nuclear deal with the West remains in place. In rival Saudi Arabia, a youthful new leader is promising long-delayed modernization at home and greater confrontation with Iran in the region. Donald Trump in the White House adds a mercurial element to an exceedingly combustible brew.

If pessimism reigns, much can be traced to the failure of the 2010-11 Arab Spring revolts against despotism. Instead of the democratic tsunami many envisaged, a string of wars has followed. Libya seems doomed to chaos and the war in Yemen is a genuine humanitarian crisis.

In many places, the old guard remains in place. So spectacular is the wreckage that almost no one refers to the Arab Spring without irony any more.

Egypt, which gripped the world's attention when street demonstrations — and the military — toppled Hosni Mubarak seven years ago, may be the best example of the scaled-down ambition. After several years of mayhem it seems more stable now, the economy starting to grow and tourism up.

Jihadi terrorism remains a problem, though, especially in the Sinai Peninsula and against Christians, and freedoms have been curtailed. Still, there is little sense of foment in the streets — where protests are severely restricted — and barring a surprise, President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi can expect to win re-election in a few months.

Across the border in Israel, there is more prospect for change as long-serving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu faces corruption investigations that could lead to his removal or early elections. Netanyahu, albeit bellicose, has been cautious — but he also seems wedded to a ruinous status quo with the Palestinians. He could be replaced by a greater firebrand or by the moderate center-left, which would create new opportunities.

Here's a look at some possible inflection points for 2018:

All quiet on the Syrian front?

Syria's President Bashar Assad has been embattled since war erupted in his country almost seven years ago, when his demise was widely predicted in the early going. But it looks like he'll survive, for now, as the war appears to draw to a close.

Major military operations have tapered off, with Assad in control of key areas and the war against the Islamic State group mostly concluded with the recapture of the cities it controlled. Bloodshed still lies ahead if Assad tries to seize areas still under rebel control, including some near the capital and in Idlib province to the north. But local cease-fires brokered by Russia, Iran and Turkey have significantly reduced the daily carnage that kept Syria in the news.

The damage, with half the population displaced and almost a half million killed, is huge. Tens of thousands are missing, many believed held in government detention centers. Syrian Kurds in the north hold nearly 25 percent of the country; Turkey, Russia, the U.S., Iran and Lebanese troops all maintain bases they are likely to keep for now.

The fate of Assad, whose heavy-handed, decades-old family rule sparked the rebellion, remains a toxic issue that has scuttled all diplomatic efforts at peace. Backed by Russia and Iran, it may seem like Assad has won the war: too many of his frustrated opponents turned to extremist groups such as al-Qaida and IS for the United States and the West to jump in and risk conflict with Russia. But the endgame remains open.

Promise and peril in Saudi Arabia

The monarchies of the region — from Morocco to Jordan to the Gulf — were the least affected by the Arab Spring. Perhaps most ossified was Saudi Arabia, a US ally and key oil power whose strict Wahhabi interpretation of Islam is blamed by critics for abetting the spread of jihadism worldwide.

Now change appears to be coming, symbolized by the ubiquitous acronym MBS — the widely used nickname for 32-year-old Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who many expect will take over the throne from his father officially in 2018. He has been stumping for a more moderate view of religion and is widely credited with the recent decisions to end the highly contentious, decades-old bans on women driving and cinemas operating.

The crown prince is also widely seen as the driving force behind the arrests of dozens of his fellow princes on corruption charges. Few are surprised by the corruption allegations, but critics sensed a power grab. Many of the detainees continue to fester, albeit in style, in the luxury Riyadh hotel that has become their improbable prison.

Saudi Arabia has also led a political and economic assault by Gulf nations on small but scrappy Qatar, accusing it of supporting terrorism and being too close to Iran. A series of demands, such as the closure of its state-owned Al Jazeera television network, have been summarily rejected, and the gambit seems mired in stalemate.

The Syria war is, to a degree, a proxy fight between the two regional powers, with Tehran supporting Assad and Riyadh many of the rebels. That also drove the seemingly Saudi-inspired and ultimately abortive resignation of Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri, who was seen as too easy on the Iranian-backed Lebanese militia Hezbollah, which is fighting in Syria.

In Yemen, where the Saudis have backed the government with airstrikes against Iran-backed Houthi rebels, many thousands of civilians have died, the rebels still control key parts of the country and there is starvation and cholera on a historic scale.

