

APRIL 2024

PRESS REVIEW

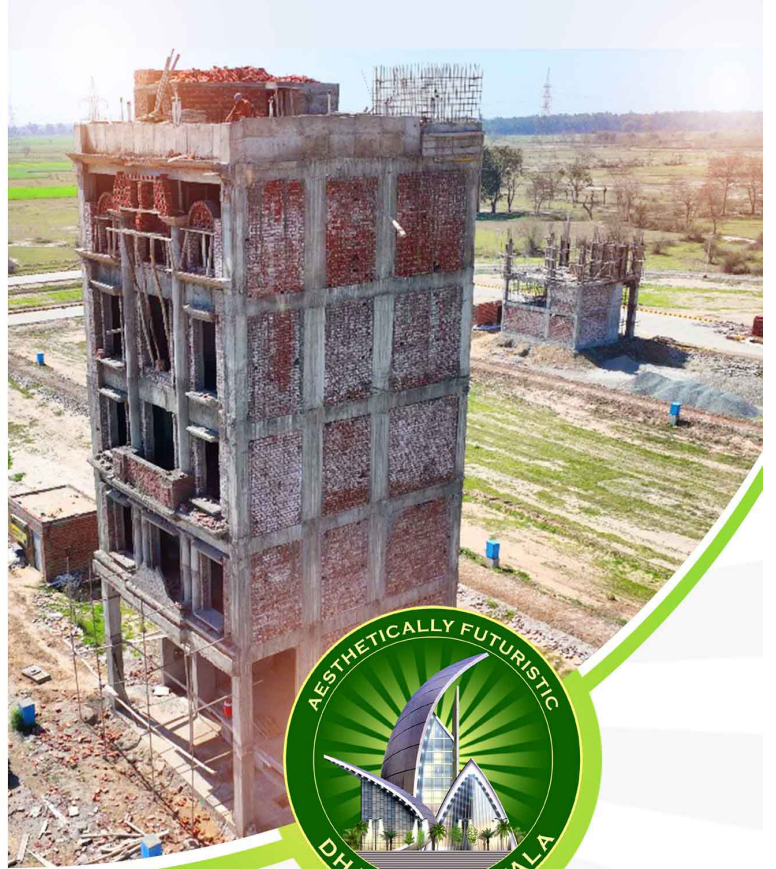
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This Month in Review

- The 23rd March commemoration
- The Day of Resolve: Defending ideological frontiers
- India continues to use draconian measures to throttle political activity in Occupied Kashmir
- Precarious situation of Pakistani prisoners in Indian jails
- Global RSS fundraising
- Afghanistan and domino effect in global terrorism
- Afghanistan without illusions
- Transformed terrorism in Pakistan
- Lessons from foreign policy

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April 2024

Volume: XXXVIII Issue: 04/24

Contents

ISLAM

- Zakat system: Pivot of economy 06
Salman Ahmed Shaikh
- 21st Ramadan: The martyrdom of Hazrat Ali (RA) 07
Farhan Bokhari

PAKISTAN DAY

- The 23rd March commemoration 08
Raza Muhammad Khan
- 23rd March: Historical perspective 08
Malik Tariq Ali
- A vow to strengthen Pakistan 11
Muhammad Hanif
- The spirit of unity and freedom 11
Dr. Zafar K Safdar
- Pakistan Day and our responsibilities 14
Dr. Muhammad Khan
- Re-examining Jinnah's Pakistan 15
Dr. Nasreen Akhtar
- The Day of Resolve: Defending ideological frontiers 16
Syed Qamar Afzal Rizvi
- Resolution Day: Quaid's vision and PAF 17
Sophia Siddiqui

KASHMIR

- India continues to use draconian measures to throttle political activity in Occupied Kashmir 20
Editorial
- Legitimizing Modi-led BJP's tyrannical rule in IIOJK 20
Dr. Awais Bin Wasi
- From Dr Qasim Faktoo to Arvind Kejriwal! 22
Hamid Mir

- Kashmir: Unwavering roadblock to Pakistan-India dialogue 24
M Fazal Elahi
- The *Hindutva* peril 25
Sabina Babar

PAKISTAN-INDIA

- Precarious situation of Pakistani prisoners in Indian jails 26
M Abdullah Hamid Gul
- Involvement of RAW in murder plots of Sikh leaders 27
Dr. M Khan
- The creepy syndrome of extremism in India 29
Tooba Mansoor
- Pakistan-India *detente*? 30
Maheen Shafeeq

GLOBAL TERRORISM

- Global RSS fundraising 31
Sajjad Shaukat
- Global terrorist threat 32
Zahid Hussain
- Russia-Afghanistan relations in the aftermath of Moscow attack 33
Vanda Felbab-Brown
- Militant sanctuaries in Afghanistan 35
Editorial
- Regional war threat and terrorism surge 36
Dr. Mehmood Ul Hassan Khan
- Afghanistan and domino effect in global terrorism 37
Iftikhar Hussain Jazib
- Geopolitics & cybersecurity 38
Rimsha Malik

The Taliban character
Muhammad Amir Rana 39

PAKISTAN-AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan without illusions
Engineer Khurram Dastgir-Khan 40

WAR ON TERROR

Transformed terrorism in Pakistan
Dr. M Khan 42

Shangla attack terrorists, facilitators held
Rasool Dawar 42

Dastardly attack kills foreigners working on Dasu Dam
Sultan M Hali 43

We'll fight terrorism with all our might, to the very end: COAS
Ag & Asim Yasin & Muhammad Anis 45

Terror rising
Omay Aimen 47

New terror wave
Editorial 48

Targeting militant sanctuaries
Zahid Hussain 50

Funeral prayers for officers martyred in North Waziristan
Arif Hasan 51

Countering terrorism in newly merged districts
Zakir Ullah 52

Terrorizing the CPEC
Asif Khurshid 53

Afghan govt's reluctance to take action against TTP
Durdana Najam 54

Afghanistan has to dislodge itself from TTP
Sher Ali Bukhari 55

Afghanistan must realize that Pakistan is not its enemy
Inam Ul Haque 56

FOREIGN POLICY

Lessons from foreign policy management
Hina Rabbani Khar 58

ECONOMY

Learning from better economies
Amar Z Khan 62

UAE's economic rise: Opportunities for Pakistan
Zaheen Qureshi 63

Vision Pakistan 2047
Malik Ahmad Jalal 65

Road to SIFC
Farhan Bokhari 66

How to solve the 'bijli' problem?
Engineer Khurram Dastgir-Khan 70

Capitalizing on coal
Ammar Habib Khan 71

PALESTINE

Gaza: Madness of war
Ven Bhikkhu Bodhi 73

Ramadan in a genocide
Editorial 74

The children of Gaza: The silent victims of war
Adv Fizza Ali 75

Binding Israel
Abid Rizvi & Sikander Ahmed Shah 76

Speak up for Gaza
Hilary Morgan Leathem 78



Zakat system: Pivot of economy

Estimates suggest that people in Pakistan pay Zakat and other charities amounting to Rs 600 billion to Rs 800 billion annually. On the other hand, just over Rs 10 billion is collected by the government in the form of Zakat. Due to issues of trust deficit, people prefer to pay Zakat privately. The potential of Zakat collectible in Pakistan is estimated to be nearly Rs 3 trillion in a March 2023 report published by the Institute of Policy Studies Islamabad.

Nonetheless, the current legal framework allows the provision of private Zakat disbursement on a simple filing of an affidavit. Currently, the Zakat administration is only involved in screening and disbursement. Collection is almost totally dependent on Zakat deducted at source by financial institutions, such as banks, brokerage houses and mutual funds etc. Since the Nisab amount is pre-announced, and date of deduction is 1st Ramadan, any deduction of Zakat is accidental from people who forget to submit affidavit to avail exemption. The challenges in administration can be summarized from the perspective of three major stakeholders in the Zakat administration, namely the *Muzakki* (Zakat Payer), *Mustahiq* (Zakat Beneficiary) and the *Aamileen* (Government Zakat Department). From the perspective of *Muzakki*, one of the important challenges is trust deficit with regard to proper disbursement of funds to the needy as well as deserving people who are eligible to receive Zakat as per Islamic jurisprudence.

Another issue is inexact incidence in deduction at source. The amount is deducted on outstanding balance in remunerative bank accounts and investment without clubbing other Zakatable items and also without allowing adjustment of debts. Majority of people does not file income tax returns in Pakistan. Hence, they fear that if they disclose, report and pay Zakat to and through the government department, they may have to pay tax as well on otherwise unreported wealth. Hence, with this fear, they try to avoid and evade taxes and pay Zakat privately to fulfil religious responsibility.

From the perspective of *Mustahiq*, one of the important challenges is lack of impactful donation which hinders socioeconomic mobility. If people are paid very small and insignificant amounts, then they can at best afford consumption for a short period of time rather than using the funds more productively. Currently, in Guzara Allowance across provinces, a paltry sum of Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,000 is paid monthly to each family. From the perspective of government

as collecting agent and regulator, one of the important challenges is lack of capacity to engage in collection and assessment. Furthermore, bridging juristic differences among various schools and sects is also a major impediment due to which the Zakat administration had slowly moved to the private sphere. In order to revitalize Zakat system, our government needs to improve its reporting, using multiple mediums to bridge the trust deficit. Periodic reporting about programs and allocation schemes together with independent auditing is necessary to build trust in the system. At district level, it is important to engage community and religious leaders to enhance public confidence. Tax incentives need to allow not only adjustment of Zakat in assessed income, but also in tax liability if the Zakat is paid to the government. This has been successfully implemented in Malaysia. Right now, income tax laws allow deducting Zakat as an expense to reduce taxable income rather than adjusting the tax liability itself. Lack of awareness about Zakat rules is also an important barrier. A great majority of people is not aware of treatment of real estate, financial assets, receivables and debts. It is important to raise awareness and urgency about Zakat. It is a religious obligation and its effective mobilization and disbursement can improve social welfare of masses. Hence, it is critical to raise awareness using public broadcast media, awareness seminars, mosque sermons and other ways of engagement. A hotline and availability of scholar at district office can help the community in Zakat assessment as well. In social crowd funding, technology is an important enabler in capitalizing on seasonal and impulsive charitable giving in important events. Not only ATMs can be used to disburse payments to deserving beneficiaries, but also they can be utilized for mobilizing charitable giving. Likewise, banks which provide discounts and reward points shall engage with institutions providing welfare services to offer redeeming of points for provision of social services. There is an overlap in several government-run programs. Even if institutions or related programs are not submerged, there shall be greater collaboration with regards to sharing databases to avoid duplication of costs and adverse selection, and to make it more difficult for people to benefit from multiple programs at once. It will also help in reducing the defaults or abuses since if a person is adjudged sharing false records in one program, he/she will be barred from multiple programs through centralized sharing of data.

(Salman Ahmed Shaikh — Pakistan Observer, March 26, 2024)

21st Ramadan: The martyrdom of Hazrat Ali (RA)

The surge in the number of pilgrims heading to Najaf in southern Iraq, has yet again reinforced the towering personality of Hazrat Ali (RA), the Fourth Caliph of Islam. The event marks the martyrdom anniversary of Hazrat Ali (RA) at the nearby majestic ‘Kufa’ mosque in the 7th century AD, where he was struck with a poison-laced sword by Abdul Rehman ibn Amr ibn Muljam al-Muradi, commonly known as Ibne Muljim.

The bloodshed occurred as Hazrat Ali (RA) led the early morning ‘Fajr’ prayers on the 19th of Ramadan. He succumbed to his fatal injuries just two days later, on the 21st of Ramadan, and was laid to rest in a gravesite whose location at the time was only known to his close family members. So ended the lifetime of a gigantic personality whose birth almost 60 years earlier in the Holy Kaaba on the 13th day of the Islamic month of Rajab-ul-Murajab, remains unparalleled.

The precaution taken to protect the location of the grave site of Hazrat Ali (RA) was meant to guard his final resting place. But the powerful impact of Hazrat Ali on the times that he lived in, and subsequently over almost 14 centuries, is witnessed across the bustling city of Najaf. The city identifies itself centrally with Hazrat Ali (RA). Najaf today attracts pilgrims from a diverse set of ethnic, geographic and linguistic backgrounds throughout the year. They include a number of non-Muslims too, who are simply pulled to the city to personally witness the enduring impact left behind by Hazrat Ali.

Not too far from the resting place of Hazrat Ali (RA) lie the scores of grave sites of a succession of prophets and other notables from centuries gone by, at Najaf’s ‘Wadi us Salaam’ cemetery, which bears testimony to the spiritually powerful character of this land. Beyond Iraq, across the world, in countries like Pakistan, India and Afghanistan, the remembrance of Hazrat Ali over centuries has been associated with monuments dedicated to his legacy. For instance, travelers from Peshawar to the historic Khyber Pass entrance to Afghanistan, drive by ‘Ali Pahar’ or Hazrat Ali’s mountain, popularly dedicated to Hazrat Ali (RA), with a large boulder delicately perched on its side for centuries. Locals believe that the boulder has remained in place after it was miraculously stopped by Hazrat Ali (RA) from falling below upon a local habitation.

And the city of Hyderabad in Sindh owes its name to

one of the popular titles of the late Caliph – ‘Haider’ or ‘Haider e Karrar’. Devotees of Hazrat Ali visit Hyderabad throughout the year. It is a shrine that hosts a rock bearing two footprints believed to be those of Hazrat Ali (RA). His fame ranged from the battlefield in view of the multiple victories claimed by Hazrat Ali (RA) to the world of knowledge. A popular text known as ‘*Nahjul Balagha*’ carries the sermons, letters and other texts written or verbally delivered by Hazrat Ali during his lifetime as he lived up to his well-preserved claim of successfully answering every question put up to him. “*Salooni, salooni, kabla ant’afkadoonee*” (Ask me, ask me, before I am not amongst you) was the historic public call by Hazrat Ali (RA) as he answered questions from his pulpit, first in Madina and subsequently from the seat of the Caliphate in Kufa. Over time, the acknowledgment of the wisdom of Hazrat Ali has poured from across the world, overshadowing many other iconic figures.

Sir Edward Gibbon, the English historian of the 18th century famously recognized Hazrat Ali (RA) for unifying “...the qualifications of a poet, a soldier, and a saint; his wisdom still breathes in a collection of moral and religious sayings.” And Washington Irving, the 19th-century American writer, while praising Hazrat Ali (RA) wrote: “He possessed the three qualities most prized by the Arabs: courage, eloquence and munificence.”

An oft-repeated source of recognition for the wisdom of Hazrat Ali continues to be driven by a letter he wrote to Maalik-e-Ashtar upon the latter’s appointment as the governor of Egypt, then a province of the Islamic empire. Over time, many scholars and leaders have recognized this document as a rich source of guidance for the governance of a state for all times to come. In his widely shared remarks, the late Kofi Annan, a former secretary-general of the UN, acknowledged the letter for offering rich guidance, including the protection of non-Muslims and Muslims alike. “Remember Maalik that among your subjects there are two kinds of people; those who have the same religion as yours; and those who have other religions than yours and yet they are human beings like you,” wrote Hazrat Ali (RA) in powerful words that still provide a fundamental basis for the rights of all citizens of an Islamic state. Together, the sources of guidance attributed to the teachings of Hazrat Ali (RA) have laid down a model of governance for all times to come. It is hardly surprising that the shrine in Najaf has become a source of inspiration for visitors, irrespective of their faith.

(Farhan Bokhari — *The News*, March 31, 2024)

Pakistani nation's added zeal, solemnity and enthusiasm

The 23rd March commemoration

RAZA MUHAMMAD KHAN

Pakistan
OBSERVER

MARCH 30, 2024

Pakistan Day was observed with traditional zeal, solemnity and enthusiasm on 23rd March. The highlight of the day was the spectacular parade of the defence forces along with the display of their sinews for deterrence and defence of the motherland, with support of the people from all walks of life, depicted through colourful floats, etc. These events were well received and appropriately reported. However, the needed media coverage about the historic context of this landmark resolution of epic proportion was

lacking.

So, what was the Lahore Resolution about, and what are its other manifestations? Simply put, that Resolution, adopted by All-India Muslim League on 23rd March 1940, formally called for an independent state for Muslims of subcontinent. While the Resolution did not include the word "Pakistan" at the time, it encompassed the rationale of the "Two-Nation Theory", and the resolve of the people despite heavy odds.

23rd March: Historical perspective

Two events occurred on 23rd March played a significant role in the history of Pakistan. The first occurred on 23rd March 1940, near Lahore Fort, at Minto Park, where Muslims of subcontinent pledged to wage a constitutional struggle for the creation of a separate homeland for themselves. The second was adoption of 1956 Constitution, when we finally became a republic, and were no longer a dominion of the British Empire.

Mohammad Ali Jinnah had desired that Pakistan should be a modern democratic welfare state, and its foundations were to be built upon a Constitution as the supreme law. The Lahore Resolution, known as Pakistan Resolution, was passed in annual session of All-India Muslim League, following its adoption by the working committee and AIML council. Today, as we celebrate this day, it is time to pledge that the Quaid's vision be adopted.

Events preceding March session in Lahore had created tensions when Punjab's (Unionist Party) premier Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan banned all private armed militias. This ban also impacted Allama Mashriqi's Khaksar Tehreek, whose party newspaper "*Al-Islah*" launched a critical campaign. On March 19, contingents of Khaksar carrying spades started gathering near Bhaati Gate. When the police tried to stop them, a fight ensued, resulting in death of a British police officer and injuries to many policemen. Later, hundreds of police reinforcements

arrived and they mercilessly brutalized Khaksars, inflicting scores of fatalities. This brutality evoked a lot of anger amongst thickly populated Muslims living within the walled city, who vented their anger against Sikandar Hayat. The situation became so critical that Sikander pleaded with the Quaid on phone to postpone the planned session of All-India Muslim League at Lahore. However, the Quaid was firm that the historic meeting would go ahead as planned.

On 21st March, the Quaid arrived in Lahore where a grand reception was planned with a huge rally on his way to the League office at Davis Road. However, in deference to Muslim families mourning their dead, he instructed the organizers to cancel the rally. He issued a press release in which he said that important historic decisions were to be taken. In the evening a meeting of AIML council was held. It finalized a list of members for Subjects Committee and passed many resolutions condemning the brutal murder of Muslims.

In the late afternoon of 22nd March, an open session of AIML was held where Nawab Mamdot presented the welcome address in which he also mentioned of the precarious condition of Badshahi Mosque, and about the efforts of Sikandar Hayat government to restore it. No sooner had he mentioned this name, the already charged emotional crowd shouted slogans against him. Sikander quietly left the venue.

Five years earlier, in the mid-1930s, Muslim leaders did their utmost to ensure maximum political safeguards and autonomy for Muslim majority provinces, within the framework of a united India. These efforts partly succeeded as they got a system of separate electorate for them in the Government of India Act, 1935. However, when elections were held under this Act, the Indian National Congress dominated in the centre and formed governments in six out of eight provinces. During the Congress rule till 1939, Muslims' identity, religion and culture were viciously attacked; numerous mandirs were constructed on Muslim lands and the education system was treacherously tempered to promote Hinduism.

Consequently, by 1938–39, the idea of Partition of India had strongly gained ground. On March 9, 1940, the concept was vividly expressed by Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the Quaid-i-Azam, in an article published in a London weekly "*Time & Tide*", where he wrote: "Democratic systems based on the concept of homogeneous nations such as England are definitely not applicable to heterogeneous countries such as India, and this simple fact is the root cause of all of India's

constitutional ills... If, therefore, it is accepted that there is in India a major and a minor nation, it follows that a parliamentary system based on the majority principle must inevitably mean the rule of the major nation..." He added that (during the Congress rule)... "An India-wide attack on Muslims was launched... every attempt was made to defeat the Muslim-led coalition ministries... the Congress song, *Vande Mataram*, was recognized as the national anthem; and the real national language, Urdu, was supplanted by Hindi... everywhere oppression was rampant and complaints poured in such force... that the Muslims, despairing of the Viceroy and Governors, ever taking action to protect them, have already been forced to ask for a Royal Commission to investigate their grievances – Is it the desire (of Britain) that India should become a totalitarian Hindu State...? ...I feel certain that Muslim India will never submit to such a position and will be forced to resist it with every means in their power – a constitution must be evolved that recognizes that there are in India two nations who both must share the governance of their motherland."

The Lahore Resolution was moved by A K Fazlul Huq,

The moment, the Quaid got up to deliver his presidential address, there was a pin-drop silence. He gave a brief account of political developments in the preceding two years, vis a vis activity of Congress and British government, and League's policy about war in Europe. Towards the end of his address, while elaborating upon Two-Nation Theory, he made a reference to a letter written by Lala Lajpat Rai to Bengal's famous leader C R Das in 1924, where the former had stated that Hindus and Muslims are two separate nations and they can never form part of one united nation. In the evening the Subjects Committee met, where the Quaid made it clear that the focus of the Lahore sessions would be Pakistan Resolution.

Nawab Liaquat Ali Khan read out the proposed draft in Urdu, prepared by 21 members of the working committee comprising Liaquat Ali Khan, Nawab Ismail, Malik Barkat Ali, Haji Abdullah Haroon, Maulana Zafar Ali, Sikandar Hayat, Nawab Mamdot, and others. The resolution translated into English by Maulana Zafar Ali Khan read: "That geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be co constituted, with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary, that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority, as in the NW and NE zones of India should be grouped to constitute" Independent States" in which the constituent units should be autonomous and sovereign." When

discussions resumed, Ashiq Hussain Batalvi, proposed some changes, wherein he stated that if whole of Punjab and Bengal are intended to be incorporated in Pakistan, then instead of NW it should be clearly mentioned that this means Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and Frontier, while NE should be replaced by Bengal, otherwise word 'territorial readjustments' could be misconstrued leading to division of these two vital components.

Nawab Liaquat Ali Khan however was of the opinion that if word 'Punjab' were to be mentioned, then boundaries of North East would end at Gorkhanwa, while we intend to include Delhi and Agra; similarly on North East we propose to include Assam also. He assured him that division of Punjab and Bengal will not be allowed. This explanation appealed to the audience and no changes were made and draft resolution was adopted.

It was also decided by the Quaid-i-Azam that Maulana Fazal ul Haq would present the Resolution in the open session on 23rd March at Minto Park supported by Chaudhry Khaliq-uz-Zaman, seconded by Ibrahim Ismail Chundrigar from Bombay, Abdul Rauf Shah from CP, Abdul Hameed Khan from Madras, Aurangzeb Khan of the Frontier, Abdul Mateen Chaudhry of Assam, Nawab Ismail from Bihar, Maulana Zafar Ali Khan from Punjab and Qazi Essa from Balochistan.

(Malik Tariq Ali—Pakistan Observer, March 25, 2024)



the CM of undivided Bengal, and was seconded by Chaudhry Khaliq-uz-Zaman from the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh), Zafar Ali Khan from Punjab, Sardar Aurangzeb Khan from NWFP (now KP), Pir Ziauddin Andrabi from Kashmir, and Sir Abdullah Haroon from Sindh. Qazi Muhammad Essa from Balochistan and other leaders also announced their support.

Later, it was the Hindu press, which was ironically quick to describe the Resolution as the demand for the creation of Pakistan; and the people began to call it with that name. This milestone document in Pakistan's history declared: "— no constitutional plan would be workable in this country or acceptable to Muslims unless it is designed on the following basic principle, namely that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted — that the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the North-Western and Eastern Zones of India, should be grouped to constitute "Independent States" (later elucidated by the Quaid as two states/ nations/ countries, one for Hindus and one for Muslims), in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign."

Addressing a massive crowd on the occasion and speaking in English for the benefit of the foreign press present, the Quaid rationalized why a separate state for Muslims was necessary. Mocking Mahatma Gandhi, he said: "And this now is what Mr. Gandhi says: "To me, Hindus, Muslims,

Parsis, Harijans are alike. I cannot be frivolous" — but I think he is frivolous", as Gandhi knows the difference that he has three votes and I have only one vote." The resolution also demanded that "in parts of India where the *Mussalmans* are in a minority, mandatory safeguards shall be provided in the constitution — for the protection of all their rights and interests in consultation with them." (In Modi's India, this continues to be a mere cherished dream).

In 1984, American historian Stanley Wolpert, in his book *"Jinnah of Pakistan"*, wrote: "Jinnah's Lahore address lowered the final curtain on any prospects for a single united independent India... The rest of the world would take at least seven years to appreciate that he literally meant every word he had uttered... All that remained was for his party first, then his inchoate nation, and then the British to agree to his formula." In 1956, on the same day, Pakistan adopted its first Constitution, which transformed the 'Dominion of Pakistan' into the "Islamic Republic of Pakistan".

23rd March is, therefore, also known as the Republic Day. In 1968, the *Minar-e-Pakistan* was built at the site where the Resolution was espoused. The text of the Resolution is inscribed at the base of the tower. Bottom lines: "The history of our creation is illustrious, arduous and inspiring. We, our media, institutions, leaders and society are obligated to spread awareness about it; lest it is forgotten by posterity.

A vow to strengthen Pakistan

MUHAMMAD HANIF

Pakistan
OBSERVER
MARCH 23, 2024

23rd March is celebrated as “*Yaum-e-Pakistan*” or “Pakistan Resolution Day”, also as “Republic Day”. This day is celebrated to commemorate the Lahore Resolution passed on 23rd March 1940 and the adoption of the first Constitution of Pakistan on 23rd March 1956, making Pakistan the world’s first Islamic Republic. Pakistan Resolution was passed and adopted by All-India Muslim League (AIML) led by Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah at the Minar-e-Pakistan

Lahore which called for establishing an independent federation comprising the Muslim majority provinces located in north-western and north-eastern regions of British-controlled territories.

Based on AIML’s efforts, and the Pakistan Resolution, the British plan to partition the subcontinent into two dominions, India and Pakistan, was announced on June 3, 1947, leading to the creation of Pakistan out of British-ruled India on August 14, 1947.

The spirit of unity and freedom

DR. ZAFAR K SAFDAR

Ideology is a system of dominant beliefs and ideals that are used to justify and represent the value-ideas construct that dominates social, economic, and political systems. The ideology of Pakistan took shape through an evolutionary process. Historical experience provided the base; Allama Iqbal gave it a philosophical explanation; Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah translated it into a political reality; and the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, by passing Objectives Resolution in March 1949, gave it a legal sanction. When the Muslims realized that their future in the subcontinent dominated by Hindu majority was not safe, and that they were not being provided with equal opportunities to compete with the Hindus and excel in all walks of life, they demanded a separate homeland. Muslims believed that Islam and Hinduism are not only two religions, but are two social orders that produced two distinct cultures.

The War of Independence in 1857 led to a significant change in the Indian administration, with the East India Company being abolished in favour of direct British rule. Despite being ill-planned and short-lived, the war shook the British Imperialism to its core. The Muslims were blamed for the disaster, leading to oppression and repression. A number of leading Muslims were hanged or sentenced to jail; their properties were confiscated. They were also

denied important jobs. The British were hostile towards Muslims. The war also had a significant impact on the people, as traditional society failed to resist foreign influences and natural leaders either held aloof or proved incompetent. The traditional structure of society began to break down, leading to the emergence of a strong middle class with a heightened sense of nationalism. Muslims rejected the Western education, preferring Persian over English, leading to a decline in their status, initially diagnosed by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, who emphasized the importance of learning western education.

In 1885, Indian National Congress was founded to primarily promote the Hindu nationalist movement under the British rule. Sir Syed advised Muslims not to join, fearing Hindu domination. This led to the emergence of All-India Muslim League in 1906, which later demanded a separate state for Muslims. Initially favoured by the British, the League later adopted self-government for India in 1913. Leaders like Mohammed Ali Jinnah called for Hindu-Muslim unity in a united India. However, it was not until 1940 that the League called for a separate Muslim state.

In 1936-37, the British India held provincial elections in 11 provinces, as mandated by the Government of India Act 1935. Indian National

The Pakistan Day celebrations begin with a gun salute in the federal capital and provincial headquarters, followed by special prayers for our forefathers, as well as the martyrs. The national flag is raised high on main government and private buildings, with change of guard ceremonies at the mausoleums of Pakistan's founding father Mohammad Ali Jinnah, and the poet-philosopher Allama Muhammad Iqbal.

The Pakistan Day Parade, featuring participation

Congress emerged in power in seven provinces, except for Bengal, Punjab, Sindh, and Assam. All-India Muslim League failed to form a government in any province. Congress, which represented 95% of the Indian population, won almost 750 seats out of 1771 in 8 out of 11 provinces, while AIML secured only 106 seats. The Congress ministries were formed in July 1937, with exclusive harsh policies against Muslims, including making Hindi the national language, establishing the Congress flag as national flag, and promoting Hindu culture through Vidya Mandar Scheme. Muslims were also excluded from government offices, career opportunities, trade and agriculture. This led to massive Hindu-Muslim riots. Several reports, such as the "*Pirpur Report*", "*Muslim Sufferings under Congress Rule*", and "*The Sharif Report*", were issued by Muslim leaders and voiced against injustice and cruelty.

In October and November 1939, the Congress ministries resigned in protest against Viceroy Lord Linlithgow's declaration of India's involvement in World War-II without consulting the elected Indian representatives. Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah called for Muslims to observe day of deliverance, offering prayers of thanksgiving and gratitude. It was then when majority of Muslims supported Jinnah, prompting him to call for the 27th annual session of All-India Muslim League in Lahore.

AIML had only a few thousand members in Lucknow in 1937; the Quaid dedicated his life to strengthening it, and by March 1940, when the League had its largest assembly, it had grown to half a million members, seeking the foundation of Pakistan. The French philosopher Renan is correct when he states that "man is not enslaved by his race, religion, the course of rivers, or the direction of mountain ranges. An aggregation of man,

from the defence forces and paramilitary units, showcases Pakistan's major and modern weapon systems, and includes aerobatics by Pakistan Air Force pilots and para jumps by the Special Services Group (SSG), inviting Pakistani and foreign dignitaries and the general public to witness. It serves to remind the Pakistanis of the significance of Pakistan's creation, and galvanizes them to work towards ensuring unity and strengthening the nation in various aspects

sane of mind and warm of heart, creates a moral consciousness and infuses in the masses the idea of reasserting their hegemony, and prepares them for achieving their lost empire".

On 23rd March 1940, a resolution was presented that outlined the basic principles for a constitutional plan. The resolution emphasized the need for geographically contiguous units to be grouped into autonomous, sovereign states, and for adequate safeguards for minorities' rights. The Hindu press also used the word "Pakistan" in an ironic manner, and the Muslim League later declared it as Pakistan Resolution. The resolution was widely accepted by prominent Muslim leaders. Within seven years of struggle, Muslims were able to gain an independent state.

Following Pakistan's birth, the country faced numerous challenges, both genuine and initiated by India, which were crucial to the State's existence. The core issues faced by Pakistan included Jammu & Kashmir, Pakhtunistan, princely states, refugees' influx, administration, financial resources, assets division, armed forces division, foreign policy trends, foreign missions, constitution framing, and provincial governments. Despite these challenges, Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah remained determined and worked tirelessly. He embraced the diversity of citizens, including Parsis, Hindus, Christians, Jews, and Muslims, and worked harmoniously to create one nation.

Though Pakistan has made significant progress in various fields, including becoming a nuclear power, expanding its economy, and growing cities, the benefits of development have been unevenly distributed. A future for Pakistan beyond the past and present, and preserving Quaid's ideals is crucial.

(Pakistan Observer, March 23, 2024)



educationally, scientifically, technologically, militarily, diplomatically and health-wise. Pakistan came into being because the Hindu majority did not respect the Muslim values and identity, and during the freedom struggle from the British rule in the 1940s, Congress had refused to meet the Quaid-i-Azam's demand for reserving the Muslim seats as per their population in the post-British House of Representatives, and hence the AIML demanded a separate homeland in the form of Lahore Resolution. The Indian Congress Leaders had fiercely opposed the creation of Pakistan. Hence India never actually recognized Pakistan. It has always been trying to harm Pakistan. India had forcefully occupied Jammu & Kashmir in October 1947 by deceiving the world about a false instrument of accession. In December 1971, India militarily intervened and exploited Pakistan's internal issue that resulted in dismemberment of Pakistan.

On August 5, 2019, the Modi-led BJP government, in total deviance from the UN SC resolutions took away the autonomy of IIOJK and divided the J&K State into two federally controlled territories. In the last few years, the BJP government ministers and its Army Chiefs have given threats to Pakistan to militarily capture Azad Jammu & Kashmir. Modi has been constantly trying to blame Pakistan for sponsoring terrorism, although ultimately India's state terrorism to kill Sikh leaders in

Canada and the US proved that it is India not Pakistan that is sponsoring terrorism in the region and beyond. The aforementioned actions confirm India's enmity, which is likely to dominate Indian politics in the coming decades.

Militarily, there should be no worry for Pakistan, with strong armed forces and having the nuclear capability, from the Indian threats, except that India is using its heavy foreign exchange reserves to further strengthen its air force, navy and missile or nuclear capabilities. For the last many years, Pakistan has successfully fought the war against foreign/ India-sponsored terrorism. The terrorists are being given a deadly response. An offensive policy to hit the Afghanistan-based TTP and BLA terrorists combined with negotiations from the point of strength is likely to work towards eliminating terrorism.

In order to resolve the economic issues, the governments and the people need to work hard honestly with full dedication and contribute towards increasing Pakistan's agricultural, industrial and IT software production by using modern day knowledge. This would help to pay back foreign debts without taking further loans and put the country back on track.



Pakistan Day and our responsibilities

DR. MUHAMMAD KHAN

Pakistan
OBSERVER
MARCH 22, 2024

As an ideological state, Pakistan is a blessing and gift by the Almighty. Our forefathers had a farsightedness and determination towards conceiving the idea of this great state, and subsequently making it a reality. As an unflinching personality, the leadership of Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah played a great role in the formation of Pakistan, based on Islamic ideology.

Famous American writer Stanley Wolpert writes in his book *“Jinnah of Pakistan”*: “Few individuals significantly alter the course of history. Fewer still modify the map of the world. Hardly anyone can be credited with creating a nation-state. M A Jinnah did all three.”

Achievement of Pakistan under an environment of stiff resistance and opposition from Congress leadership and British colonial bosses could not have been possible without the statesmanship and visionary leadership of Quaid-i-Azam. Under his leadership, the Muslims of subcontinent achieved what seemed to be impossible before 1940. Indeed, Muslims of this region were alienated, exploited and kept backward by the ruling colonial power and the majority population of Hindus. Hindu leadership was optimistic that in any future arrangement after decolonization, they would be the legitimate rulers of subcontinent, based on their majority population.

That’s why 23rd March has a special significance in history. On this historical day, in 1940, the celebrated resolution for the creation of Muslim state was passed in the Lahore session of All-India Muslim League. In the political struggle of Muslims of subcontinent, this was the biggest gathering, attended by over 100,000 people from all parts. Indeed, under the exploitative British colonialism, Muslims were targeted because of being former rulers. Through this historic gathering, the Muslims of subcontinent gave a message to the world at large and Britain and Hindu majority in particular that they were determined to have their own homeland in the form of Pakistan, a state where they can freely live as a nation, while following the glorious principles of Islam.

This resolution was adopted 10 years after the historical address of great philosopher Dr Allama Muhammad Iqbal, in the Allahabad session of All-India Muslim League, in 1930. This visionary thinker and poet had envisioned in his address a separate homeland for the Muslims of South Asia. The Lahore session of Muslim League was indeed the first substantial step towards the implementation of this vision, a dream turning into reality. The struggle for nothing less than a separate homeland (Pakistan) was the agenda of this session as the Quaid had specified prior to this historical congregation of the Muslims of subcontinent. “The watch-words of “Faith, Unity and Discipline” were the munitions which the Quaid gave to the nation for waging the battle for Pakistan. The most dependable powerhouse in the struggle for Pakistan was the Muslim nation’s unity.”

Following the adoption of this resolution, Muslims of subcontinent, devotedly struggled for this God-gifted ideological Muslim state. Despite difficulties faced by this newly established country, the spirit of Pakistan’s Resolution remained alive and this great nation confronted the challenges with great vigour, zeal and zest. Unfortunately, in 1971, owing to a number of external conspiracies, half of the country was lost. However, the ideology of Pakistan – the concept of Two-Nation Theory did not die, as Bangladesh did not become India.

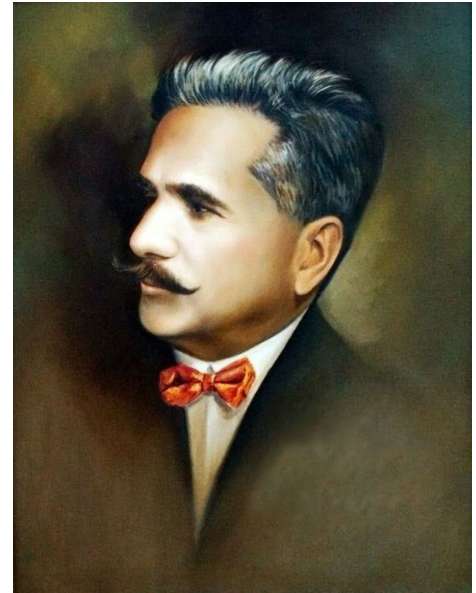
Pakistan Day reminds us of the contributions of our forefathers who sacrificed their comfort for our future and struggled to attain Pakistan for us. Today we need to review ourselves as a nation. If our forefathers have given us an ideological state, are we following its ideology in letter and spirit? Let us trace back the blunders we have committed which harmed Pakistan and correct ourselves. Let us unite ourselves and follow true values of an Islamic brotherhood and Pakistani nationhood by shedding differences, and bridging fault lines. Let us respect our sovereignty and secure this God-given motherland by defeating the evil forces – both domestic and external. A well aware and educated future generation provided

with adequate and identical opportunities of employment would definitely guarantee a stable and peaceful Pakistan, as dreamed by our forefathers.

Regionally, India is all set to destabilize Pakistan on various grounds. Globally some forces have agendas to undermine Pakistan's sovereignty and integrity through covert and overt means. Pakistan has to tackle all these challenges with wisdom. This great nation has fought a prolonged war against terrorism, and is still facing the ensuing waves of this war. Despite over 85,000 human losses and \$150 billion direct economic losses, the resilient Pakistani nation has survived with dignity and national integrity while defeating the menace of terrorism, extremism and sub-nationalism.

The masses and brave Armed Forces of Pakistan have given unprecedented sacrifices for the motherland. Our forces have defeated and deterred the well-planned external aggression and conspiracies during the last two decades. Let us be united and defeat all these challenges through a visionary approach of bringing social cohesion and national harmony among the masses by providing social justice, equal opportunities for progression, ending political bitterness and collectively working for the economic prosperity of Pakistan.

Re-examining Jinnah's Pakistan



After the Independence, the founding father Mohammad Ali Jinnah gave an inclusive image about the new country that how the new Muslim state should be made a peaceful, progressive, and a moderate state in the world. In a series of speeches, he delivered, as Governor General of Pakistan, he provided and defined the path to the policy makers that how Pakistan should be. About Pakistan's Constitution, he said: "The Constitution of Pakistan will be of a democratic type, embodying the principles of Muslim democracy. Our salvation lies in following the golden rules of conduct set for us by the Prophet of Islam (PBUH). The Quran is the "general code for the Muslims a religious, economic, social, judicial, criminal and civil code". The Objective Resolution 1949 defined Islamic principles – this resolution

remained the core part of Constitution 1962 – the Constitution of 1973 also included the Objective Resolution and Article 227 states, "all existing laws shall be brought in conformity with the injunctions of Islam as laid down in the Holy Quran and Sunnah, and no law shall be enacted which is repugnant to such injunctions". Theoretically, all three Constitutions – 1956, 1962 and 1973 provided Islamic clauses – these sources, if employed, are the guarantee to rule of law and a welfare state.

If we evaluate Jinnah's principles, providing contextual explanation is crucial for understanding any speech. As the President of the first Constituent Assembly, Jinnah categorically defined that the future of the new state lay in Islamic principles. Though he preferred 'parliamentary democracy' in new Pakistan but he

wanted to practice the golden rules set by the Last Prophet (PBUH). Jinnah tasked to the legislators to make a constitution but the post-Jinnah leaders could not frame a democratic constitution and ruled Pakistan without constitution till 1956. The first constitution took nine years after Independence.