So great is the antipathy toward Iran by Saudi Arabia and other Sunnis powers that some observers think it exceeds their opposition to Zionism. In Jerusalem,

officials giddily whisper of an emerging Sunni-Israeli axis against the Islamic Republic.

A penultimate deal?

Seemingly inspired by the high-profile failures of his recent predecessors to coax the Israelis and Palestinians into a final peace, Trump speaks repeatedly of the “ultimate deal”. But it is difficult to envision even a more moderate Israeli leader meeting the Palestinians’ terms, which include dividing or sharing Jerusalem and its Old City, holy to three religions.

5 things you should know about Jerusalem

Even if they somehow agree to share, Israel and a future Palestine will likely need a border snaking through the city to keep peace rejectionists apart. And the Palestinians demand recognition of at least a theoretical “right of return” for millions of descendants of refugees, which few Israelis contemplate. Two decades of failed negotiations attest to the quagmire.

With this unpromising backdrop many Palestinians are talking about ditching the two-state strategy and demanding annexation and equal rights instead. That would make Israel an evenly divided binational state, something its government can be expected to resist, even as they face potential accusations of apartheid. With Israel having already settled 600,000 Jews in the West Bank and east Jerusalem, extricating itself will be difficult.

Some expect Trump’s team to try to forge a partial deal instead: A Palestinian state on only some of the land they seek, with Jerusalem and refugees left for later negotiations. Washington may be hoping for help from Riyadh and perhaps Cairo in pressuring the Palestinians. But that never came in the past, even with offers on the table far more likely to entice.

A phoenix on the Tigris

The war against the Islamic State group has been declared over after four years of savagery. The group’s epic abuses — enslaving women, massacring whole populations, grisly killings, mass terrorism — inspired a furious reaction that has left large parts of Iraq in smoldering ruins. The fight by the US-led coalition was

grueling in Fallujah, Ramadi, Hawija, Tal Afar and finally, Mosul. Whether Iraq can rebuild is a key question for 2018, for only then will Baghdad regain the authority to govern the whole country.

The cash-strapped government estimates \$100 billion is needed nationwide — while leaders in Mosul say that amount is needed for their city alone. Funding is unclear, and the United States — whose coalition dropped approximately 27,700 munitions around Mosul from October 2016 to July 2017 — seems to be washing its hands.

While 2.7 million Iraqis have returned to lands retaken from IS, more than 3 million others cannot — including some 600,000 from Mosul. Thousands of civilians were killed. More than 70 percent of Ramadi remains damaged or destroyed, according to authorities there.

At the heart of the matter are the sectarian divisions that bedevil not only Iraq but Syria, Lebanon, and other parts of the region whose borders were mostly drawn by Europeans. The destroyed areas are largely Sunni, while the Baghdad government is Shiite-dominated. If rebuilding efforts fail, the Sunni areas will likely become restive again.

Source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1378592/middle-east-in-2018-a-look-at-saudi-arabia-palestine-syria-and-iraq>

The United States Should Resolve to Avoid War With North Korea in 2018 By Colin Kahl

It's the season for New Year's resolutions. So here's a good one: Let's resolve not to have a massive war on the Korean Peninsula in 2018. Any such war could result in tens of thousands of deaths in the opening hours of hostilities, and potentially kill hundreds of thousands or even millions before the end of the conflict.

Unfortunately, like many New Year's resolutions, this one may be difficult to keep. Sen. Lindsey Graham, a keen observer of foreign affairs who has become a confidante of President Donald Trump, recently put the odds of Trump authorizing a preventive strike against North Korea at three in 10. Graham may be overly optimistic. North Korea's nuclear and missile programs are rapidly colliding with Trump's recklessness to make the possibility of a second Korean war the single greatest threat to world peace in 2018.

The challenge posed by North Korea's nuclear program is not new. In the early 1990s, U.S. intelligence agencies concluded that North Korea had separated sufficient weapons-grade plutonium for one or two nuclear bombs, and the country tested its first nuclear explosive device in 2006. According to media reports, the U.S. intelligence community currently assesses that North Korea possesses as many as five dozen nuclear weapons, and Kim Jong Un's regime likely has the ability to deliver them against regional targets using its increasingly sophisticated arsenal of short and medium-range ballistic missiles.