After Jinnah's demise, Pakistan has not been ruled by visionary leaders, though some of them made efforts to strengthen Pakistan vis-à-vis India, and developed the country's infrastructure. But only the ruler and his party are not responsible for developing an undemocratic culture in Jinnah's Pakistan. Ensuring good governance is the prime responsibility of the bureaucrats. The founding father knew the bureaucratic behaviour. He gave very lucid message to the Pakistani bureaucrats on March 25, 1948, in an address to the Gazetted Officers at Chittagong. Jinnah said: "Your conduct and dealing with the people in various departments, in which you may be; wipe off that pat reputation – you are not rulers. You do not belong to the ruling class. You belong to the servants. Make the people feel that you are their servants and friends, maintain the highest standard of honour, integrity, justice and fair play. If you do that, people will have confidence and trust in you and will look upon you as friends and well-wishers".

Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah wanted to establish a welfare state. If we look at his historical speeches from 1943 to 1944, Jinnah assertively stated that the "new Muslim state will be a true welfare state, based on principles of Islamic social justice with equal rights for all citizens – including minorities. He had observed Muslims' plight in united India, where they were badly treated, discriminated against and targeted by Hindu extremists. They (Muslims) would not get their fundamental rights. Today's India, under Modi, has proved that Jinnah's vision was right and his ideology to defend Muslims "as a separate nation" was inevitable.

Emerging primary external challenges is the TTP and Afghanistan – their nexus is a grave threat to Pakistan's security. But sincere determination to serve the country, and commitment to be loyal with Jinnah's country may help in dealing with all existing and existential threats and challenges in Pakistan. Jinnah's Pakistan is not for a particular faction; it is for all and needs due attention from its people.

*(Dr. Nasreen Akhtar — Pakistan Observer,
March 12, 2024*

The Day of Resolve Defending ideological frontiers

Every year on March 23, the Pakistani nation celebrates Pakistan Day with its full national zeal and zest to pay homage to our founding fathers and remember the significance of the 1940 Lahore Resolution in shaping the destiny of a future Pakistan. It is the day, when the idea to create an independent state of Pakistan was propelled and transmitted in Muslims' rank and file under the heroic stewardship of Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

Needless to say, Pakistan Resolution was a precursor to the ideological frontiers of Pakistan, therefore, its impact cannot be seen in isolation of the Objectives Resolution, tabled in Pakistan's first Constituent Assembly in March 1949. This is the day of resolve to uphold Jinnah's credo of Pakistan.

The Boulevard towards Pakistan: Pakistan Resolution was the landmark in the history of Muslim of South-Asia. It determined for the Muslims a true goal and their homeland in north-east and north-west. The resolution, written by Zafarullah Khan and other prominent Muslim League members, proposed the establishment of an independent state to safeguard the interests of the Muslim community in the Indian subcontinent.

The acceptance of the Pakistan Resolution accelerated the pace of freedom movement. The Lahore Resolution holds immense significance in the history of Pakistan. It was a formal statement presented by All-India Muslim League, advocating the creation of a separate state for Muslims based on their predominantly Muslim population. During the period (1940-47), All India Muslim League was encapsulated with new enthusiasm as League's branches were opened even in the remote corners of subcontinent.



Resolution Day: Quaid's vision and PAF

As Pakistan commemorates *Yaum-e-Pakistan*, also known as Pakistan Resolution Day, we are reminded not only of the historic Lahore Resolution passed on March 23, 1940, but also of the visionary words of our founding father Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. As we have already passed 76 years since his passing, his famous quote resonates profoundly: "A country without a strong Air Force is at the mercy of any aggressor. Pakistan must build up her Air Force as quickly as possible. It must be an efficient Air Force, Second to None. I charge you to remember, that only with, discipline and self-reliance, can the Pakistan Air Force, be worthy of Pakistan."

Quaid-i-Azam's words serve as a timeless reminder of the critical importance of a robust defence policy, particularly in the realm of air power. In today's world, where threats to national security are ever-evolving, the need for a strong and efficient Air Force is more pertinent than ever. As we honour Quaid-i-Azam's legacy, it is imperative that his vision be applied not only in defence policy but also in various other spheres. Quaid-i-Azam's call for a strong Air Force underscores

the need for Pakistan to remain vigilant and prepared to defend its sovereignty against any potential aggressor.

With advancements in technology and the changing nature of warfare, investing in air power is essential to maintaining a credible deterrence and ensuring the nation's security. Moreover, Quaid-i-Azam's emphasis on efficiency highlights the importance of modernization and capacity-building within the Air Force. Pakistan must continuously strive to enhance its capabilities, acquire cutting-edge technology, and train its personnel to the highest standards. Only by doing so can Pakistan truly fulfil Quaid-i-Azam's vision of an Air Force that is second to none. However, Quaid-i-Azam's vision extends beyond defence policy alone. His principles of honesty, integrity, and fair play should guide Pakistan's interactions both domestically and on the world stage. As we navigate the complexities of international relations, it is essential to uphold Quaid-i-Azam's ideals of friendliness, goodwill, and peaceful coexistence.

Pakistan Air Force has proved that they are second to none – from the War of 1965, in case of M M Alam, War on Terror, Operation Zarb-e-Azb, operations Radd

Under Jinnah’s mentorship, the Muslim League underwent a mass mobilization – becoming a popular party with the Muslim masses in the aftermath of Lahore Resolution, the Muslims of subcontinent were united under the banner of Mohammad Ali Jinnah’s poised, dynamic and astute statesmanship – marching on a boulevard towards the state foundation of Pakistan. The subsequent political vicissitudes of the events during 1940-1947 period hold sufficient evidence to Jinnah’s statesmanship accompanied by a political truth, had there been no Jinnah, there would have been no Pakistan.

After the failure of Cabinet Mission (1945), both Congress and Muslim League had had no choice but to accept the Lord Wavell Plan. Two largest Muslim majority provinces, – Bengal and Punjab – were

partitioned. The Assemblies of West Punjab, East Bengal and Sindh and in Balochistan, the Quetta Municipality, and the Shahi Jirga voted for Pakistan. Referenda were held in the North-West Frontier Province and the District of Sylhet in Assam, which resulted in an overwhelming vote for Pakistan. As a result, on August 14, 1947, the new state of Pakistan came into existence.

Ideological orientations of Pakistan: The state of Pakistan embraces its national ideology rooted in the political and philosophical teachings of Allama Iqbal and Mohammad Ali Jinnah. Late Professor Sharif-ul-Mujahid, a research scholar and an authority on Jinnah and Pakistan Movement in his book, “*The Ideology of Pakistan*” argues that Pakistan’s emergence as an independent state was predictable because



ul Fasaad, even how can we forget, Operation Swift Retort. I remember, during Operation Swift Retort, the PAF successfully targeted military installations and shot down two Indian fighter jets, including a MiG-21 Bison piloted by Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman. The capture and subsequent release of Wing Commander Abhinandan by Pakistan demonstrated the nation’s commitment to peace while sending a clear message of deterrence to India. Operation Swift Retort was not merely a military action, it was a testament to Pakistan’s strategic restraint and commitment to regional stability.

Despite being provoked, Pakistan exercised measured response, avoiding escalation into full-scale conflict. The success of Operation Swift Retort highlighted Pakistan military’s capabilities, including its advanced aerial warfare tactics and precision targeting systems. It also underscored the professionalism and



bravery of Pakistan Armed Forces in defending the nation’s sovereignty. Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah’s vision extends beyond the defence policy to encompass the broader socioeconomic development of Pakistan. He envisioned a nation where every citizen has access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. To realize this vision, Pakistan must confront challenges such as poverty, inequality, and inadequate infrastructure, while also promoting innovation and entrepreneurship. As we commemorate Pakistan Resolution Day, let us recommit ourselves to Quaid-i-Azam’s ideals and strive for a strong, prosperous, and progressive Pakistan. By upholding his legacy and pursuing excellence in all aspects, including the development of a formidable Air Force, we can advance our nation towards a brighter future.

(Sophia Siddiqui – Pakistan Observer, March 26, 2024)

the Muslims of India tended to view themselves as a separate nation and they had “event-making” personalities, especially Jinnah – who postulated the Two-Nation Theory successfully – which was the driving force behind the creation of Pakistan. As for the the Muslims of India, nothing was more subtle and acceptable than a distinct nation – entitled to self-determination and de jure recognition.

The Objectives Resolution: Objectives Resolution is one of the most important documents in the constitutional history of Pakistan as it chartered our constitutional moorings. It was passed by the first Constituent Assembly on 12th March 1949 under the leadership of Pakistan’s first Premier Khan Liaquat Ali Khan. It laid down the very objectives to be drafted in the formulation of our constitutions, and became the foundational stone of Pakistan’s constitutional legacy-cum-development.

The most diverse feature it entailed was that it adopted the spirit of politico-religio syncretism – fostering the principles of both the Islamic political system and Western democracy. It is why that it served as a preamble for the Constitutions of 1956, 1962, and 1973, thereby becoming part and parcel of the Constitution of the 1973 via the Eighth Amendment in 1985. Though some constitutionalists have framed their reservations, how the Supreme Court has used the preamble, undeniable is the fact that our Constitution’s sanctity chiefly rests with the true interpretation of its preamble. Undeniably, the Objectives Resolution serves as a guidepost to an enlightened commitment made by the founding fathers to promote civil liberties, religious freedom, and democracy within society.

Jinnah’s Pakistan: All famous scholars of Pakistan Movement unanimously agree that Jinnah’s Pakistan was the embodiment of a liberal Islamic and a modern democratic state. Needless to say, Jinnah’s Pakistan was a state based on the fundamentals of liberal Islamic ideology void of religious extremism and sectarianism. Since religion had played an important role in the creation of Pakistan, the role of religion in the context of an independent Pakistan assumed paramount significance. Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, from the very beginning of the foundation of Pakistan made it clear that Pakistan was not going to be a theocratic state, rather a liberally democratic state – ruled under the Islamic ideals of a welfare state, where all citizens will be equal before the law.



Today we need to realign ourselves with the ideals of Jinnah’s Pakistan.

Today our nation, including our Armed Forces share the spirit of an unflinching resolve to adhere and defend Pakistan’s ideological and territorial frontiers. On the eve of this historical day – 23rd March – the people of Pakistan cannot help paying a rich tribute to the defenders and martyrs of Pakistan who rendered their supreme sacrifices in the war against terrorism. As a nation, we all must be united to foil our enemies’ agenda to divide us. The world knows that we are a resilient nation: since its creation, Pakistan has survived through multiple crises and *In sha Allah*, it will also survive through the current challenges via inculcating “Faith, Unity, and Discipline” in all our ranks and files.

(Syed Qamar Afzal Rizvi — *Pakistan Observer*,
March 23, 2024)

India continues to use draconian measures to throttle political activity in Occupied Kashmir

The Indian state continues to use draconian measures to throttle political activity in IIOJK. The latest example of these tactics came recently, as New Delhi clamped bans on several Kashmiri political outfits, while extending restrictions on Yasin Malik's faction of the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front.

According to the Indian home ministry, the Kashmir Peoples Freedom League, as well as four factions of the Jammu and Kashmir Peoples League, has been banned. Mr Malik's faction of the JKLF had already been proscribed in 2019; the latest move only extends the ban. Mr Malik has been given a life sentence on a dubious terror charge, while prosecutors are pushing for the death penalty for the veteran Kashmiri leader. The reasons given for the latest clampdown on Kashmiri parties are familiar.

According to a *tweet* by the Indian home minister, the JKLF continues to "foment terror and secessionism". Similar charges have been levelled against the other proscribed parties. According to Pakistan's Foreign Office, 14 political parties in IIOJK have been outlawed by India. Meanwhile, even those Kashmiri politicians close to New Delhi, such as Mehbooba Mufti and Omar Abdullah, have received the rough end of the stick, with Indian authorities often putting them under house arrest.

If India's aim is to crush the Kashmiri freedom struggle by neutralising all those political forces which raise a voice for the disputed territory's rights, these moves are likely to backfire. In fact, when mainstream parties are banned, many of those unhappy with India's brutal rule over the region will gravitate towards armed groups. The only way to justly solve the Kashmir question is through a sustained political process involving the region's genuine popular representatives.

For now at least, India, under BJP rule, has slammed the door shut on this option. It remains to be seen what the contours of the new Indian government's Kashmir policy will be after the general elections.

(Editorial — Dawn, March 25, 2024)

Legitimizing Modi-led BJP's tyrannical rule in IIOJK

Elections in Indian Illegally Occupied Kashmir, either Lok Sabha or State Assembly, have largely been viewed in India from a security and strategic lens, with New Delhi seeking legitimacy for its rule, and reading the people's participation in the Delhi-backed polls exercise as a proxy for the trust they repose on Indian Union.

Kashmiris' perceptions, however, stand in stark contrast to what New Delhi tries to showcase. For them, these polls have nothing to do with the larger political question of the Kashmir dispute. However, they do provide some opportunity to address their day-to-day matters. Lok Sabha (LS) polls, unlike the State Assembly polls, are even further from this perception as they have rarely sparked enthusiasm among the local people. The latter largely consider it to be a political elites' exercise to position themselves in New Delhi, instead of aligning with the electorate.

With the announcement of the schedule of India's 18th Lok Sabha polls by the Election Commission of India (ECI) on March 16, 2024, polls in IIOJK five parliamentary seats have become an issue of greater significance, as it would be the first major political activity since August 5, 2019.

This electoral exercise is being conducted in a context where Kashmir's political landscape has undergone a seismic shift, upending the entire political order with the downgrading of the state into two separate Union Territories (UTs), stripping it of its special status, and the resulting reconfiguration of the parliamentary and state assembly constituencies. The erstwhile state of IIOJK had six parliamentary seats, which have come down to five now: Srinagar, Baramulla Anantnag-Rajouri, Udhampur and Jammu, while one seat was left to Ladakh, the other UT.

While the Congress-led INDIA (Indian National

Developmental Inclusive Alliance) and BJP-led NDA (National Democratic Alliance) are in the fray, the major contest will likely take place between the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), and the National Conference (NC) on the two parliamentary seats of Kashmiri Valley: Srinagar and Baramulla.

The BJP, Congress and Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP), a new political party formed by Ghulam Nabi Azad after bidding adieu to his long-term association with Congress, will probably be vying for the two seats of Jammu division: Jammu and Udhampur. The Peoples Conference of Sajad Lone and the recently established Jammu and Kashmir Apni Party of Altaf Bukhari are also significant contenders, though their prospects of securing any seat are not very promising.

Since the parliamentary polls in IIOJK are being conducted ahead of the state assembly polls, expected to be held after LS polls, the major contestants view Lok Sabha polls as the run-up of the assembly elections where they stake their major claims. Therefore, the key contenders would seek to reposition themselves in New Delhi while simultaneously reconnecting with their electoral base in Jammu and Kashmir.

Given the BJP's decade-long onslaught against Kashmiris, their state and identity, and its hopeful prospects for a third term, the two regional parties of Kashmir, PDP and NC, might find themselves in a bind. If they openly side with the BJP-led NDA, their already considerably squeezed electoral base in the Valley ceases to exist, and if they go along with the Congress-led alliance, their chances for power sharing in the future dispensation of IIOJK, in case the BJP comes to power again, may drastically be diminished.

Both parties are caught in a dilemma which is evident in their recent statements. For instance, Dr Farooq Abdullah in an interview with *"India Today"* (Feb 15, 2024) said his party would go solo on all seats while hinting that they may re-join the BJP-led NDA in the future. Immediately after the interview, his son and Vice President of NC Omar Abdullah clarified the party's position, dismissing any chance of quitting INDIA and the possibility of his party aligning with the BJP-led NDA. It bears recalling here that the NC was a coalition partner with Vajpayee's NDA, Omar Abdullah then being the union minister of state for external affairs from 2001 to 2002.

With this anti-BJP posturing, the NC likely intends to retain the three Kashmir valley parliamentary seats

that they won in the last LS polls, regain their support base in Kashmir, and create an enabling environment for a better performance in the expected State Assembly elections.

Similarly, the PDP is also walking the tightrope of aligning with its support base in the Valley while outwitting the NC's moves to potentially gain the support of the centre for the major role in the future dispensation of IIOJK. The biggest challenge the PDP is facing now is to wrest back its support base, which it lost to a considerable extent after stitching an alliance, termed by critics 'an unholy alliance', with the BJP in 2015. To neutralize and diffuse the anger evoked in the valley against the PDP, it felt compelled to reposition itself to make amendments for its past political blunder and retain its electoral base in the Valley.

The most unpredictable contest is likely to occur in the radically restructured parliamentary constituency of Anantnag-Rajouri, which has been transformed from being an entirely Valley-centric constituency to a trans-regional one, between Jammu and Valley.

The districts of Rajouri and Poonch, previously part of Jammu, have now been clubbed into this new constituency, ostensibly paving the way for the BJP contender to have decisive support from the Pahari tribe, which accounts for around 19 percent of the total population of the constituency. This gerrymandering coupled with granting the status of ST to the Pahari community of Pir Panjal, ahead of general elections, is a move to realize the BJP's long-cherished wish for a toehold in Kashmir.

With this, the BJP seeks to alter the parliamentary trajectory in its favour in terms of the number of seats. The two seats of Udhampur and Jammu have already been held by the BJP for the last two consecutive terms, in 2014 and 2019, with promising prospects for a third term. It is now eyeing the trans-regional seat of Anantnag-Rajouri.

These electoral dynamics may shape the outcome of upcoming parliamentary polls in IIOJK. However, by no means can they be construed as a benchmark to determine the relationship between the larger population of the region with New Delhi, as 14 such exercises have already been conducted in IIOJK with the people's resentment only running deeper in the region after each round.

(Dr. Awais Bin Wasi — *The News*, March 23, 2024)



Dr. Faktoo is often called the Nelson Mandela of South Asia

From Dr Qasim Faktoo to Arvind Kejriwal!

INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS
MARCH 26, 2024

HAMID MIR

The US Department of State recently released a report that says that an estimated one million individuals across the world find themselves behind bars as political prisoners. The report mentioned individuals like Iranian lawyer and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Narges Mohammadi serving a sentence of nine years. It also includes Dr Gulshan Abbas, an ethnic Uyghur physician from the Chinese province Xinjiang who was sentenced to 20 years in 2019.

I also found the name of Russian opposition leader Vladimir Kara-Murza sentenced to 25 years for criticizing Russia's war in Ukraine but surprisingly I never found the name of Kashmiri prisoner Dr Muhammad Qasim Faktoo who has already spent more than three decades in Indian jails, and the last six years (2018-2024) in solitary confinement.

Dr Muhammad Qasim Faktoo is one of the longest-serving political prisoners and is often called the Nelson Mandela of South Asia. Former South African President and Nobel Peace Prize winner Nelson Mandela served 27 years in prison but Dr Faktoo has now completed 31 years in prison and there are no signs of his release in the near future. In fact, he is a living example of judicial violence in India. His wife has also been behind bars since 2018. Dr Faktoo married Asiya Andrabi in 1990. They only spent three years together. Dr Faktoo was arrested in 1993 under the colonial Public Safety Act and Asiya, a mother of two, became an activist after the arrest of her husband. She was arrested many times in the last three decades but she has not been released since 2018. The couple is now imprisoned in different jails.

Some Indians don't like the comparison between Nelson Mandela and Dr Faktoo. I met Mandela in New Zealand during the Commonwealth conference and read his autobiography '*Long Walk to Freedom*' many times. I never met Dr Faktoo but I have read some of his books

authored in prisons. It is easy to find commonalities between the two. Very few people remember now that Nelson Mandela became the first black president of South Africa in 1994. He announced retirement from politics in 2004 but he was on the terrorist watch list of the US government until 2008. Both Mandela and Dr Faktoo faced charges of terrorism and high treason due to their political views. Both struggled for freedom and justice and their enemies declared them terrorists.

Mandela became an international story after spending 27 years in prison because his party, the African National Congress (ANC), launched an international campaign for his release. Dr Faktoo has spent 31 years in prison but he doesn't have a political party on his back to campaign for his release. No political party in India ever demanded a fair trial for him because a nation's terrorist is simply another's freedom fighter. Dr Faktoo is a freedom fighter for the majority of Kashmiris. Pakistan has always supported the right of self-determination for Kashmiris but most Pakistanis are not aware of Dr Faktoo who has spent more time in prison than Nelson Mandela. No Pakistani leader has ever mentioned his name at any international forum.