During the 2016 presidential campaign, when North Korea's nuclear and missile program appeared to only threaten America's Asian allies, then-candidate Trump seemed relatively sanguine about the danger. In fact, in an infamous interview with the New York Times, Trump appeared to suggest that South Korea and Japan should consider developing their own nuclear deterrents in order to fend for themselves instead of always turning to Uncle Sam. However, after being warned by President Barack Obama and receiving intelligence briefings on the growing direct threat to the United States emanating from Kim's drive to develop a nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), Trump changed his tune. On Jan. 2, he tweeted: "North Korea just stated that it is in the final stages of developing a nuclear weapon capable of reaching parts of the U.S. It won't happen!"

Yet, during the remainder of 2017, this is precisely what seemed to happen. North Korea conducted at least 20 missile tests this past year, including three missiles with intercontinental range. On Nov. 28, the North tested a Hwasong-15 ICBM capable of ranging the entire continental United States. Meanwhile, on Sept. 3, North Korea tested its largest nuclear weapon to date. The energy generated by the blast suggested that the device was at least 10-times greater than the nuclear bomb the United States dropped on Hiroshima in 1945. While it remains uncertain whether North Korea has yet perfected a survivable re-entry vehicle to reliably deliver a city-busting nuclear warhead via an ICBM, the rogue nation may pass that technological hurdle sometime in 2018.

The president has responded to North Korea's apparent disregard for his Twitter red line with increasingly heated rhetoric and threats of war. Trump has taunted Kim, calling him "Little Rocket Man;" promised to rain down "fire and fury" and "totally destroy North Korea" if Pyongyang threatens the United States with nuclear weapons; and declared that "military solutions are now fully in place, locked and loaded, should North Korea act unwisely."

Although Secretary of Defense James Mattis and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson have attempted to be more measured, others on team Trump have bent over backwards in public and private to convey the willingness, and even the likelihood, of Trump initiating military action. National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster has been particularly vocal in this regard. The North Korean regime has been dissuaded from using its nuclear capabilities for more than a decade, and both the U.S. intelligence community and most outside experts believe Kim is sufficiently rational for the logic of mutually assured destruction to operate. But McMaster has repeatedly suggested otherwise, arguing that Kim is a leader of "unspeakable brutality" who is essentially undeterrable. (As Max Boot notes, the United States successfully deterred China and the Soviet Union from launching a nuclear attack during the Cold War "even when they were led by blood-thirsty lunatics such as Mao Zedong and Josef Stalin" — but that argument seems lost on McMaster.) On Dec. 19, McMaster told CBS News that Kim's regime "has never met a weapon it didn't use" and, consequently, the world "can't tolerate" the risk of co-existing with a nuclear North Korea. Unless Pyongyang completely relinquishes its nuclear ambitions through diplomatic means, McMaster warns, the United States will have

no choice but to address the threat militarily — a prospect that is growing as North Korea's nuclear and missile progress marches on.

As we learned the hard way with Iraq, if a rogue regime is deemed undeterrable, and diplomatic compromise is seen as untenable, the allure of preventive war can quickly become irresistible. McMaster has taken the lead in making these arguments, but he is not alone. In October, Admiral Harry Harris, the top military officer in the Asia-Pacific, told an audience in Singapore that Kim was a “reckless dictator,” and he warned that “combining nuclear warheads with ballistic missiles in the hands of a volatile leader ... is a recipe for disaster.” Harris made clear that he preferred a diplomatic solution, but emphasized that diplomacy had to be backed up with a “credible” military option. “Many people have thought about military options being unimaginable regarding North Korea. Folks, I must imagine the unimaginable. And what is unimaginable to me are North Korean nuclear-tipped missiles delivered in Los Angeles, in Honolulu, in Seoul, in Tokyo, in Sydney, in Singapore.”

At the very least, all of this posturing is aimed at bolstering coercive diplomacy. The target is not just Kim's regime, but the international community, and China in particular. The Trump administration deserves credit for building on efforts during the Obama administration to isolate Pyongyang. Trump's “madman” routine has probably helped motivate the United Nations Security Council to get behind increasingly punishing sanctions targeting the North, and it has encouraged Beijing to do more to implement them. As a result, the diplomatic and economic vice on Pyongyang is tightening.