Dr Muhammad Qasim Faktoo was born in 1967 in a middle-class family in Srinagar. He was only 13 years old when his father passed away. He continued his studies and arranged college expenses through small private jobs. In 1985, the Kashmir police sought applications for the recruitment of sub-inspectors. Faktoo appeared in the selection test and passed but he was asked to pay Rs 25,000 as a bribe for getting the job. He did not have the money and was denied the job. He completed his B.Com degree from Islamia College Srinagar in 1987 and started preparing for the exam offered by the Institute of Cost and Works Accountants (ICWA).

During that period the Indian government held a sham election in the state of Indian Illegally Occupied

Jammu & Kashmir to install National Conference leader Farooq Abdullah as the chief minister. Many Kashmiri leaders like Syed Ali Shah Geelani and Sayed Salahuddin participated in the 1987 state election. Unfortunately, the Indian Army rigged the election shamelessly. This rigging pushed Kashmiri youth towards militancy. Many youngsters like Sayed Salahuddin and Qasim Faktoo realized that armed struggle was the only option left for them.

Faktoo abandoned his plan to appear for the ICWA and started a PhD in Islamic Studies from Kashmir University. He started writing columns in a local daily. He was appointed spokesperson of Hizbul Mujahideen, led by Sayed Salahuddin (who contested the election from Srinagar but lost due to rigging). In October 1990, Faktoo married Asiya Andrabi. He never participated in armed action but was the spokesperson of the militants, calling them freedom fighters. He was arrested in 1993 with his wife and infant. After 13 months, his wife and child were released but he was kept in jail under the Public Safety Act. The then advisor of J&K Governor Lt-Gen DD Saklani met Dr Faktoo in an interrogation centre three times and offered him to take part in the elections. The Indian general not only assured him success but offered him a ministry in the next state government. Dr Faktoo refused to buy freedom in return for participating in another rigged election. Gen Saklani wrote a book after his retirement, *Kashmir Saga: A Bundle of Blunders*, but never dared to speak the whole truth about Dr Faktoo who was forced to sign blank papers under severe torture meted out under Saklani's supervision. Ultimately, Dr Faktoo was implicated in the murder of a Hindu pandit, Hirday Nath Wanchoo.

There was no evidence against Dr Faktoo except a confession that was written by some intelligence officials. In March 1999, he was released on bail for a short period. He launched a religious organization, Muslim Deeni Muhaz, and he was again arrested after a few months. In July 2001, the TADA court in Jammu honourably acquitted him in Wanchoo's murder case but the government challenged the verdict in the Supreme Court of India. The Superior Court overruled the TADA court verdict and sentenced him to life imprisonment. He was offered another deal in 2002, at the Talab Tillo interrogation centre in Jammu. Some intelligence officers offered him release if he agreed to participate in the 2002 state election. This offer again tarnished the image of the biggest democracy in the

world in the eyes of a prisoner. Faktoo never said yes and preferred to remain in jail.

Dr Faktoo completed his life imprisonment (14 years) in 2007 but he was not released. Indian authorities were committed to teaching him a lesson through 'judicial violence'. In 2012, the Supreme Court of India declared that "life imprisonment implies a jail term till the end of [a] convict's life". This person's specific ruling was a violation of human rights. He wrote more than 15 books in different jails between 1993 and 2018. Finally, he was banned from reading and writing inside the jail and thrown in solitary confinement.

Dr Faktoo proved that a pen is more powerful than a gun. He raised a question about Maharaja Hari Singh who signed a document of accession in 1947, asking: "Was he an elected representative of the Kashmiri people?" He further asked: "If Hari Singh had a right to take such a decision, what about the ruler of Junagarh who announced accession with Pakistan but [it] was not accepted by India?"

Today many people in India are disappointed in the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. Opposition leader Rahul Gandhi has said that Kejriwal's arrest weeks before the general election is political victimization and pre-poll rigging by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He perhaps forgot that Modi learned the art of rigging from Rahul's late father Rajiv Gandhi which he used in 1987 against Kashmiris in favour of Farooq Abdullah. Indian political parties remained silent on the fake cases and victimization against Dr Faktoo and many other Kashmiri leaders like Yasin Malik and Shabbir Shah who are imprisoned in the Tihar jail of Delhi.

Now it is Kejriwal and Rahul Gandhi's turn to face fake cases. Indian courts denied justice to Dr Faktoo and now they can do the same to Kejriwal. If the opponents of Modi believe in real democracy they must confess that rigging and injustice actually started in Kashmir and reached Delhi due to their criminality. The Indian opposition is rightly worried about the downfall of democracy but they cannot deny the fact that their silence on the plight of Kashmiri prisoners like Dr Faktoo and Yasin Malik encouraged Modi to treat his political opponents like criminals. It is time to speak not only for Kejriwal but also for Dr Faktoo and many other Kashmiri prisoners.



Kashmir: Unwavering roadblock to Pakistan-India dialogue

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MARCH 24, 2024

Responding to a question on Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulating the newly-elected Prime Minister of Pakistan, Shehbaz Sharif on taking the oath of office for his second term, the State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller on March 6, 2024 said the US wants India and Pakistan to have a “productive and peaceful relationship”. However, in the same breath he categorically stated that the pace, scope, and character of any dialogue was a matter for the two neighbours to determine. What does this reflect? It cogently reflects that the US wouldn’t like to play a mediatory role in initiation of the dialogue that it wishes India and Pakistan to hold, to establish “productive and peaceful relationship”. One is compelled to ask, why the US does not want to play any role in bringing India and Pakistan to the negotiation table for the proposed dialogue. The only reason that comes to mind is the issue of Indian Illegally-Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) – an issue that has been and continues to be a bone of contention between the two regional nuclear powers.

It may be recalled that former US President Donald Trump in his first one-on-one meeting with former Prime Minister of Pakistan at the White House on July 22, 2019 offered to mediate in the India-Pakistan conflict on Kashmir. Mr. Trump cogently said that he was making the offer after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi requested that he “mediate or arbitrate” in the 70-year-old territorial dispute between the two nations. This shows that the US, if it sincerely wants, can play a pivotal role in bringing India and Pakistan to the negotiating table and encourage them to negotiate and amicably resolve all bilateral issues, including the long-pending issue of Jammu and Kashmir.

The desire expressed by the US to see India and Pakistan have a “productive and peaceful relationship,” is estimable. However, saying that the pace, scope and character of any dialogue was a matter for the two neighbours to determine makes the sincerity of this desire questionable. It is known that Pakistan sincerely seeks to resolve all outstanding issues with India, including the long-pending issue of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir. Conversely, India has

been willing to discuss all issues except Kashmir. Pakistan is aware of the fact that India will never be serious about having a bilateral dialogue with it as long as it continues to list occupied Kashmir on top of its roster of issues to be discussed between the two countries. India must realize that talks excluding the Kashmir issue will never be acceptable to Pakistan. Both nations must acknowledge this reality before engaging in discussions on other bilateral matters. Until India demonstrates genuine commitment to resolving the Kashmir conflict, dialogue efforts will remain fruitless.

The UN, the US and majority of the world nations have always been asking the two nuclear neighbours – India and Pakistan to get down to the negotiating table and hammer out all issues, including the critical issue of occupied Kashmir bilaterally. The UN and the world community should appreciate that India has obstinately and persistently been shunning bilateral negotiations particularly on the substantive issue of occupied Kashmir. Contrary to this, Pakistan, as known to the world, has been consistently offering India a dialogue on all issues, including the issue of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir.

India’s reluctance to engage in talks with Pakistan shows it’s unwilling to resolve the longstanding Kashmir dispute through bilateral negotiations. The world community must realize that a dialogue between India and Pakistan, though profoundly essential for establishment of peace not only between the two nuclear neighbours but also the region, cannot take place until India is willing to discuss and resolve the issue of IIOJK. And the critically perilous Kashmir dispute, the world should appreciate, can never be resolved through bilateral dialogue. It will have to be resolved in accordance with the Charter of the UN and the UN SC Resolution of 1948 on Occupied Kashmir; the Resolution that cogently declares IIOJK a disputed territory and grants right to self-determination to the people of the occupied territory.



The *Hindutva* peril

INTERNATIONAL
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SABINA BABAR

The inauguration of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya has dashed any hope for India's 200 million Muslims to feel safe in what they formerly believed was their country too. The Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 declared that the BJP government has "continued its systematic discrimination and stigmatization of religious and other minorities, especially Muslims".

This discrimination goes beyond mere instances of mob violence and vigilantism; it reflects a deeper issue concerning the essence of the Indian state under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. With the rise of muscular Hindu nationalism, the pervasive saffronization of institutions and the increasing trend towards majoritarianism, India is gradually forsaking its constitutional neutrality.

The imposing temple in Ayodhya stands on the same ground where Hindu nationalists razed the 16th-century Babri Masjid in 1992, unleashing nationwide riots which resulted in the killing of over 2000 people, most of them Muslims. That orgy of violence holds chilling parallels with recent targeted assaults on Muslims in India over accusations of cow slaughter or so-called "love jihad". The lesson since Ayodhya is unmistakable: whether its lynch mobs, vigilantes, or unjustified state demolitions of Muslim homes, India's largest minority community is subject to the whims of the Hindu majority.

Reportedly built over 70 acres and at an estimated cost of \$250 million, financed by private donations, Ram Mandir's granite walls enclose the corpse of Indian pluralism. The demolition of Babri Masjid, despite being an illegal act, established a precedent of impunity for violence against Muslim sites and lives.

Besides, India's highest court was complicit in rubber-stamping this new normal. While wagging a finger at the 1992 demolition's illegality, its verdict handed the land for building the temple to the very Hindu activists behind the destruction. To garner international legitimacy for its actions, PM Modi's government enlisted the support of Bollywood celebrities to add credibility and a touch of glamour to the event.

The Ayodhya judgment also compromised a 30-year-old parliamentary law expressly prohibiting retroactive changes to the religious status of places of worship after India's 1947 independence. The court indicated

that minority places are not legally protected against majoritarian claims and mob control by declining to maintain this regulation. The ramifications are seen across the country as Hindu nationalists assert comparable rights over mosques located in Varanasi and Mathura.

At the heart of this Hindu nationalism movement lies the idea that India is a Hindu '*Rashtra*' – enshrining the faith as the state religion in all but name. The strategic replacement of the word 'India' in BJP rhetoric with '*Bharat*' signals the fundamental shift away from the secular nation envisioned by India's founding fathers. This conceptual shift seems complete with the opening of the state-sponsored Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, built literally from the rubble of Muslim identity. Due to religious polarization, the demolition of the mosque has made it possible for the BJP to achieve an astounding electoral ascent. The consecration of the temple comes after several other significant political actions taken by PM Modi in pursuit of his government's Hindu nationalist goal. This includes removing the special autonomous status of Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), the nation's only state with a majority of Muslims, and passing the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019. With the inauguration of the temple mere months before the 2024 elections, PM Modi leaves no doubt that divide-and-rule communal politics will remain his party's dominant electoral strategy for cementing long-term power. The re-election of the BJP, which seems probable, could have long-term repercussions for the Muslim community, further subjugating and marginalizing them.

The soul-searching question now is whether Ayodhya and its disturbing aftermath signal a 'new normal' for India where minorities know their subordinate place, mobs enforce morality through violence, and the law is deployed as an instrument of state repression, not justice.

While PM Modi's government often argues that it is simply correcting historical injustices, its policies seem to be empowering Hindu nationalist sentiment and eroding protections for minority groups. Weaponizing faith as an instrument of political power threatens the unity of a common national fabric woven from countless multi-coloured threads of language, ethnicity and belief systems over millennia.

Precarious situation of Pakistani prisoners in Indian jails

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India is a country with a population of about 80% Hindus, 15% Muslims and 5% other religions. It claims to be the world's largest democracy and a secular state, but in practice the reality is otherwise. Modi's rule has become a nightmare for the minorities, especially Muslims. Indian prisons can't be called prisons because these are no less than the shameful Guantanamo's when it comes to treating prisoners.

There is no hearing of Pakistani prisoners in Delhi's Tihar Jail, Lakarjam's Imphala Jail, Hirangar Jail, Kot Balwal Jail, Kathua Jail and many other prisons. International human rights organizations, including the United Nations, have remained completely silent on these torture cells. The suicide attempt by a 60-year-old Pakistani citizen named Hamid Khan in Alwar Jail last month has exposed the difficulties, both administratively and legally, faced by the Pakistani citizens imprisoned in India. Legal complications and acts of injustice at the hands of Indian police and judiciary towards Pakistanis have come to fore. Hamid Khan, a resident of Pashin district of Balochistan province, committed suicide despite completing 10 years of imprisonment in Alwar Central Jail of the Indian state of Rajasthan. His condition was critical.

According to the prisoner exchange list, at least 347 Pakistani citizens are currently imprisoned in India. 249 civilians and 98 fishermen are among them. Majority of them are persecuted in baseless cases. Similarly, 76 of them are detained in Indian jails despite completing their sentences and awaiting repatriation. Indian government creates various obstacles for their release. For instance, sometimes under the pretense of their identity, they are kept behind bars. On occasions, Pakistan's diplomatic personnel are accused of not providing the required cooperation and sometimes jail terms are extended with some other justifications. As, there is a Pakistani prisoner in the prison, despite completing his sentence in 1998. There are many such stories which echo in the corridors of Indian prisons,

most of which have not been revealed yet. As per an agreement in 2008, authorities from both sides share lists of prisoners twice a year on the 1st of January and July respectively. Generally, the common people often cross the long border between Pakistan and India while grazing their cattle or by mistake, but instead of releasing them, Indian soldiers illegally imprison them while declaring them spies.

In Indian prisons, these Pakistani prisoners are subjected to so much cruelty that either the person dies or loses their mental balance. The worst example of which was Shaukat Ali, a young resident of the border area of Sialkot, who accidentally fell into the hands of Indian army while crossing the border and lost his life during detention. The authorities torture them to such an extent that they either go mad or are forced to commit suicide, but it is a matter of fact that our higher authorities do not take any effective measure to release these prisoners. Similarly, they do not raise their voice about the brutal treatment that is made against these prisoners. In 2000, a judicial committee was formed between Pakistan and India. The purpose of that committee was to work several times a year on the matter of prisoners, in order to ensure their fair treatment. It worked for eight years; however, the traditional Indian attitude came to the fore, unilaterally refusing to attend the Judicial Committee meeting in a very rude and unethical manner. If the death of Sanaullah, imprisoned in Balwal Jail of IIOJK, had been raised on an international level, today the condition of the Pakistanis imprisoned in India would not have been like this. The attempted suicide of prisoner Hamid Khan is enough to expose the awful face of Modi. Therefore, it is important that the international community and NGOs working for the rights of prisoners should take note of these painful incidents while standing with Hamid Khan for the sake of justice. For the sake of human sympathy, Indian terrorists are often released from Pakistani jails, yet it has not

brought any difference in the anti-Muslim attitude of Indian authorities.

A majority of Pakistanis imprisoned in Indian jails is from the fishing community. They are imprisoned due to ignorance from the rules related to sea boundaries. However, the longstanding demand of fishermen is the same which is in accordance with Article 73 of the United Nations that states that fishermen cannot be arrested while fishing. But the irony is that due to strained relations between Pakistan and India, the traditional practice of deception of Hindus and lack of proper arrangements for the release of fishermen, many of them remain in jails even after completing their sentences. It should be noted that from Karachi to the border of India, there are 17 places where the Indus River meets the ocean. These places are called Creek. The last creeks among them are Kajar Creek and Sir Creek, which India claims as its parts. Sometimes when the fishermen are freed from Indian jails, their power launches are not returned to them. Indian authorities ignore the humanitarian aspect, along with legal requirements. There is a regulation regarding prisoners, that is often followed but the case of India is otherwise.

Pakistan urges India to release Pakistani nationals who have completed their terms of imprisonment. Similarly, it vows to bring back their nationals imprisoned in Pakistan, whose nationality has been confirmed. But India's response has always been negative when it comes to humanitarian terms and always denies the rules. People imprisoned in jails and their families are facing prolonged sufferings, and are eagerly waiting to meet them. Most of the Pakistanis detained in India went to India for the purpose of marriage. However, they were put in jail while accusing them of terrorism in Kashmir. The life of many of the prisoners is a human tragedy. The fault of many people is that they were victims of Indian cruelty because of being Pakistani citizens and have cross-border marriage relationships. Many husbands and wives have been waiting for citizenship for almost a decade. Their love stories turn into tragic tales of separation, as Indian bureaucracy's process is slow and mostly against the oppressed. Some innocent Pakistanis in Indian jails face charges of espionage and terrorism-related offences. These charges, which are often compared to people in various jails, add to the complex Pakistan-India relations. This inhuman

treatment by India is a clear reflection of the brutal policy of the fascist Modi's regime.

India should adhere to its own laws and treat prisoners fairly. More importantly, the international community and human rights organizations should urge India to immediately release innocent citizens of other countries. The Indian government and its intelligence agencies are majorly behind the torture and brutalities on Pakistani prisoners in Indian jails. Therefore, it is important that our government should raise the issue of violence and deaths of Pakistanis, imprisoned in Indian jails in the Security Council and a formal resolution should be presented in this regard in order to declare India as a terrorist country. A much more pragmatic and proactive approach is the need of the hour on Pakistan's side. In view of the current situation and incidents, it is very important to stop Indian terrorism and expose the terrible face of India to the world at large. It is important because of two reasons: firstly, to show the awful and brutal face of so-called largest democracy; secondly, the international community's claim of globalization, global peace, human rights and liberal democratic order stands exposed.

Involvement of RAW in murder plots of Sikh leaders

In March 2024, India shared findings of its investigation with the United States about murder attempts on a Sikh leader in New York. As per New Delhi, rogue operatives were involved in the plot to kill Sikh separatist leaders. India told the US that a special panel was set up to investigate a foiled plot of killing a Canadian-American Sikh in New York which concluded that it was the action of rogue government operatives. Surprisingly, India is trying to cheat and deceive the courts and intelligence agencies of the United States and Canada, that asked India to undertake criminal investigations about two prominent incidents, took place in Canada and New York in 2023. In the last week of November 2023, the Biden Administration unearthed a plot to kill some Sikh leaders in the United States. The prominent among those Sikh leaders was Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, (a separatist Sikh leader), the RAW operatives planned to assassinate Sikh leader on New York on executive orders given from New Delhi. Earlier the US intelligence provided secret information to the

Canadian government about the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijar, who was killed in Canada in June 2023 by RAW.

In connection with the killing of pro-independence (Khalistan Movement) leaders, RAW has undertaken a wider planning. This planning includes posting of RAW agents in Indian embassies of various European states, the United States and Canada. It is worth mentioning that there was a massive migration of Sikhs after Indian government launched a military operation for the genocide of Sikhs following the killing of former prime minister Indira Gandhi in 1984. Following the murder plot of Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in New York, US intelligence agencies clearly identified and traced the footprints of RAW agents behind the assassination attempts of Sikh leaders in the US. As per US media, “A foiled plot to assassinate a prominent Sikh separatist leader in New York, just days after another activist’s killing, was meant to precede a string of other politically motivated murders in the United States and Canada.” The US intelligence confirmed that, along with Hardeep Singh Nijar, RAW agents had planned to kill at least four prominent Sikh leaders in June 2023.

Owing to timely surveillance and intelligence, the United States was able to foil killing of Sikh leaders in its various cities and also informed Canadian government to take necessary measures for the protection of Sikh leaders. As disclosed by British newspaper, the target this time was Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, General Counsel of the “Sikhs for Justice” movement. The Indian government was infuriated with him since he along with thousands of workers is working for Independent Khalistan. Moreover, he asked all Sikhs not to travel by Air India. He was wanted by the infamous National Investigation Agency (NIA). Earlier, killing of Sikh leader Hardeep Singh Nijar on Canadian soil attracted international attention and deep anger of the Sikh community. Indeed, he was killed by RAW through secretive means, since he was an advocate for the independent state Khalistan as a separate homeland for Sikhs. He along with many others had been working for the internationalization of Khalistan Movement.