Nevertheless, Trump's maximum pressure campaign isn't likely to achieve the president's stated objectives. Kim sees nuclear weapons and the ability to target the U.S. mainland as his best way to ensure regime survival. It is simply inconceivable that he will accept full denuclearization at this point, no matter how much the pressure builds. Furthermore, while it is true that China has gotten much tougher on Kim's regime, Beijing remains unlikely to completely blockade the North, fearing Pyongyang's collapse more than its nuclear-tipped missiles. And even if China somehow decided to do so, it wouldn't create an existential choice for Kim before North Korea's nuclear and ICBM progress crossed technological thresholds the Trump administration deemed unacceptable. Indeed, the combination of unrelenting pressure and perceived abandonment by China may

actually reinforce Kim's belief that he must race across the nuclear ICBM goal line as his only remaining path to prevent U.S.-imposed regime change.

All of this means that, sometime in 2018, Trump's threat to use force will likely be put to the test. Trump's threat to use force will likely be put to the test. Given the difficulty the United States would have in confidently finding and destroying North Korea's nuclear weapons and mobile ballistic missile launchers, as well as the North's ability to level Seoul with its formidable artillery and rocket arsenal, would the president actually risk starting a preventive war if Kim fails to cry uncle?

Trump just might.

He has repeatedly denigrated the diplomatic option and constricted the space for peaceful compromise, appearing to favor military action. On Sept. 30, during a trip to China, Tillerson suggested that the administration had opened a direct channel with North Korea to explore a way forward. On Oct. 1, Trump tweeted, "I told Rex Tillerson, our wonderful Secretary of State, that he is wasting his time trying to negotiate with Little Rocket Man... Save your energy Rex, we'll do what has to be done!" On Dec. 12, when Tillerson said the administration was open to holding talks with the North "without preconditions," he was immediately brushed back by the White House, which rushed out a statement making it clear that Trump's position had not changed. The president has insisted that Kim agree upfront to discuss denuclearization before the United States will sit down to negotiate, something Kim will not acquiesce to. (Not to be outdone, following the White House rebuke of Tillerson, an editorial in North Korea's state newspaper said Pyongyang was not interested in unconditional talks either.)

Equally troubling, some of Trump's advisers appear to believe a limited military strike is viable and that escalation is controllable. According to recent reports, there is growing talk at the White House of a "bloody nose" option that would aim to set back North Korea's missile program, demonstrate Trump's resolve, and compel Kim to enter denuclearization talks on American terms. People who have met with McMaster and the National Security Council staff in recent weeks have left convinced that they are seriously considering such an option. And Trump's new National Security Strategy even says the United States will "remain ready to respond with overwhelming force to North Korean aggression and will improve options to compel denuclearization of the peninsula."

Limited war proponents seem to believe that the United States can control escalation by threatening to destroy Kim's regime if North Korea retaliates. (Of course, if Kim is so irrational that preventive war is the only way to head off the nuclear threat North Korea poses to the United States, it is not at all clear why Kim is simultaneously sufficiently rational for intra-war deterrence to operate in this manner.) But the notion that a war, once initiated, can be kept from spiraling out of control is a dangerous fantasy — one that makes the optimism before the 2003 Iraq invasion pale in comparison. Yes, Kim wants to survive. But given the amount of personal and regime legitimacy Kim has invested in North Korea's nuclear and missile programs, he may conclude that not retaliating is a graver threat to his survival than punching back. Moreover, given Trump's fire and fury rhetoric, it is also conceivable that Kim would see a limited strike as simply the first salvo in a wider U.S. campaign, creating use them or lose them incentives to rapidly escalate while he still can. A limited U.S. strike would therefore be an enormous gamble, with hundreds of thousands of lives hanging in the balance.

Perhaps for these reasons, there is no evidence that Mattis supports a preventative strike. But the president may be attracted to one anyway. Trump does not appear to be overly worried about potential escalation, so long as it stays contained to Asia and kills mostly Asians. In August, Graham observed that Trump is "not going to allow ... the ability of this madman [Kim] to have a missile that could hit America. If there is going to be a war to stop him, it will be over there. If thousands die, they're going to die over there. They're not going to die over here — and he's told me that to my face." Trump's willingness to take risks in launching a preventive war may be compounded by his extreme overconfidence in the ability of American missile defenses to shield the United States from any residual North Korean capability to retaliate in the wake of an American first strike.

But even if this is all wrong, and Trump is actually bluffing, his dangerous gambit could still lead to catastrophe. For starters, his undisciplined rhetoric has made miscalculation and inadvertent escalation much more likely. In the coming months, seeing a preventive war on the horizon, Kim could misperceive a U.S. military exercise, overflight of nuclear-capable aircraft, or other shows of force aimed at bolstering Trump's coercive diplomacy as a game-on moment, encouraging Kim to go first.

Any bluff of this magnitude also risks a credibility trap for the administration. As North Korea nears or transgresses Trump's red line by demonstrating a workable re-entry vehicle or perhaps conducting an atmospheric nuclear test, pressure will build inside the administration to act to preserve American credibility in Asia and across the globe. Add to that Trump's domestic political incentives — given low polls, special counsel Robert Mueller's probe, and approaching 2018 midterms — to look strong and perhaps wag the dog, and you get even more reasons to believe the president won't back away from a military strike.

For all these reasons, the prospect of a devastating conflict on the Korean Peninsula is growing. Unless the president begins to send clear and consistent signals that the United States is open to talks with North Korea without upfront conditions, and unless the administration proves willing to settle — at least for some period of time — with a negotiated outcome that eases the risk of nuclear war but falls short of full and immediate denuclearization, all signs point to a very dark path ahead. And, as several commentators have rightly pointed out, we appear to be collectively “sleepwalking” down this road. To date, there has been almost no public debate about the prospect of war on the Korean Peninsula and far too little attention paid by Congress. As we begin the new year, let's all resolve to change that before it is too late.

Source: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/12/27/the-united-states-should-resolve-to-avoid-war-with-north-korea-in-2018/>

‘America First’? So Far, Trump’s Foreign Policy Mostly Puts America Last. By Aaron David Miller and Richard Sokolsky

Concluding the national security strategy address that he delivered earlier this month, President Trump described his foreign policy aim “to celebrate American greatness as a shining example to the world.”

Not exactly.

At the end of his first year in office, the president’s approach to foreign affairs doesn’t fit the platitude-ridden narrative laid out in that speech as much as it lines up with six key components that define the Trumpian way abroad: America first, politics over policy, ego, deconstruction, risk aversion and dictators over democrats. They don’t make a neatly defined doctrine, but these components have a certain cohesion — at least in Trump’s mind — that hints at how he’ll operate for the rest of his tenure.

America first

The point of departure for any effort to decode Trump’s foreign policy is an understanding of what he means by “America first” — less a set of rules and more a state of mind. To the president, America has been getting taken to the cleaners for years via “disastrous trade deals,” freeloading allies and commitments made by Beltway establishment that have dragged America into endless, costly wars and nation-building efforts that have drained American prosperity in the dog-eat-dog world darkly described in his national security speech. Trump’s view of the world is much like his view of his business career — a cruel zero-sum game where the weak are to be taken advantage of and only the strong emerge as the real winners. These are views he’s held all his life; not an ideological construct imposed on a credulous first-time officeholder by a manipulative Stephen Bannon. America first is a variant of Trump first, which is why it subordinates the United States’s national interest to a solipsistic worldview uniquely ill-suited to dealing with the complicated challenges we face.

Politics over policy

It helps to think of Trump not as a foreign policy president, but as a recently minted politician trying to play one on TV. His approach to foreign policy is guided by his need to constantly assuage the constituency that elected him, not necessarily by actions that serve the long-term strategic interests of those constituents or U.S. allies. His ideological Svengali, Bannon, no longer inhabits the White House, but his whiteboard to-do list — with items ranging from “Build the border wall and eventually make Mexico” pay for it, to move the U.S. Embassy from “Tel Aviv to Jerusalem” — always beckons.

In February, Sen. Bob Corker (R-Tenn.) told Politico that “at one point” Trump and his team “were ready to move the Embassy” to Jerusalem “at 12:01 on January 20th” — a move that would have been capricious then and remained so when it was announced this month, despite warnings from advisers. Trump’s immediate withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership; his capricious exit from the Paris climate accord; and the various iterations on his ban on travelers from several Muslim-majority countries are valuable as gestures to his base, but mostly worthless as policy. The president’s campaign rhetoric and his determination to be the un-Obama have so far won out, and as the 2018 midterms and the 2020 presidential election approach, expect Trump’s political impulses to increasingly dominate governance — at home and abroad.