The movement started in the 1990s, just a few years after the genocide of Sikhs in the so-called secular India. The Sikh community members were brutally killed by Hindus using the state machinery, after two Sikh security guards killed Indira Gandhi on October

31, 1984. Despite massive persecution of Sikhs, they decided not to surrender to Indian military might. Rather, they formally organized them and decided to have their own homeland, thus starting a political and social struggle for their right of self-determination. While there was an ongoing Sikh movement against Hindu rule in India, the Sikh diaspora devised a wider strategy of pursuing the international community to recognize their right of self-determination by having their own homeland with the name of Khalistan. In order to achieve their legal right, over the years Sikhs have transformed their movement at global level.

The US-based Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) organization has already mobilized itself for the conduct of Referendum in the US with the sole objective of a separate homeland for Sikhs with the name of Khalistan. Indeed, Sikhs referendum for their independent homeland, Khalistan, had entered its conclusive stage which India could not digest and planned the killing of Sikh leaders all over the globe. Killing of Hardeep Singh Nijar in June 2023 was, in fact, the beginning of this nefarious Indian campaign. The right to self-determination is ingrained in international law, including the Charter of the United Nations.

In 2023, the US and Canada had taken very serious action against the plot of killing prominent Sikh leaders in their countries. US intelligence officials visited New Delhi with solid proof that RAW was involved in the killing of Sikh leader in Canada and plot of killing the Sikh leaders in the US. The BJP government under Modi is misleading the world and the US that rogue officials may be involved in these assassination attempts of Sikh leaders. On their part, Sikh community is of the view that the international community should support them in their right of self-determination since Sikhs have decided to have their own homeland. Indeed, RAW has planned worldwide covert assassination plots to target Sikh leaders, demanding independent Khalistan.

Against the backdrop of clandestine machinations, the Sikh community’s fundamental aspiration for self-determination encounters perilous hurdles, with the RAW facing damning charges of masterminding a far-reaching and deadly campaign of targeted assassinations aimed at silencing the prominent Sikh leaders championing the cause of an independent Khalistan.

(Dr. M Khan — Pakistan Observer, March 29, 2024)



The creepy syndrome of extremism in India

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Extremism is a complex issue with deep-rooted historical, social, economic and political factors. Growing extremism in India manifests itself in various forms, including religious forms, political, ethnic, racial and ideological forms. Religious extremism, particularly Hindu extremism, has gained significant attention in recent years with the renewed rise of violent groups like Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its affiliates or offshoots. These groups exclusively promote a very narrow interpretation of Hinduism, which often advocates the marginalization of religious minorities, particularly Muslims. Unfortunately, this approach of marginalization of Muslims and religious minorities is leading the Indian society towards communal tension, chaos and violence in parts of the country. Since the onset of BJP government under Modi, the extremist and highly discriminatory policies towards Muslims have raised alarms for the Muslim minority. BJP's policies are based on the RSS ideology of Hindutva or Hindu nationalism with an idea to form Akhand Bharat – a state which is only representative of Hindu culture and religion. Events of 1998 nuclear explosion, violence against Christians, Gujarat carnage and strengthening of Indo-Israel ties are a few of examples of the ruling party's extremist policies. Currently, use of anti-Muslim rhetoric and anti-Pakistan sentiment as a tool to gain vote bank in the ongoing election campaign explicitly explains the prevalent extremist mindset.

Modi's mantra of making India a Hindu nation, and making minorities (about 20% of the Indian population) as second-class citizens, especially Muslims who are about 14%, are compelled to accept increasing majoritarian violence. The communal violence against Muslims has become a core component of Modi's India. International groups, such as Freedom House and V-Dem, consider India only "partly free" and an "electoral autocracy" owing to the sharp decline of human and civil rights. BJP has attempted to pass laws banning conversions from Hinduism and restricting the rights of religious minorities. Moreover, there are some other important laws being inexplicably used against Muslims, i.e. Sections 295-A (deliberate act intended to outrage religious

feelings of any community), 153-A (promoting enmity between different groups on the basis of religion), 505(2) (statements conducing to public mischief), 143 (unlawful assembly), 124-A (sedition) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860 and Section 151 (arrest to prevent commission of a crime) of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973.

Muslims in India are consistently being threatened since the Hindu nationalist party came to power in 2014. But in recent times, hostility towards Muslims became even more overt. Today, far-right Hindu nationalists mostly under state's patronage and police are making it clear to Muslims that they are no longer seen as equal citizens. Indian media frequently cites accounts of criminal cases being filed against Muslims with no evidence of criminality. Indian Constitution which accords basic rights to every citizen of India, equal citizenship rights to Indians are increasingly forgotten in the context of Indian Muslims and minorities.

RSS and BJP also launched the *Ghar Wapsi* and *Bahu Lao Beti Bachao* campaign. It encourages Hindu boys to marry girls from Muslim or Christian communities to convert them to Hinduism in order to counter the very 'Love Jihad Myth'. In addition to this, Hindu extremist organizations and their offshoots often use saffronization as a tool to promote the party's agenda, the main objective of the policy is to brain wash the young minds along with introducing the educational courses of Geeta, Maha-Bharat and Hindu Literature for Muslims in Indian institutes to legitimize BJP rule and to keep party's sole identity alive to remain in power. In February 2022, the southern State of Karnataka banned women from wearing *hijab* in classroom while BJP argued that "wearing *hijab* is not an essential practice of Islam." Every other day, Hindu nationalists have been seen brandishing swords, chanting anti-Muslim slogans outside the mosques. Demolishing of mosques and *madaris* has become a norm for BJP extremists. Several videos relating to mob attacks on Muslims are frequently shared on social media, which unfortunately is no more an anomaly for Indian authorities.

Pakistan-India *detente*?

Khawaja Asif sees thaw in ties, after Indian polls

MAHEEN SHAFEEQ

INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS
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Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's response to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who in a brief tweet extended his congratulations to Sharif for assuming the post of PM, garnered wide attention.

The exchange of political tweets between the leaders of two hostile neighbours was perceived by many as an icebreaker between the two governments after an extended period of no contact. However, it was not significant enough to be assumed as a beginning of a *detente*. While analysts have argued that Islamabad and New Delhi should adopt an incremental approach towards normalizing diplomatic relations and resuming trade, experts believe it might be a most vexing test.

Both Pakistan and India have clearly expressed their prerequisites for normalization of relations. Pakistan has remained firm over its call for revision of Article 370 of the Indian constitution; this was also part of PM Sharif's election mandate. However, India's stance on A370 has hardened particularly since the Indian Supreme Court verdict on upholding the revocation of Article 370. India considers the subject of Article 370 off the agenda of bilateral ties while Pakistan does not. What appears more concerning for Pakistan is Article 35A of the Indian constitution through which the BJP government aims to inorganically alter the demographics of the disputed region to strengthen its foothold. As long as India disregards the Kashmir dispute, Pakistan will continue to internationalize it.

On the other hand, India has often correlated Pakistan with cross-border terrorism and has emphasised zero tolerance over the matter. Unless the new government in Pakistan takes measures to dispel this notion, Indian strategists will continue to raise red flags. These aspects are likely to strain bilateral ties.

Moving post-election, the new government in Pakistan would likely start by prioritizing the revival of the economy before considering normalizing ties with India. On the Indian side, analysts state that the subject of Pakistan is no longer on the table in New Delhi as they believe it to be

a high-cost and low-rewarding matter. India's focus has been on securing a seat on the higher table as evident in its ventures such as the latest Agni-V MIRV tests. New Delhi has been fixated on moving beyond the discourse of Pakistan. The BJP's tactics have been to isolate Pakistan regionally as well as globally. India has been bolstering BIMSTEC and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), while purposefully decaying SAARC as Pakistan is a member. Pakistan also remains off the agenda in New Delhi due to growing anti-Muslim rhetoric under Modi's India. India is experiencing a unique rise of religious hyper-nationalism under the *Hindutva* ideology, which the BJP government has openly adopted from the RSS. The *Hindutva* ideology is a movement for the national reconstruction of Hindustan through the otherization of Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Dalits, Adivasis and other minorities in India.

Meanwhile, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif expressed hope for betterment in bilateral ties with India after the neighbour comes out of its election phase commencing from April 19 and ending in June. Regional arch-rivals – Islamabad and New Delhi – have a long history of strained relations, primarily due to Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) dispute which led to several wars while tensions usually rise on the occasions of countrywide elections in India.

“Our relations with India could be improved after elections there,” the defence minister expressed his views while speaking to reporters outside the Parliament House in Islamabad, adding that Pakistan and India ties have its “own background”. As the country which borders with China, India, Afghanistan, and Iran witnessed tensions with other neighbours, except for China, following crossborder attacks from Iran and Afghanistan, Asif is hopeful for a turn of event in terms of improvement of bilateral ties with New Delhi after the neighbour completes its upcoming election phase.



Global RSS fundraising

The Nation
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SAJJAD SHAIKAT

The militant party Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) was created in 1925 with an intent to Hinduize India at the cost of religio-cultural diversity.

Since its manifesto also has '*Hindutva*' (Hindu nationalism) a part of ideology, it is now hell-bent upon implementing this ideology, being aided and abetted by the Modi-led BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) government. It operates with the help of Sangh Parivars – an umbrella term used for the outfits toeing the ideological line of RSS both in India and abroad.

Many outfits operating in America have a direct nexus with RSS-allied Sangh Parivar organizations in India. The US-based groups are financing the latter. RSS has a ubiquitous presence across every nook and corner of India with an array of affiliates working in line with its agenda to take India from *Hinduization* to '*Hindutvization*'. Being administratively facilitated by BJP government, RSS has been proliferating its motto with ease and comfort.

However, RSS has been maintaining an effective foothold in America, UK, Canada and elsewhere with the help of so-called INGOs, charity organizations being run by RSS ideologues. They have both stated and unstated (covert) objectives. In the case of the latter, funds are funneled to Sangh Parivar groups toeing the line of RSS back in India. An endeavour has been made to unearth the fundraising and financial flow of organizations for RSS.

On November 27, 2022, the Global Hindu Heritage Foundation organized a fundraising concert in the USA. In its flyer, among other things, they started the intent to use money for '*Ghar Wapsi*', the demolition of churches in Tripura, and elsewhere in India. Besides fundraising, and funds funneling to Sangh Parivar outfits, the US-based entities are found involved in lobbying for India in the line of RSS dictated BJP government policies. In this regard, *Al Jazeera* on April 2, 2021 reported: "Washington, DC, United States... Five organizations with ties to Hindu supremacist and religious groups have received funding amounting to \$833,000, according to data released by the United States' Small Business Administration (SBA), a federal agency that helps small business owners and entrepreneurs. Massachusetts-based Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA) received more than \$150,000 under PPP and a further \$21,430 under EIDLA and DAL programs."

It indicated: "VHPA's Indian counterpart Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) was designated as a religious militant organization by the world... fact book of CIA for years. VHP is an affiliate of RSS, a far-right Hindu nationalist organization formed in 1925 along the lines of hardline nationalist groups in Europe, which aims to create an ethnic Hindu-majority state in India". *Al Jazeera* pointed out: "RSS is the ideological mentor of India's governing BJP and boasts of having Prime Minister Narendra Modi among millions of its members across India. American organizations such as VHPA openly acknowledge that they are inspired by India's Hindu nationalist organizations, such as VHP and RSS... Any American nonprofit that perpetuates Islamophobia and other forms of hate should not receive federal relief funds".

It further said: "For decades, VHP has campaigned to turn India into a Hindu nation and stands accused of orchestrating numerous attacks on Muslims and Christians in hundreds of riots in various parts of the country". *Al Jazeera* added: "*Ekal Vidyalaya* Foundation of USA, an organization affiliated with RSS, obtained direct payment of \$7,000 and a loan of \$64,462 under PPP. Through its network of schools mainly in India's tribal and rural areas, *Ekal Vidyalaya* has been accused of spreading RSS agenda of Hindu supremacy and of promoting anti-minority hate among young children".

Besides Sewa International funds, several RSS-run projects are working across India. In fact, in the older RSS literature, Sewa International's address was the same as the RSS headquarters in New Delhi. Ramesh Bhutada, an Indian-American businessman from Texas and national vice president of Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), the US wing of RSS, also holds the position of board chairperson at Sewa International.

And HSS – operating in the UK since 1968 – is ideologically inspired by RSS. Britain's charities watchdog opened a statutory probe after concerns were raised on its "extremist" views and "improper" working in the country for the collection of funds. *Reuters* news agency pointed out on September 29, 2023: "A video showing the head of an independent Muslim human rights organization calling for a ban on the Hindu nationalist group Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh has been shared online to falsely claim the government of Canada has banned the latter amid rising tensions between Canada and India".

Global terrorist threat

DAWN
MARCH 27, 2024

ZAHID HUSSAIN

The deadly attack on a concert hall in Moscow last week, which left around 140 people dead, marks the expansion in the terrorist operations of the so-called Khorasan chapter of the militant Islamic State group. The daring IS-K assault in the Russian capital demonstrates the group's increasingly destructive capacity to carry out high-profile acts of terrorism beyond the region it has so far been operating in.

The attack has raised the profile of the IS-K as a global terrorist group that has long been active in Afghanistan and the surrounding countries. The suspects who were arrested are from the Central Asian region, which has produced a large contingent of foreign fighters for the Islamic State in the Middle East in the past. Many of them are now associated with its Khorasan chapter after the routing of the transnational jihadi group in Iraq and Syria.

It is, however, not clear why the group targeted Russia. According to some analysts, the militants see Russia as responsible for the persecution of Muslims. In September 2022, IS-K claimed responsibility for a deadly suicide bombing at the Russian embassy in Kabul. Moscow has long been concerned about the rise of IS-K's influence in the Central Asian states.

While accusing the Islamic extremists of the attack, the Russian president has also tried to link the incident to the war with Ukraine. A recent UN report quoted by the Western media said, "Some individuals of North Caucasus and Central Asian origin travelling from Afghanistan or Ukraine towards Europe represent an opportunity for [IS-K], which seeks to project violent attacks in the West."

Meanwhile, the Moscow massacre has alerted other countries to the growing terrorist threat. The IS-K has emerged as the most dangerous transnational terrorist group. A top American military official told a US congressional committee a day before the attack that the IS-K "retains the capability and the will to attack US and Western interests abroad, in as little as six months, with little to no warning". According to some media reports quoting Western counterterrorism officials, in recent months, several IS-K plots to attack targets in Europe have been foiled.

An offshoot of the Middle East-based IS, the militant outfit, which was formed in 2015, has been involved in a

series of spectacular attacks in Afghanistan and Iran. It was behind a bombing attack earlier this year that killed over 80 people in the Iranian town of Kerman during a memorial procession for Maj-Gen Qasem Soleimani, an Iranian commander who was killed in an American drone strike in 2020 in Baghdad. Several other attacks in Iran also have the group's fingerprints all over them.

Just before the Moscow incident, the group had claimed responsibility for a suicide attack in Kandahar, the second largest city of Afghanistan, killing and injuring several people. The IS-K has also been responsible for attacks in Pakistan's Balochistan province. Some banned Sunni sectarian groups have reportedly joined the group.

The first signs of the transnational militant group organising itself in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region emerged in 2014. Early IS-K recruits came from the ranks of splinter factions of the Pakistani Taliban, who had been driven into Afghanistan after large-scale operations in the former tribal region by the Pakistan Army. Some low-ranking Afghan Taliban commanders also joined the radical group. In 2014, Abdul Rahim Muslim Dost — a former Afghan Taliban commander from Kunar province — was named organiser for the group's Khorasan chapter. With some high-profile defections from the ranks of the Afghan Taliban, the group evolved a formal organisational structure.

In January 2015, the militants released a video proclaiming themselves the administrators of an official *wilayat* (province) for IS in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The creation of the *shura* for Khorasan (the historical name for the region including parts of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Central Asia) was endorsed by the IS supreme command. It named the former TTP commander of Orakzai Agency in Pakistan, Hafiz Saeed Khan, as IS head in the Khorasan region and Mullah Abdul Rauf, a former Afghan Taliban commander who had spent many years in Guantanamo, as his deputy.

Soon after the formation of its Khorasan chapter, the group became active in many provinces of Afghanistan. In most cases, defections from the Afghan Taliban ranks to the IS-K were motivated by the group's huge financial resources rather than its radical and rigid worldview and ideology. In many regions, the Afghan Taliban fought

with the IS-K for control. However, IS-K underwent a rapid surge in numbers – which reached, as per some estimates, 4,000 – after the US forces exited Afghanistan and the Taliban once more took up the reins. Most of them have apparently come from other transnational militant groups. Its alliance with the TTP has further strengthened it. There was a marked escalation in IS-K attacks at the end of the American war. The terrorist group also attacked Kabul’s international airport in 2021, in which 13 US troops and a large number of civilians were killed during the chaotic American withdrawal from the country. According to a UN report released in January, the Afghan Taliban’s efforts to defeat the group have caused the number of attacks in Afghanistan

to decline. But the threat posed by this terror nexus goes beyond the region. With their strength increasing, transnational militant groups and foreign fighters are a dangerous threat to not only Afghanistan but also its neighbours, especially Pakistan. The Afghan Taliban’s continuing support for militant groups such as the TTP is seen as a significant reason behind the IS-K’s resurgence. Many IS-K fighters have come from TTP factions who took refuge in Afghanistan. While the IS-K has been fighting the Afghan Taliban, the group has coexisted with TTP factions in eastern Afghanistan. The Moscow attack makes it clear that the group’s growing capacity threatens the region and beyond. A joint regional strategy is needed to deal with this common threat.

Russia-Afghanistan relations in the aftermath of Moscow attack

The horrific terrorist attack against the Crocus concert hall in Moscow has been claimed by the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), the same Afghanistan-based terrorist group that bombed the Kabul airport’s Abbey Gate in August 2021, killing 13 US soldiers and 170 Afghans. The United States has also attributed the attack to ISKP. Yet to deflect attention from the Russian security services’ incompetence and to instrumentalize the attack to increase Vladimir Putin’s authoritarian grip and war efforts in Ukraine, Russia’s propaganda is seeking to link the attack to Ukraine. This disinformation is part and parcel of Russia’s (and Iran’s) persistent lies that the United States created ISKP, as Russian interlocutors for years claimed to me and others.

Although the ISKP attack may complicate Russia’s relations with the Taliban, it is unlikely to alter them fundamentally. While the Taliban’s repeated promise that it would prevent international attacks from Afghan soil is further discredited, ISKP is the one terrorist group that the Taliban has been fighting with determination and consistency even after coming to power. Russia might ask the Taliban for further specific actions, but it has adjusted itself to Taliban rule, supporting the Taliban at multilateral fora, and it doesn’t really have alternatives in Afghanistan.

ISKP’s international terrorism

In its propaganda, ISKP has long highlighted Russia as a key international villain and target. ISKP grievances include Russia’s support for the Bashar Assad regime in Syria, repression of Muslims in Chechnya and other parts of the world, and Russian counterinsurgency in Afghanistan. The United States, Iran, Pakistan, and India also feature high on ISKP’s list of enemies.

ISKP’s external operations against a wide range of international actors have increased over the past two years, as its prospects of conquering a significant part of Afghanistan from the Taliban have diminished. For example, in April 2022, ISKP fired a salvo of Katyusha rockets against the Uzbek city of Termez. In May 2022, it launched a similar barrage against Tajikistan. In October 2022, its attack on a Shiite shrine in Iran killed many worshipers, as did its other Iran operations—in April 2023 in Shiraz and in January 2024 in Kamran.

ISKP has also repeatedly attacked international targets in Afghanistan: the Russian and Pakistani embassies in Kabul in September and December 2022 and a hotel frequented by Chinese businessmen.

ISKP has been actively and successfully recruiting outside of Afghanistan, including in Pakistan, Tajikistan, Central Asia, and Syria. Russia claims that the Crocus attack perpetrators it captured were from Tajikistan.

ISKP's external operations and attacks against international targets in Afghanistan seek to demonstrate its perseverance despite the Taliban's military actions and undermine the Taliban's successful external engagements. ISKP likely calculates that by souring the Taliban's relations with Russia and Afghanistan's neighbors, it can augment Afghanistan's economic woes and reduce financial flows to the Taliban, destabilizing its rule. ISKP also likely hopes that by inducing the Taliban's regional isolation, it can grow more powerful on the battlefield and prevail in any ensuing Afghan civil war, which Russia and regional actors want to avoid above all else.

ISKP-Taliban relations

ISKP emerged in Afghanistan a decade ago in direct opposition to the Taliban. Its core members were Taliban commanders who, for various reasons, such as their bloodthirstiness, ran afoul of the then Taliban leader, Akhtar Mansour. Some of the commanders Mansour fired sought to incite an anti-Shiite sectarian war in Afghanistan; Mansour opposed this, as he was actively courting ethnic minorities to join the Taliban. The Taliban have been fighting ISKP with determination and resolve since the latter's inception. In 2016 and 2017, the Taliban's military pressure forced ISKP cadres into eastern Afghanistan. Jihadists from abroad joined the new Islamic State branch, and ISKP also intensively intermingled with another militant group in eastern Afghanistan: Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). (The Taliban's persistent fear that TTP members might join ISKP and fight the Taliban explains why the Taliban have not been willing to crack down on the TTP despite its intensified attacks against Pakistan and Pakistan's pressure on the Taliban to do so.) From 2018-2019, the Taliban's ground operations against ISKP in Afghanistan's Nangarhar province crucially supplemented the US air campaign against the group, smashed its rural base, and dispersed it into Afghanistan's northern and urban areas. In April 2023, the Taliban killed the ISKP commander who organized the August 2021 Kabul airport attack. It has eliminated other ISKP commanders, including the group's presumed deputy commander, interim leader, head of intelligence, and shadow minister of justice. As a result of Taliban actions, ISKP attacks in Afghanistan decreased last year. In late 2022, the Taliban also presumably decimated ISKP cells targeting Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

ISKP is the only terrorist group in Afghanistan that the Taliban actively fight. Due to the Taliban's ideological bent, global jihadist obligations and debts, and decades of intermarriage with other militant actors, it has merely sought to manage Afghanistan's other terrorist groups, such as the TTP, al-Qaeda, and Central Asian militants. The Taliban move the groups away from its neighbours' borders, place them (temporarily) in special camps, and separate the fighters from their families. However, the Taliban have not been willing to arrest, kill, or extradite them. The Taliban also merely manage Uyghur militants, China's top concern, even though it look to China for badly-needed economic investment and trade far more than Russia.

Russia's and regional counterterrorism diplomacy

Russia, regional actors, and the West are highly concerned with preventing terrorism spillovers from Afghanistan, and all remain sensitive to the risk that an Afghan civil war would provide a dangerous breeding ground for terrorists and stimulate much larger migration flows. To meet these challenges, Russia, regional actors, the United States, and Great Britain have maintained a counterterrorism dialogue with the Taliban. Russia, Iran, and China have reconciled themselves to Taliban rule. The three are lukewarm towards Western economic sanctions on the Taliban, such as the freeze of the Afghan central bank's assets, and unmotivated by issues of human rights, civil liberties, and women's rights. They have even given up advocating for the representation of their ethnic kin powerbrokers in the Taliban government.

Russia has been developing its relations with the Taliban for years. By 2017, Russia was providing the Taliban with weapons and intelligence to fight ISKP and the United States. Russia sought to make the United States militarily bleed and entangle itself in Afghanistan even as Moscow opposed long-term US bases in Afghanistan. Since the US withdrawal in 2021, Russia has labored to reduce US influence in the region. However, Russia's efforts to position itself as an Afghan kingmaker haven't panned out. Like everyone else, Russia has not been able to move the Taliban on internal rule in Afghanistan even though it has tacitly supported the Taliban in various international fora, including in a recent multilateral meeting in Doha by not insisting on a new UN special envoy whom the Taliban opposes. Along with China, Russia has condemned Western

sanctions and called for engagement with the Taliban (though Russia has not pushed to remove the sanctions at the United Nations). But the Taliban has continued to snub Moscow on international diplomacy at various times.

China has gone the furthest in normalizing relations with the Taliban by accepting the latter's ambassador to Beijing in December 2023. Chinese businesses have also slightly increased their exploration of trade and resource extraction opportunities in Afghanistan packaged within a renewed possibility that the Taliban-run Afghanistan may join the Belt and Road Initiative.

Moscow can ask the Taliban for specific actions against ISKP, and the Taliban are likely to grant them. But beyond that, Moscow can do little more than boost its military readiness in Central Asia — including at its bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, something it had already signaled before the Crocus attack — and become more diligent about monitoring and stemming jihadi terrorist networks in Russia. Moscow's effectiveness with the Taliban is as constrained as everyone else's, and its leverage is even more limited. Russia provides virtually no humanitarian aid to Afghanistan — not that the West has been able to translate it into inducing less odious internal Afghan policies — and its economic engagement with Afghanistan is small. Russia may threaten the Taliban with opposition to lifting sanctions and travel bans against the Taliban, but since there is no current prospect for their removal anyway, little leverage results. And building up Afghan alternatives, i.e., the very weak National Resistance Front that has been flailing in its efforts to fight the Taliban, would take a long time and bring uncertain payoffs.

Russia may feel frustrated with the Taliban over the Crocus attack, but its false-flag Ukraine propaganda aside, it has few cards to play with the Taliban.

(Vanda Felbab-Brown — Brookings, March 28, 2024)

Militant sanctuaries in Afghanistan

Relations between the newly formed government and Afghanistan's de facto Taliban rulers have begun on an inauspicious note. Seven security personnel were martyred in a terrorist attack in North Waziristan.

There were reports of cross-border exchanges of fire in Kurram district. Militants had also staged attacks in Mohmand, Nowshera and Bannu over the

weekend. While terrorist attacks targeting civilians as well as security personnel are a red line and cannot go unanswered, and the frontiers must be defended, unilateral action should not become the norm. This will only cause further deterioration of ties with the Afghan Taliban, and Pakistan may lose whatever leverage it has with Kabul, adding to our security concerns.

Soon after the new government took over, there was a routine exchange of pleasantries between the foreign minister and his Afghan counterpart, as both vowed to expand cooperation in various sectors, including security. The North Waziristan attack and its fallout, however, have come as a painful reality check, and are the government's first test on the Afghan front of its management of relations with Kabul. Both sides must verify where the attacks targeting Pakistan originated from. While Afghan Taliban officials insist their territory is not being used by terrorists, there is a lot of evidence suggesting otherwise. Pakistan has raised the issue of militant sanctuaries in Afghanistan at the UN whose officials have similarly highlighted the presence of numerous militant groups in Afghanistan.

Instead of feigning ignorance, the Afghan Taliban should take action to stop anti-Pakistan fighters from launching attacks inside this country, especially if they are serious in their quest to be accepted as Afghanistan's legitimate government. While clear threats to national security must be immediately neutralised, Pakistan has to use carrots and sticks with the Taliban to permanently solve the militancy problem.

The FO has hinted at a similar line of action and of working "towards finding joint solutions in countering terrorism". Communication channels should remain open, and Pakistan should ask Afghanistan to take action against verified terrorist sanctuaries across the border. Moreover, China, which offers a financial lifeline to the Kabul regime, can also be asked to take punitive measures if the Taliban refuse to crack down on militants on their soil.

The terrorist threat from Afghanistan-based groups can destabilise the entire region, which is why all regional states should work on a common counterterrorism agenda with Kabul, along with using bilateral channels.

(Editorial — Dawn, March 19, 2024)



Regional war threat and terrorism surge

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MARCH 31, 2024

The regional escalation of war threats has led to increased terrorist activities, notably in Russia, Pakistan, and Tajikistan, with the Director of Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB), Alexander Bortnikov, accusing the US, UK and Ukraine of involvement in the Moscow concert hall attack that claimed over 139 lives, despite denials from Kyiv and claims of responsibility by an Islamic State affiliate.

Despite claims from the Islamic State affiliate taking responsibility for the attack and corroborating intelligence from the US and French sources, Russian President Putin continues to assert alleged Ukrainian involvement, a stance refuted by President Zelenskyy, who accuses Putin of attempting to incite fervor amid ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

Four gunmen who attacked the concert have been apprehended, with Russian President Vladimir Putin suggesting they were en route to Ukraine, though Ukraine has refuted any connection to the assault. Critical analysis of the incident indicates meticulous planning, as evidenced by the timing of the random shooting amidst peak crowd presence. Notably, the attack coincided with the conclusion of the Russian presidential election, coinciding with a relaxation of security measures in Moscow following a period of heightened alertness.

Bortnikov alleged that Western spy agencies could have assisted in the deadliest terror attack on Russian soil in two decades, with Ukrainian special services having a direct part in it. The US identified ISIS-Khorasan as responsible for the attack, a group fixated on Russia due to its military campaigns against ISIS in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Syria, and Iraq, aiming to establish a Muslim caliphate across multiple countries.

Latest attack in Russia has become hot topic in the regional as well as international media. It has spillover geopolitical and geostrategic ramifications. Most of the Western media claimed it as false flag operation

ultimately providing ample reason to Kremlin to further accelerate its martial activities against Ukraine. However, whatever the reason, Russia will now swiftly respond and create a matching balancing act very soon. It fears that Black Sea will witness another round of fresh war escalation in near future.

On the other hand, Pakistan has also been in the line of fire because of a series of deadly terrorist attacks. The attacks on defence forces caravan in North Waziristan, Gwadar Port Complex, Naval aviation station, Turbat and last but not the least, killing of five Chinese nationals in Bisham, Kohistan, KP, shocked the newly formed federal government and military establishment of the country alike. Both have been striving hard to attract more and more in-flows of foreign direct investment in the country, however, the most recent terrorist attack badly damaged these efforts which have now been reversed somehow.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province has become a hotspot for national and international terrorist groups, especially in Kohistan and Waziristan. Their proximity to Afghanistan's Kapisa province enables groups like Al-Qaeda, the Haqqani Network, and TTP to infiltrate Pakistan. The resurgence of ISIS-Khorasan in KP and parts of Balochistan signals a critical security challenge for the defence forces and intelligence agencies.

Allegedly the ISIS-K has been receiving funds from ISIS, Terik-e-Taliban Afghanistan and its global sponsors like US and CIA. Initially, ISIS was formed and financed by the US establishment to initiate many destructive activities in Iraq, Syria, Libya and many parts around the globe.

President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif visited the Chinese embassy to extend heartfelt condolences on behalf of the government and people of Pakistan after the tragic killing of Chinese citizens in the terrorist attack in Bisham. They expressed solidarity with the Chinese people

during their time of mourning, emphasizing that Pakistan shared their grief. Both leaders pledged to take all necessary measures to ensure the security of Chinese citizens working on various projects in Pakistan, underscoring the importance of safeguarding their well-being amidst regional challenges.

Chinese Ambassador Zaidong expressed gratitude to both leaders for personally visiting the embassy to extend condolences and acknowledged the condemnation of the terrorist attack by people from all walks of life in Pakistan. Zaidong emphasized the significant contribution of Chinese workers to Pakistan's socioeconomic development and condemned terrorism as an affront to humanity. He stressed the importance of bolstering counterterrorism cooperation and providing enhanced security to Chinese workers in Pakistan, reaffirming China's commitment to strengthening cooperation with Pakistan, particularly in projects like the CPEC.

In summary, it is high time to form a joint security system for the safety and security of the Chinese nationals working in the different projects of CPEC in the country. Hawkish regional secret agencies are conducting these terrorist operations with the help of local sympathizers, facilitators and sleeper cells.

Enemies of development, prosperity, connectivity and humanity are in search of a scapegoat to weaken Pak-China bilateral relations and derail the CPEC project.

Joint surveillance system, aerial monitoring mechanism, information sharing system, joint anti-terrorism operations and discarding of narrative of a perception war because it is a full fledged war perplexed by our enemies to contain China and disturb Pakistan's peaceful persuasions of socioeconomic integration and prosperity.



Afghanistan and domino effect in global terrorism

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MARCH 21, 2024

The 11th edition of the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) 2024 report supports Pakistan's UN SC position that terrorist attacks have become more lethal. The Australia-based Institute for Economics and Peace recorded a 22% decrease in terrorist attacks but a 22% increase in terrorism-related fatalities, indicating a 56% increase in average deaths in an incident. This increase in the lethality of terrorist attacks indicates that terrorist outfits have access to modern weapons, explosives, training resources and technologies. In this regard, Pakistan's permanent representative to the UN has already asked for an international probe to ascertain how TTP got access to leftover weaponry from ISAF and NATO in Afghanistan. Pakistan had already alerted the international community that improper disposal of American leftover weaponry could enable terrorists to acquire it. It has further warned that these arms pose a threat not only to Pakistan, but those terrorists will use them in attacks against the interests of other countries as well. Now, the recovery of the arsenal from the militants in recent attacks, which included RPG-7, AK-74, M-4, and M-16/A4 rifles, all of American origin, indicates that a worst-case scenario has become a reality. The availability of these weapons has escalated terrorist threats, making militants more lethal in Pakistan, and the world is experiencing a domino effect of the situation emerging from Afghanistan.

According to the data collected and analyzed for the GTI Report 2024, Pakistan is the fourth most terrorism-affected country in the world. As Afghanistan ranked sixth in the world, Pakistan became the worst-hit country in South Asia. However, the report did not consider violent incidents involving the Afghan Taliban, treating them as a state authority; therefore, Afghanistan's position is debatable. Ironically, the Afghan Taliban's success in forming a government in Kabul has re-energized militants and all terrorist outfits view it as a way to revamp terrorism. Moreover, the GTI report profiled every country separately for the increase in terrorism, and it did not research cross-regional links among terrorist outfits to evaluate Afghanistan's role in the surge in the lethality of terrorist attacks in the world. Pakistan had told the UN SC that the interim

Afghan government is responsible for the resurgence of TTP attacks in Pakistan. It has further warned that TTP is an Al-Qaeda-backed terrorist organization, and its unchecked activities in Afghanistan would escalate global terrorist threats as well.

A report from the UN SC Analytical Support to Sanctions Monitoring Team on Al-Qaeda and ISIS corroborated Pakistan's security institutions' findings. According to UN research, the Afghan Taliban are providing financial assistance to the TTP as well as paying \$50,000 to Noor Wali Mehsud. According to the findings of the UN research group, Afghan Taliban members consider it a religious duty to participate in the TTP's attacks. The Afghan Taliban provided it with a huge cache of American leftover weaponry and manpower for violence. The report also revealed that TTP is working closely with Al-Qaeda and ISIS in Afghanistan to further complicate Pakistan's threats. Al-Qaeda has established eight camps in Afghanistan, and its Kunar camp is training suicide bombers for the TTP. It gifted some vehicles to the TTP for the safety of militant leaders, and its militant commander, Hakeem Al-Masri, is ensuring full support for the terrorist activities of the TTP in Pakistan.

Against this backdrop, Pakistan is perturbed by the Afghan Taliban's lack of cooperation over TTP and is withdrawing support for it. It needs to put pressure on the Afghan Taliban to check the activities of TTP militants in Afghanistan; therefore, it has asked the UN SC to investigate the TTP's financial resources in Afghanistan for supporting 50 thousand militants and their dependents.

In a realist paradigm, states are prime actors in contemporary international relations and giving importance to non-state actors over them is not a reasonable strategy. It is a compulsion for the interim Afghan government to choose Pakistan over TTP in order to coexist in the world. Otherwise, international recognition should remain a far-fetched dream for them. According to the GTI report, violent conflicts are the primary driver of terrorism, and the increase in attacks has exacerbated them. Unfortunately, some members of the interim Afghan government have resorted to war rhetoric against Pakistan, which should also be alarming for the world. Such a scenario would be detrimental to international peace in light of global terrorist threats.



Geopolitics & cybersecurity

The original aim of artificial intelligence (AI) was to mimic human cognitive functions and provide insights into real-world problems. AI has gained global recognition through creative works in literature and cinema. Its applications span various sectors including military, space exploration and healthcare. In healthcare, AI aids in diagnosis, treatment suggestions and financial projections for structural health management. Cybersecurity, rooted in cybernetics, aims to safeguard networks, devices and data against damage or unauthorized access. AI, particularly through machine learning, enhances cybersecurity by automating risk identification and mitigation. Cybersecurity frameworks like NIST and ISO offer guidelines for protecting diverse domains, reflecting concerns from infrastructure to human security. China, the US and EU released an unprecedented joint communiqué in November 2023, pledging to work together globally to address the problems brought forth by cutting-edge artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, especially "frontier" AI-like generative models like *ChatGPT*. This paper raised issues about the possible use of AI for misin-formation and the significant threats it poses to biotechnology and cybersecurity. Officials from the US and China are engaging in further bilateral discussions to explore potential collaboration on risk management and regulation of AI. Notably, recent regulatory initiatives by these key actors show notable convergence, such as China's rules, the EU's AI Act and US President Joe Biden's executive order on AI. The common objective of these regimes is to stop AI exploi-tation while encouraging innovation. One major area of conflict related to AI is the ongoing dispute between China and the United States over the global semiconductor industry. To manufacture devices that can run cutting-edge AI models used by OpenAI, Anthropic and other companies on the technological frontier, the US Commerce Department released its first comprehensive licens-ing regime for the export of advanced chips and chip-making technology in October 2022. China responded in August 2023 by imposing export restrictions on rare materials germanium and gallium, which are both required for the pro-duction of semiconductors. Because states are not sufficiently restrained from implementing export controls by inter-national trade law under the World Trade Organization, tit-for-tat rivalry over chips is feasible. There is minimal chance of new formal regulations that can be legitimately enforced by a reputable international organization because former US President Donald Trump eliminated the WTO's appeal body in 2018. Reduced trade and increased geopolitical tensions are the results of this.

(Rimsha Malik — Pakistan Observer, MARCH 28, 2024)

The Taliban character

MUHAMMAD AMIR RANA

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The Afghan Taliban's character has remained tricky throughout their history. Their leadership is notorious for shifting positions and breaking its promises. Who knows this better than Pakistan's security institutions, which have dealt with them since the beginning? However, there is more recent testimony from Saudi Arabia, which recognised their regime in the mid-1990s alongside the UAE and Pakistan, while they were in the midst of a war with their rivals.

Prince Turki al-Faisal al-Saud, former head of the Saudi intelligence, detailed his department's involvement in Afghanistan (1979-2001) in his book *"The Afghanistan File"*. The purpose of the publication was to clarify the Saudi position on Afghanistan – from the Afghan-Soviet war to 9/11 – as different accounts existed about Saudi Arabia's involvement in Afghanistan and nurturing of a militant brand of Islam across the world. The book also confirms many previous accounts but better explains the Saudis' position. Some chapters are relevant to understanding the Taliban's character, as Prince Turki provides a detailed account of Saudi efforts for Osama bin Laden's (OBL) extradition. However, the Taliban leadership tactically manipulated the issue.

The book focuses on the Taliban's harbouring of OBL and their link to 9/11. The chapter culminates with Prince Turki's descriptions of his two meetings with elusive Taliban leader Mullah Omar.

The author recounts a meeting with Mullah Omar, the Taliban leader in June 1998. The prince requested that OBL be handed over to Saudi Arabia. Mullah Omar expressed his willingness but felt constrained by his obligations as a host. Mullah Omar agreed to form a joint committee of ulema from Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia to draft a legal judgement that would allow Mullah Omar to surrender his guest. The committee would meet within two weeks. There was an understanding that OBL would be turned in, with the committee serving as a formality.

Before the second meeting, a Taliban delegation led by Maulvi Mutawakil visited Saudi Arabia. He

assured them that OBL would be swiftly expelled from Afghanistan. The delegation admitted that OBL had supporters inside Afghanistan as well as good contacts with a large number of individuals due to the financial support he had provided them. They proposed: "It would be better to examine this together and collaborate on developing a mutually beneficial solution." In Afghanistan, they agreed to apply pressure on OBL to get him to leave the country. There is an interesting account in the book of how when OBL had declared war against the US and announced the killing of its citizens, he had cited fatwas issued by Pakistani ulema in support of his arguments. This could be the reason why the Pakistani ulema were not included in the committee.

However, the Taliban did not deliver on their promise. This forced Prince Turki to plan another meeting with Mullah Omar in September of that same year. This time, Mullah Omar denied making any agreement to hand over OBL, claiming mistranslation. He criticised Saudi Arabia's alliance with the US and blamed them for the suffering of the Afghan and Iraqi people. The prince was offended by the outburst and cut short the meeting. It was a major disappointment for the prince, and was a factor that contributed to his decision to quit his position.