Presidential ego

Tony Schwarz, who co-wrote “The Art of the Deal,” wrote this year that Trump’s “sense of self-worth is forever at risk.” The president is driven by deep insecurities and an inordinate need for adulation and one-upmanship, on display in his speech accepting the GOP presidential nomination, when he declared “I alone can fix” what ails the American system. It was also reflected in his national security address, when he said: “For many years, our citizens watched as Washington politicians presided over one disappointment after another.” He fancies himself the greatest negotiator in the world, but allies and adversaries alike have cracked the code: If you flatter and fete Trump — as the Saudis and Israelis did in his first trip abroad, and as the Japanese and Chinese did during the president’s Asia trip — he is pliable. Witness his failure to push the Saudis on their atrocious human rights

record and military campaign in Yemen, to confront Israel on its unhelpful settlement activity, and to press China and Japan on trade.

Trump the deconstructionist

Far from a builder, so far Trump has proved more adept at condemnation and demolition, spending a lot of his time trying to tear down what was built by his predecessors — particularly President Barack Obama — without offering viable alternatives to take their place. A prime example is the Iran nuclear agreement, which has its flaws, but so far has been working and is far better than no deal at all. Trump provides no logic or specifics to back up his claim that the Iran deal is “incomprehensibly bad” and as seasoned diplomats have noted, the president isn’t much of a dealmaker. If it weren’t for cooler heads such as Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Trump may already have abandoned the deal (and still could down the road), leaving Iran to go full-speed ahead with its nuclear ambitions and isolating the United States from the other parties to the agreement.

Risk aversion

It’s ironic that, for a president who desperately wants to appear tough and muscular, Trump is as cautious and risk-averse as his predecessor when it comes to leveraging American military power. Though his administration just announced the sale of long-denied “lethal” weapons to Ukraine, in defiance of Russia, in general, on these issues, Trump isn’t the un-Obama, he’s Obama redux. For all of Trump’s bellicose rhetoric toward North Korea — “fire and fury,” “locked and loaded” and so on — he has not yet taken military action; he ordered a small missile strike after Syrian President Bashar al Assad’s use of chemical weapons (even though, he, like Obama, had far more robust options); and he mostly adopted Obama’s playbook for combating the Islamic State. With Trump’s use of military force, far more yellow and red lights have been flashing than green. The world remains a turbulent and unpredictable place, but Trump seems to have accepted the military’s view, at least for now, that projecting American force is an instrument to be used carefully in pursuit of realistic goals. Let’s hope that remains the case with North Korea — one scenario where Trump’s ego, his carelessness, domestic politics and Kim Jong Un’s recklessness could combine to create a catastrophe.

Dictators over democrats

The administration's new national security strategy brief brands China and Russia as "competitors" and promises more aggressive push back to their efforts to upend the global status quo. Maybe the president has had an epiphany about America's two main geopolitical rivals, but his rhetorical flexing is belied by his embrace of the dictators, President Xi Jinping and President Vladimir Putin, who rule these two countries. It looks increasingly likely that he'll soon lower the trade boom on China by imposing anti-dumping penalties and retaliating against Chinese theft of intellectual property, but he continues to give Russia a pass. Trump's favoring of dictators is evidenced by the way he has sucked up to autocrats and human rights abusers in Egypt, Turkey, the Philippines and Saudi Arabia. All while verbally roughing up democratic leaders, including allies like German Chancellor Angela Merkel, whose refugee policy he described as a "catastrophic mistake" and South Korean President Moon Jae-in, whom he accused of "appeasement" in a Twitter outburst.

Trump deserves credit for dealing a death blow to the Islamic State's territorial conquests in Syria and Iraq — his only laudable national security achievement to date. But the yardstick for judging Trump's foreign policy isn't whether his administration solves the world's toughest problems. The question is whether his approach to foreign policy can manage the challenges the United States cannot resolve in a way that strengthens our interests while avoiding international crises, such as an escalation of conflict with Iran or, particularly, North Korea, that might irreparably harm those interests. A year in, the record does not inspire confidence. His worldview isn't one that carefully calibrates means and ends or clearly defines true U.S. national interests and makes them a priority. Instead, it is one that will likely end up putting America last, not first, on a range of issues critical to its long-term prosperity and security.

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Source:https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/posteverything/wp/2017/12/27/america-first-so-far-trumps-foreign-policy-mostly-puts-america-last/?utm_term=.aa919d244cd4