The Afghan Taliban seem to be playing the same game with Pakistan. Several recent media reports indicate that the interim Taliban administration in Afghanistan has once again claimed to have taken action against the banned Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan militants and arrested many of them. They assert that there are no militant groups currently operating inside their country. However, Pakistan has refuted these claims and has urged the United Nations to conduct an investigation to determine how the TTP acquired advanced military equipment and weaponry and to also identify the sources of financing of the terrorist group, which is said to be supporting 50,000 fighters and their dependents, as well as its operations. The same situation has been depicted in the Afghanistan File, but in the Saudi context:

Al Qaeda was actively involved in terrorist attacks and the Taliban were denying the Islamist group's presence in Afghanistan with similar fervour.

Terrorist attacks are again on the rise in Pakistan, yet the TTP has only accepted responsibility for a few of these attacks. From Dec 1, 2023, to Feb 29, 2024, there were 62 attacks (51 in KP, nine in Balochistan, and two in Karachi). However, the TTP has only acknowledged responsibility for 34 attacks. This could be an attempt to show that the Afghan Taliban interim regime is putting pressure on the TTP.

The relationship between the Taliban and Pakistan cannot improve until the Taliban leadership learns how to fulfil its commitments, especially made to its close allies. One can understand why the Saudis are not enthusiastic about supporting the Taliban regime this time. Pakistan has a few more bitter experiences, as the Taliban regime is exploiting them as it indicates growing relations with India.

The major lesson for Pakistan in all this is to take the issue to parliament and have an open discussion before deciding on its future course. The Saudis had the option to curtail their relations with the Afghan Taliban. However, Pakistan does not have this option, as Afghanistan shares a crucial border in all strategic, economic, and political contexts.



Afghanistan without illusions

ENGINEER KHURRAM DASTGIR-KHAN

INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS
MARCH 30, 2024

Pakistan's understanding of its northwestern neighbour is beset with hubris and delusion masquerading as familiarity. The increasingly bold and bloody attacks on our soldiers and Pakistan's response indicate that it is time to set aside nostrums and ethnic proclivity. All attempts to appease Afghanistan have failed. It is a complex neighbour closer to being foe than friend. It is time to see Afghanistan without illusions.

This complex neighbour poses, after India, the most serious challenge for Pakistan's security today. Terrorist incidents inside Pakistan began to rise in 2021, the year of the US withdrawal and assumption of power by the Afghan Taliban. In 2021, there were 294 terrorist incidents, a 56 percent rise from 187 incidents in 2020. In 2022, the number of incidents rose to 380, and in 2023 nearly doubled to 645.

Pakistan's security agencies estimate that almost all these incidents have their origin inside Afghanistan. Since the end of 2020, around 1907 Pakistanis have been martyred by terrorists. The worst recent attack killed at least 100 people, mostly policemen, when a suicide bomber blew himself up in a Peshawar mosque in January 2023. Compared with 2020, terrorist incidents in 2023 increased 244 percent; and the number of Pakistanis killed rose by 267 per cent. Most of the Pakistanis martyred were in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Baluchistan, although Punjab also witnessed a rising number of terrorist incidents last year.

Pakistan is bleeding again. The simplest questions are the most relevant: who, why, how. We assume that the 'who' is the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) that Pakistan ostensibly eradicated in 2015-16 through operations *Zarb-e-Azb* and *Radd-ul-Fasaad* and some of its remnants fled to Afghanistan. They are remnants no longer and once again are assaulting the constitutional state of Pakistan.

We avert our eyes to the 'why' question and have done so for too long. It was and is hidden under the rubric of religious extremism, terrorism, and regional deprivation. But the TTP is clear and has announced its political intentions repeatedly. Its principal demand is the reversal of the merger of former FATA with KP, with the eventual intention of separating FATA into an autonomous region

ruled by TTP.

History cleaves the two neighbours and there has been too much of it. The two Afghan wars (1979-89 and 2001-21) are vast subjects that defy easy summarization. The second war that brought US occupation and presence in Afghanistan for twenty years – and Pakistan’s concomitant cooperation – ended in an ignominious US withdrawal in 2021.

What did Pakistan gain? Between 2007 and 2016 and again in 2021-to date, our nation was and is the principal victim of violent extremism in the world. Pakistan’s economy collapsed under the colossal loss of \$252 billion in the US-led war against terrorism, which is nearly eight times more than the financial assistance given by Washington to Islamabad.

Pakistan lost 67,000 citizens during 2001-22. Yet this unimaginable ocean of pain and Pakistani blood became dust in Western capitals. By allegedly providing safe haven to the Afghan Taliban and through deception, Pakistan is deemed to be the principal reason the US lost the war in Afghanistan. Pakistan was the easy scapegoat for the failures and defeats suffered by the Afghan Army and US forces at the hands of the Afghan Taliban.

Carter Malkasian differs in his magisterial work ‘The American War in Afghanistan’. He documents how presidents Karzai and Ghani as well as successive heads of the Afghan National Army “claimed to be fighting a foreign Pakistani invasion and refused to characterise the [Afghan] Taliban as anything but a creature of Islamabad...grievances, Pakistan and infighting could not explain every incident of [US] battlefield defeat”.

The second task of rebuilding Pak-Afghan relations is reinforcing the sovereignty and thereby the responsibility of the two sides for their respective territories. This is the foundation for stopping cross-border terrorism, ending the harbouring of militants that attack the other state, and for returning Afghan refugees to their homeland. The third task is to build cooperation on the common Pak-Afghan aim of defeating Islamic State Khorasan (ISIS-K), a group that according to a senior expert at USIP, “seeks to outperform rival jihadis by carrying out more audacious attacks to distinguish its jihadi brand and assert leadership of the global jihadi vanguard.” ISIS-K claimed

responsibility for the attack on Moscow last week that killed at least 133 people, for attacking the Russian Embassy in Kabul, killed at least 84 people in Iran this January, and murdered 54 Pakistanis and injured over 130 in a suicide bombing in Bajaur last July. There is no time to waste in protecting the Pakistani people from this malignant extremism.

The fourth aim is ethnic neutrality in Pakistan’s Afghan policy. Pakistan needs to free itself from the impression that it supports Pashtuns at the cost of other ethnicities in Afghanistan. We need to see Afghans free from the Pashtun, non-Pashtun binary and see in our neighbours a nation like ours – yearning for peace and the ability to educate and feed their children. We also need to address the equally pernicious impression among Afghans that Pakistan has made money in their name, whether as refugees or through military aid from the US and allies.

It is time to focus single-mindedly on connectivity – trade, communications, financial systems, and energy – for shared prosperity. Pakistan has to redeem its destiny as the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, and China. ‘Geography is destiny’ and, whatever our current travails, Pakistan and Afghanistan are part of each other’s destiny.



Transformed terrorism in Pakistan

Pakistan is facing a renewed wave of militancy and terrorism since last few months. In the recent incidents of terrorism, five Chinese nationals were targeted through a well-planned and very well coordinated suicide attack near Bisham. Besides, two strategic locations were targeted; the Gwadar Port Authority Complex and the Turbat Naval Base in a series of attacks. These three attacks were somehow interlinked and an attempt to sabotage the developmental work of CPEC, a grand Pak-China Project. Very interestingly, there came a very interesting statement from US State Department, after suicide attack on Chinese nationals, working at Dasu Dam. State Department spokesperson was questioned about the Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline, which Pakistan decided to complete its part after a delay of more than fifteen years. He clearly communicated US annoyance over

this gas pipeline project and indirectly warned Pakistan not to proceed on this project. This statement is sufficient enough to draw conclusions from the series of terrorist attacks, being conducted on various parts of Pakistan. Indeed, keeping Pakistan in a constant state of socio-political instability, security threats and state of economic tremulousness are the direct objectives form these terrorist attacks. Indeed, Pakistan has been combating militancy and terrorism since the start of 21st century. This wave of terrorism started in Pakistan, after the well planned incident of 9/11, which was planned, conceived and executed at US but its fall-outs were felt in Pakistan and Afghanistan until 2021. Pakistan suffered the loss of over 80,000 human beings in this uncalled for war with massive economic and social losses. After the pull-out of US and NATO forces, the occupying powers imposed Taliban Government in

Shangla attack terrorists, facilitators held

The Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) have arrested multiple terrorists and facilitators for their involvement in the deadly suicide attack in Shangla's Bisham city that killed multiple Chinese nationals, Geo News reported citing sources.

The sources within CTD said that more than 10 terrorists and accomplices have been apprehended and that the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)-affiliated outfits are believed to be involved in the March 26 deadly attack. The attack, which saw a suicide bomber crashing his explosives-laden vehicle into the car carrying Chinese nationals, resulted in the deaths of five Chinese citizens, including a woman, and a Pakistani driver. Following the incident, the country's civil and military leadership notably Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, President Asif Ali Zardari and Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Syed Asim Munir condemned the attack vowing that the perpetrators responsible for the heinous attack would be brought to justice.

Meanwhile, a wreath-laying ceremony was held at Rawalpindi's Nur Khan Airbase and a 30-second

silence was observed as bodies of the deceased Chinese nationals were airlifted back to China.

Floral wreaths were laid on behalf of the president, prime minister, army chief, Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmad Babar Sidhu and Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCSC) General Sahir Shamshad Mirza.

In the aftermath of the attack, Chinese companies overseeing operations at the sites of the Dasu and Diamer-Bhasha Dams, temporarily suspended the civil work at both sites owing to security concerns.

Around 991 Chinese engineers were working on both projects, while the local staff has been told to stay at home till further instructions, an official working on the project confirmed to the publication.

Last week, a Chinese investigation team has also arrived in Pakistan to investigate the incident after China's military expressed its willingness to work with Pakistan to enhance the capability of the two countries to tackle various security risks and challenges including terrorist attacks.

(Rasool Dawar — The News, April 01, 2024)

a war-torn country for a new phase of terrorism in Pakistan. This phase of terrorism is totally focused against Pakistan and China with three main objectives; a) to sabotage China Pakistan Economic Corridor, b) to economically ruin and exploit Pakistan ensuring its dependency over IMF and World Bank and c) to harm Chinese economic and strategic projects which are being implemented through Pakistani geopolitics.

In the last two decades, Pakistani military has very successfully fought against this externally imposed terrorism with lot of bravery and enthusiasm. Indeed, the nation has defeated the terrorism through its brave armed forces while the entire nation stood behind them. This achievement was never the agenda and desire of those who conceptualized the idea of terrorism against Pakistan. They wanted more to be done against Pakistan, thus renewed the concept with changed methodology. They wanted Pakistan to constantly bleed and ultimately get involved into a civil war and an internally chaotic situation. They imposed Taliban Government in Afghanistan, whom U.S declared as a terrorist outfit during its prolonged stay in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2021. Despite not being recognized, U.S and west is supporting Taliban Government through various NGOs, IGOs, MNCs and various organizations of United Nations. They don't criticize the human rights violations, being committed by Taliban; they have no issue with women rights under Taliban Government. Indeed, Taliban Government in Afghanistan is being sustained through various direct and indirect approaches. All the vested powers want from Taliban Government in Afghanistan is to destabilize Pakistan through terrorism and use Afghan soil to target the joint ventures of Pakistan and China.

Despite repeated requests to Taliban Government in Afghanistan for stoppage of terrorism through TTP and its splinter groups, there is no let-up in the attacks from Afghan soil. TTP and its splinter groups have killed thousands of innocent Pakistanis and thousands of our soldiers in last two decades. The main objective of TTP terrorist campaign against Pakistan has been to force Government Pakistan to give them some concessions and areas for their own rule within the boundaries of Pakistan. Former FATA was the area; TTP has been looking forward for this type of set up in the first instance. Having achieved this concession they would have expanded their influence in other areas in a gradual process. Indeed, TTP is just a tool, planning to destabilize and insecure make Pakistan has been going for decades. Establishment of militant groups like; TTP, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA) and similar other splinter groups was done in first decade of 21st, after US and NATO invaded Afghanistan.

In the first two decades of 21st century, Pakistan was deliberately kept vulnerable from the perspective of security

as well as economically. So much so, that US and NATO forces tried to exploit the Pakistani vulnerabilities many a time from 2004 to 2021. In the post 2021 scenario, the response of the Afghan Taliban Government towards Pakistan has been unfriendly and rivalry based. Taliban soldiers, guarding the Afghan border repeatedly disrupted the process of security fencing, undertaken by Pak Army. Taliban soldiers even removed the fence from a sizable portion of Pak-Afghan border which cannot be taken as an incident but a willful act. Nevertheless, Pakistani military is quite alert against the happenings and the nefarious designs of external forces and combated the well planned terrorism which was aimed to ruin Pakistan through direct and indirect strategies.

Pakistan is the only country whose security situation has deteriorated after take-over of Afghanistan by Afghan Taliban in August 2021. Afghan soil is rapidly becoming a confluence of various spying networks to; train, finance, equipped and abets the terrorists of various cadres to conduct terrorist attacks in Pakistan. Even Indian RAW is covertly getting back to Afghanistan under various pretexts. In fact, there is a need to understand the new trends and renewed objectives of terrorism against Pakistan by external forces while making use of Afghan soil. Pakistan must devise new strategies to counter the emerging trends of terrorism through wisdom and foresight.

(Dr. M Khan — Pakistan Observer, 01 April, 2024)

Dastardly attack kills foreigners working on Dasu Dam

A dastardly attack on a bus carrying Chinese workers transporting staff of the Dasu dam project in Bisham resulted in the death of five Chinese citizens including a woman and one Pakistani national — the driver. On March 26, a suicide bomber rammed his explosive-laden vehicle into the bus, travelling from Islamabad to Dasu, the site of a key hydroelectric dam being constructed by a Chinese company, 270 km from the capital. This is not the first time that Chinese experts working on the Dasu Dam have been targeted. On July 14, 2021, nine Chinese and four Pakistanis were killed after a suicide explosion targeted their vehicle. In response to the 2021 attack, Pakistan had increased the security of the Chinese nationals and it was decided that the Chinese nationals would travel in the form of a convoy. Unfortunately, lightning struck twice in the same place with this latest attack. It was announced that the multilayer security of the Chinese nationals executing the Dasu dam, and the residential campus has further been enhanced following the suicidal attack on engineers of one of the flagship energy projects of Sino-Pak

friendship.

Condolences have poured in for the loss of lives in the brazen attack while the Chinese diplomatic missions in Pakistan have strongly condemned this terrorist attack, expressed deep condolences to the victims and sincere sympathy to the bereaved families, and declared in a statement that they are making every effort to handle the aftermath together with the Pakistani side. The statement said the Chinese mission in Pakistan was taking “all necessary measures to protect” the Chinese citizens, institutions and projects in Pakistan. The Chinese Embassy in Islamabad announced that an “emergency plan” had been launched immediately, requesting the Pakistani side to thoroughly investigate the attack and severely punish the perpetrators.

During a press briefing, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller also condemned the attack on the Chinese convoy. “We are deeply saddened by the loss of life and injuries sustained. We share our heartfelt condolences with those affected by the attack. The Pakistani people have suffered greatly at the hands of terrorists. I note that PRC nationals in Pakistan have also been the victims of terrorist attacks and no country should suffer the acts of terror attacks.” In a press conference in Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian expressed strong support for iron brother Pakistan in the fight against terrorism. Lijian emphasized Beijing’s vowed commitment to the safety of Chinese nationals, institutions and projects abroad, stating that both countries are determined and capable of making terrorists pay the price. Lijian reiterated the enduring partnership between both sides, saying no efforts undermine their cooperation. He also highlighted China’s support for Pakistan’s socioeconomic development and its commitment to working together in various fields for the benefit of both peoples. Simultaneously, Pakistani civil-military authority held a high-level security meeting and renewed pledge to protect Chinese nationals working in the country. However, it leaves a gap in the security planning that after terrorist attacks in Gwadar—the centrepiece of the \$62bn dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project, a week earlier and a night before, on a naval base in Turbat — why security on strategic targets and projects involving Chinese engineers and technicians was not enhanced? In the past few weeks, bold attacks by terrorists have been on the rise, taking a toll on precious lives. While foreign agents have been blamed for the shameless attacks and surgical strikes have been carried out in neighbouring Afghanistan on alleged strongholds of the terror mongers, they have not stemmed the rot. It is imperative that the precarious situation is tackled on a war

footing before more assaults destabilize Pakistan.

To address this grave issue, several steps should be taken. These involve taking enhanced security measures, which necessitate increased patrols and security checkpoints along the highway to deter attacks. It also requires the deployment of well-trained security personnel to safeguard travellers and convoys. Pakistan owes it to its prime benefactor China to protect its engineers, technicians and experts working on various projects in Pakistan. This entails collaboration between Pakistani and Chinese security forces to share intelligence and coordinate efforts. In the realm of intelligence and surveillance, it is imperative to strengthen intelligence gathering to identify potential threats and pre-empt attacks. It is urged that the use of technology, such as surveillance cameras, be used to monitor critical points along the highway. Community Engagement will yield positive results. We should engage local communities living near the highway to foster cooperation and gather information. There should be concerted effort to raise awareness about the importance of security and reporting suspicious activities.

Another aspect that merits prompt attention is Emergency Response Preparedness. This will require training of bus drivers and passengers to respond effectively during emergencies. There is a dire need to establish communication networks for quick reporting and assistance. This involves strategic route planning, in which we should review and optimize travel schedules to minimize vulnerability during specific times or routes. It is essential to implement convoy systems with security escorts for buses and vehicles. Public awareness campaigns will go a long way in achieving the desired results. There is a need to educate travellers about safety precautions and emergency procedures as well as promote vigilance and encourage reporting of suspicious activities. There is a dire need to launch diplomatic efforts to reassure China of our intent to ensure the safety of Chinese citizens in Pakistan. We must engage with China to jointly address security challenges. The steps also require that we seek international cooperation to combat terrorism along the CPEC. Touched to the quick at the loss of Chinese personnel in Shangla, the Chinese military has expressed its willingness to work with Pakistan to enhance capability of the two countries to tackle various security risks and challenges including terrorist attacks. It is heartening that China considers protecting lives and ensuring safe travel a shared responsibility. Let us stand united against terrorism and work towards a secure and peaceful region.

(Sultan M Hali — Pakistan Observer, 31 March, 2024)



We'll fight terrorism with all our might, to the very end: COAS

AG & ASIM YASIN & MUHAMMAD ANIS

INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS
MARCH 28, 2024

An emergency meeting chaired by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in the aftermath of the Besham terrorist attack on Chinese nationals working on the Dasso Hydel Power Project expressed serious concerns over sanctuaries available to terrorists across the borders and emphasized the need for a regional approach for countering terrorism.

Participants of the meeting expressed their resolute commitment to completely rooting out terrorism from the country and reiterated to comprehensively combat terrorism, employing all resources available to the state, a statement issued by the PM media wing said.

The meeting was attended by federal ministers, Chief of the Army Staff General Syed Asim Munir, chief ministers, chief secretaries and Inspector Generals of Police of respective provinces to discuss the heinous

attack on innocent civilians working on a development project meant to contribute to energy and water security of Pakistan.

The prime minister underscored the enduring bond of brotherhood between the people of Pakistan and China and conveyed that the whole nation was saddened by the loss of Chinese lives. He appreciated the alacrity with which law enforcement agencies and locals responded to the attack, saving many precious lives which could have been lost. The PM instructed for a thorough joint investigation to be conducted, utilizing all resources of the state.

Shehbaz said that terrorism is a transnational threat that has been instrumentalized by the enemies of Pakistan to stymie Pakistan's progress and development. "The acts targeting Pakistan-China friendship are



particularly aimed at creating mistrust between the two iron brothers,” the prime minister said. He offered his deepest condolences to the families of innocent victims of the attack and assured them that the perpetrators of this barbaric act would be brought to justice swiftly.

COAS General Syed Asim Munir reiterated the resolve of armed forces to eliminate the scourge of terrorism afflicting the country. The COAS stated that the nation had steadfastly fought the war on terror for the last two decades and had defeated the nefarious designs of Pakistan’s adversaries. Noting the recent surge in terrorist incidents, the COAS remarked that the enemies of Pakistan had once again underestimated the resilience and grit of the state and the people of Pakistan. “We shall fight terrorism till every terrorist casting an evil eye on Pakistan, its people and their guests is eliminated; we shall not leave any stone unturned to ensure that every foreign citizen, especially the Chinese nationals contributing to the prosperity of Pakistan, is safe and secure in Pakistan. We shall fight terrorism with all our might, to the very end,” the COAS said.

Meanwhile, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said that Pakistan and China have the determination and ability to make terrorists pay the price for their actions and any attempt to undermine China-Pakistan cooperation will not succeed. Lin made the remarks at a regular press briefing in response to a terrorist attack. “We strongly condemn this terrorist attack, express deep sympathy for the victims and extend sincere condolences to the bereaved families,” Lin said.

Noting that some other countries have also condemned the attack and expressed sympathy for the Chinese victims, Lin said China is grateful for that. He said that immediately after the incident, China’s foreign ministry and the Chinese embassy in Pakistan triggered an emergency response mechanism. They have maintained close contact with the Pakistani side in Beijing and Islamabad, requesting that Pakistan accelerate the hunt for and subsequent punishment of the terrorists, seek justice for the victims and take concrete measures to ensure the safety of Chinese nationals in the country.

The Pakistani side pledged that it would investigate the attack thoroughly, provide the Chinese side with timely updates on the progress of the investigation and take further, comprehensive measures to improve the security of Chinese personnel, projects and institutions in Pakistan, Lin said. He reiterated China’s stance on terrorism that terrorism is the common enemy of all

human beings and it is the shared responsibility of the international community to combat terrorism and prevent the recurrence of such tragedies.

China firmly supports Pakistan’s counterterrorism efforts, Lin said. China will continue to support Pakistan’s economic development, social development and improvement of its people’s livelihoods, he added, and it will undertake firm cooperation with Pakistan in various fields to bring benefits to the two peoples.

Meanwhile, the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) on Wednesday registered the first information report (FIR) of the attack on the convoy of Chinese nationals working on the Dasu Hydropower Project in Upper Kohistan. The FIR included sections of the anti-terrorism law. The FIR was registered after the police sent a letter to the CTD.

Five Chinese and their Pakistani driver were killed in a suicide attack on their convoy in Besham tehsil in the Shangla district on Tuesday. A suicide bomber had rammed his explosive-laden vehicle into the convoy carrying the Chinese workers.

Meanwhile, a video of the attack on the bus went viral on social media. A vehicle can be seen approaching the bus from Kohistan’s side on the Karakoram Highway and the explosion occurred when it hit the bus carrying Chinese nationals.

In a related development, a high-level meeting chaired by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has decided that a Joint Investigation Team (JIT) will be formed for an investigation into the terrorist attack on Chinese engineers in Besham.

Sharing details of the meeting at a news conference in Islamabad, Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar said the meeting recognized the importance of adopting a coordinated strategy to curb terrorism. He said a mechanism will be devised under this strategy to ensure greater coordination amongst the relevant stakeholders.

The information minister said the meeting applauded the role of security forces in the war on terrorism. He said the participants of the meeting were on the same page that no stone will be left unturned to eradicate terrorism. The whole nation is united in the war on terrorism reaffirming that every possible step will be taken for the security of important installations by Chinese citizens and the Pakistani people.

Attaullah Tarar said anti-Pakistan elements want to hurt the longstanding relationship between Pakistan

and China but they will fail in their designs. He said this everlasting relationship will remain intact. The information minister said China has always stood by Pakistan in difficult times. The country has always supported Pakistan's stance at the international fora. He said the CPEC is our lifeline and guarantor of economic development. He said Pakistan shares the grief and sorrow of the Chinese people at this hour of grief.

Responding to a question regarding the security of Chinese nationals in Pakistan, Attaullah Tarar said there are SOPs in this regard and all-out steps are being taken to ensure their implementation. "However following Tuesday's incident we are identifying any loopholes in the SOPs or their implementation," he said.

To another question, the minister said the federal government is closely engaged with the provincial governments of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on the security issue. He mentioned that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has directed the Balochistan chief minister to expedite work on Gwadar safe city project being funded by the federal government and in this regard, the chief minister will visit Gwadar today (Thursday). He said

a counter terrorism force will be established in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa at the pattern of the state-of-the-art CTD force of Punjab.

To a question about Afghanistan's involvement in terror incidents in Pakistan, Attaullah Tarar said the prime minister has already made it clear that any use of soil against Pakistan will be thwarted. "We continue to emphasise peace in the region and resolve issues through negotiations." Meanwhile, President Asif Ali Zardari visited the Embassy of the People's Republic of China Wednesday and offered condolences on behalf of the government and people of Pakistan over the killing of Chinese citizens in a terrorist attack in Besham.

Upon his arrival, President Asif Ali Zardari was received by the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Pakistan, Jiang Zaidong. The secretary Ministry of Foreign Affairs was also present on the occasion. Zardari strongly condemned the Tuesday's terrorist attack, saying that the Pakistani nation shared the grief of Chinese people. He added that the people of Pakistan stood in solidarity with the Chinese people in this hour of grief.

Terror rising

OMAY AIMEN

Terrorism has become a complicated problem worldwide, and in recent years, state-sponsored terrorism has become a major worry. Incidents like the 9/11 attacks have highlighted the frequency of activities carried out by intelligence organizations such as the Indian Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), endangering the stability and sovereignty of adjacent countries. Even in the face of international rules that oppose meddling in the domestic affairs of sovereign governments, RAW's long history of interventionism and espionage, which dates back years, continues to influence the way it approaches regional geopolitics. RAW operates with a mandate that goes beyond traditional information gathering, frequently using disruptive measures to assert India's regional influence. This mandate is influenced by doctrines like Kautilya's Arthashastra.

RAW was created in 1968 to strengthen India's external intelligence capabilities in the wake of the country's intelligence lapses during the India-China

border war. Since then, though, its purview has broadened to include a variety of clandestine operations, including meddling in nearby conflicts and domestic political matters. With a great deal of autonomy in carrying out its mission, RAW operates directly under the Indian prime minister. Although RAW's stated purpose is as an external intelligence organization, its engagement in domestic Indian affairs highlights its multifarious role in moulding the country's foreign and domestic policies, frequently obfuscating the distinction between covert operations and intelligence collection.

Narendra Modi's tenure as India's prime minister has been characterized by Hindutva, a nationalist movement based on Hindu supremacy. Allegations of extremism and state-sponsored violence have resulted from the growing adoption of this ideology by state institutions, including intelligence services, under his leadership. A disturbing example of this trend is the alleged participation of Indian operatives in a plot to kill a Sikh leader in the US.

INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS
MARCH 28, 2024

The conspiracy to assassinate American Sikh leader Gurpatwant Singh Pannu has sent shockwaves through the international community, prompting investigations and condemnations. The purported participation of Indian intelligence operatives in the conspiracy to kill Pannu is not a singular event, but rather a component of a larger trend of state-sponsored terrorism with international implications.

This pattern is further reinforced by reports that connect Indian operatives to the murder of Sikh leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada, presenting a worrisome image of state-approved extrajudicial violence. Such claims highlight the pressing requirement for an extensive probe into the operations of the Indian intelligence establishment and the involvement of government players in terror attacks abroad. The world community has taken note of the seriousness of India's

suspected state terrorism. Comments by international leaders like Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the testimony by US Assistant Secretary of State Donald Lu before the US Congress Committee revealing the depth of India's alleged state terrorism, implicating Indian government officials in the nefarious plot, should be taken as strong warnings in response to the allegations.

Due to the seriousness of the situation, Washington brought up the matter with New Delhi, straining diplomatic ties and raising questions about state actors' accountability for committing acts of violence outside of their boundaries. The world waited anxiously to see India's response to the severe charges as charges grew but to no avail and Western media outlets examined the details of the plot.

The gravity of the situation and the pressing need

New terror wave

EDITORIALS

A string of deadly terrorist attacks over the past few days – with the bombing in KP's Bisham area on Tuesday being the latest atrocity – drives home the grim point that Pakistan is in the midst of a multidimensional terrorist insurgency.

From the coast and interior of Balochistan to the rugged mountains of the north, violence is occurring with alarming frequency. While most of the victims thus far have been civil and military security personnel, the Bisham attack targeted Chinese nationals. According to officials, at least six people were killed in what has been termed a suicide bombing – five of them Chinese. The foreigners were en route to the Dasu power project from Islamabad when an explosives-laden car smashed into their vehicle.

Meanwhile in Turbat, Baloch separatist militants attacked the PNS Siddique naval base on Monday night. An FC trooper was martyred in the incident. Last week, security forces had thwarted a terrorist attack, also carried out by Baloch militants, on the Gwadar Port Authority Complex.

At the time of writing, no group had claimed responsibility for the Bisham bombing. In the past, both Baloch militants and religiously inspired fighters have targeted Chinese interests in the country. An ISPR statement has identified "certain foreign elements" as being responsible for the latest wave of terrorism, while

the Foreign Office has said "enemies of Pakistan-China friendship" are behind the violence. Certainly, both the Bisham and Gwadar attacks appear to be aimed at derailing the Pakistan-China relationship, specifically the economic aspect of it. The fact that Chinese blood has been spilt makes matters more serious. Several past incidents have also resulted in the death of Chinese nationals, such as the 2021 attack in Kohistan, which is close to Bisham, and the 2022 assault on Karachi University's Confucius Institute.

Beijing's reaction has been firm, with the Chinese embassy demanding the Pakistani state take "practical and effective measures" to protect its nationals here. China has come to this country's aid at difficult times, and invested in Pakistan when few others were willing to.

Security must immediately be beefed up for all foreigners working in the country, particular Chinese nationals. The civilian and military leadership must work closely together to uproot the terrorist infrastructure without delay.

If malign foreign actors are involved in subterfuge, diplomatic channels need to be used to communicate to them that their facilitation of terrorist violence will be exposed before the international community.

(Dawn, March 27, 2024)

for an open inquiry into India's intelligence operations are highlighted by their demands for justice and responsibility. The world is waiting impatiently for India's reaction to the accusations that have damaged its reputation globally, as diplomatic tensions boil and calls for action intensify.

World peace and security have been seriously threatened by terrorism ever since the turn of the 21st century. By using various forms of coercion, Indian RAW was able to create, arm, train, and finance terrorist groups like the TTP and various militant outfits in Pakistan, and in other countries. India attempts to destabilize the target nation to undermine its economic progress or exert control over its economy. It is time for regional countries to be united and take action against Indian aggression. The purported engagement of Indian intelligence operatives in the plot to kill Sikh

leaders overseas signifies the perilous intensification of state-sponsored terrorism that carries extensive consequences.

India's intelligence agencies are accused of forsaking their duty to maintain national security in favour of extrajudicial measures meant to advance the goal of the ruling regime, all under the shadow of Narendra Modi's leadership. Those guilty must be held accountable as the world community struggles to deal with the impact of these discoveries. Ensuring justice for the victims of state-sponsored terrorism and breaking the dark web of Indian intelligence requires transparency, accountability, and respect for democratic norms. The only way to reveal the shadow world of Indian intelligence and open the door to a future free from oppression and tyranny is by working together to defend rule of law.

Defining extremism

The British government's recent decision to redefine extremism has stirred up debate about the motives behind the move, and the greater ramifications it may have for those who disagree with state policy. There are genuine fears that the British decision could prompt other Western states – pandering to populist constituencies – to take similar steps. Much like the global debate regarding the elusive definition of terrorism, overly broad interpretations of extremism could be used to haul up those critical of the state in the name of making the world safe from extremists. There is reason to be wary as leading members of the UK's ruling Conservative Party, including the prime minister, have termed pro-Palestine marches in the country 'extremist'. Some Muslim groups have already been named by British officials as falling under this new definition, and others may be next.

Redefining extremism may well be the first step to clamping down on advocacy for Palestine. Ironically, many Western governments are rattled by the pro-Palestine 'from the river to the sea' chant, deeming it extremist, yet fail to see the monstrous, genocidal extremism of the Israeli state. While states need to act against radicalised actors that preach violence against non-combatants, it must be ensured that national liberation movements, such as the Palestinian struggle, are not tarred as 'extremist', and that governments don't use broad powers to lock up those who criticise the official line. This grand crusade against 'extremism'

could meet the same fate as the 'global war on terror', an endless campaign which, while claiming to fight terrorism, ended up destroying countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq.

The new anti-extremism campaign could disproportionately target Muslims and others in Western societies simply for speaking up for Palestine, or criticising the war-mongering of Western governments. It could also influence right-wing actors, such as India's BJP, to tighten the screws on their own Muslim populations in the name of fighting 'extremism'. Instead of coming up with narrow definitions, the international community should deliberate on what exactly qualifies as hate speech and extremism. Certainly, violence and threats of violence and intimidation against religious groups, sects, or ethno-linguistic communities are unacceptable, and most states already have laws to address these threats. Moreover, antiterrorism legislation has to be accompanied by sufficient legal safeguards so that individuals accused of committing or promoting violence can defend themselves. Bypassing fundamental rights in the name of defending them is inexcusable. Arguably, 'extremism' is an even more subjective term than 'terrorism', which is why it is essential that there is maximum global consensus on what constitutes extremism. If the aim is to stop the demonisation of certain communities, then global consensus should be easy to reach. Otherwise, moves to redefine extremism will remain suspect.

(Dawn, March 18, 2024)

Targeting militant sanctuaries

ZAHID HUSSAIN

DAWN
MARCH 20, 2024

The long-simmering tension between the two countries now threatens to escalate into a full-blown conflict after Pakistan's latest air strike on militant sanctuaries inside Afghanistan. The Afghan Taliban regime claims to have retaliated by firing with heavy weapons at Pakistani border security posts. It has now gone beyond a war of words. The latest military actions mark a new low in Pakistan's relations with the interim Taliban regime.

The current crisis has come after yet another terrorist attack at a security post last week in North Waziristan by a militant group operating from across the border, claiming the lives of seven Pakistani soldiers. Islamabad seems to have lost its patience after this attack. The air strike came a day after Pakistani leaders vowed to take the war to the terrorist sanctuaries across the border. Pakistan has lost more than 300 security personnel to terrorist attacks in the last two years, mainly carried out by the TTP (whose leadership is based in Afghanistan) and its affiliates.

There have been conflicting reports about the casualties. While Pakistan claims to have targeted militants in the air strikes, Kabul says those killed were women and children. A Pakistan Foreign Office statement said the intelligence-based action targeted militants belonging to the Gul Bahadur group believed to have been involved in most of the terrorist attacks, which have escalated in the past two years. One of the most powerful militant commanders, Gul Bahadur has also been closely associated with Al Qaeda.

Pakistan last year reportedly bombed targets in the Salala neighbourhood in Nangarhar province, but the Foreign Office rejected the reports. There had also been some reports of Pakistan having carried out cross-border operations to take out militant leaders based in Afghanistan. But there has never been official confirmation of those attacks.

Curiously, Pakistan has now gone public, claiming it conducted the air strikes in the Afghan provinces of Paktika and Khost, which host thousands of militants belonging to various factions of the TTP. It reflects

Islamabad's rising ire over the escalation in terrorist attacks in Pakistan, which have targeted mainly the security forces. Belligerent statements from some Afghan Taliban leaders seem to have also pushed Pakistan into issuing a public warning.

In a statement, Afghanistan's defence ministry, headed by Mullah Yaqoob, warned Pakistan of serious consequences: "The country's defence and security forces are ready to respond to any kind of aggression and will defend the country's territorial integrity in any situation." The statement also called the Durand Line, which divides the two countries, "artificial". The Afghan Taliban leaders have repeatedly challenged the legitimacy of the Durand Line. The war of words highlights the worsening tensions between Islamabad and the Kabul regime.

According to Pakistani officials, 5,000 to 6,000 TTP militants have taken shelter in Afghanistan. If their family members are included, the number is in the tens of thousands. Most had fled the army operation in the former tribal regions in 2014. Many of them have also been fighting alongside the Afghan Taliban against foreign forces. The TTP has virtually become an extension of its Afghan counterpart, and it is not surprising that there has been a massive surge in militant activities in Pakistan after the end of America's war and the return of Taliban rule in Afghanistan.

Pakistan has directly held the Afghan Taliban regime responsible for the terrorist attacks. "The Afghan interim government is not only arming the terrorists but also providing a safe haven for other terrorist organisations as well as being involved in incidents of terrorism in Pakistan," an ISPR said in a statement after the latest terrorist attack in North Waziristan.

Pakistan has also accused some of the Afghan Taliban commanders of using the TTP as a proxy. It is certainly a grave situation. There has also been strong evidence of the Afghan Taliban being involved with the TTP in conducting cross-border terrorist attacks. Last year, hundreds of militants crossed the border and overran Pakistan's security posts in Chitral. For

the security forces in Pakistan, another primary concern is that of the militants laying their hands on the modern weaponry left behind by Nato troops and the former Afghan army.

Given their long connection and ideological proximity, the Afghan Taliban will not take action against their fellow jihadists. Instead, they insist that Islamabad make peace with the group, which has been responsible for the killing of thousands of people in Pakistan. Indeed, Pakistan has few options after the failure of diplomatic efforts to persuade the Islamic regime to expel the TTP.

Nevertheless, military options have severe repercussions for regional peace. A wider conflagration's spill-over effects will be disastrous for the country's internal and external security. Indeed, we must keep up pressure on the Afghan Taliban but should not close doors on diplomatic efforts. Instead of knee-jerk reactions, we must think more rationally.

There is no doubt that the Afghan Taliban's return to power has been a major contributory factor in the revival of terrorist violence in Pakistan.

It is almost a return to the pre-military operation situation — perhaps even worse, as the militants seem to be better organised this time and possess sophisticated weapons.

The attacks against Pakistan's security forces are being carried out with impunity, raising questions about our strategy to deal with the situation.



Funeral prayers for officers martyred in North Waziristan



The funeral prayers of two army officers, who were among seven martyred yesterday in a terrorist attack on a security forces' post in North Waziristan, were offered. On March 16, at 6:15 am, a group of six militants stormed the Frontier Corps' post in the Khaddi market area in North Waziristan's Mir Ali area. The militants rammed an explosives-laden vehicle into the gate, followed by multiple blasts, including a suicide bombing.

Seven soldiers including Lt Col Syed Kashif Ali Shaheed, 39, resident of Karachi and Capt Muhammad Ahmed Badar Shaheed, 23, resident of Talagang — were martyred. Six terrorists were also neutralised in the subsequent clearance operation.

Bahadur's outfit is the strongest militant group in North Waziristan. He was flushed out in Operation Zarb-i-Azb in 2014 and fled to Afghanistan. In the early hours of March 17, the funeral prayers of the two officers were offered at Chaklala Garrison Rawalpindi.

President Asif Ali Zardari, Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee General Sahir Shamshad Mirza and Chief of Army Staff Gen Syed Asim Munir attended the prayers, along with other senior serving military and civil officers, relatives of the martyred officials, and locals of the area.

(Iftikhar Shirazi — Dawn, March 17, 2024)

Countering terrorism in newly merged districts

The merger of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) into Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) in 2018 marked a significant shift in the governance and security dynamics of the region. This amalgamation aimed to integrate the tribal areas into mainstream Pakistani governance structures, striving for development, stability, and peace in the region. However, the transition has been marred by persistent challenges, particularly concerning terrorism and extremism in the Newly Merged Districts (NMDs). The analysis identifies historical neglect and marginalization, socioeconomic deprivation, and rugged terrain as key drivers of terrorism in the NMDs. These factors have contributed to the emergence and proliferation of extremist ideologies and militant groups, posing significant challenges to governance and security. Understanding the drivers behind terrorism in these regions, identifying the associated challenges, and exploring viable options for addressing these issues are critical endeavours for policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders alike.

However, the 1980s heralded a decade of transformation for FATA. The increasing Soviet influence in Afghanistan thrust the adjoining FATA region into the international spotlight. The United States, amidst the Cold War with the Soviet Union, developed a renewed interest in the tribal belt. Its Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) collaborated with Pakistan's premier intelligence agency to finance, train and arm mujahedeen, who were operating from (former) FATA. Pakistani scholar Tariq Amin Khan has observed that this external funding and interest in Islamizing Pakistan's largely secular public sphere were unprecedented.

The drivers of terrorism in the NMDs are varied and complex, stemming from socio-economic, political, security and ideological factors. Socio-economic disparities, including marginalization, poverty, and limited access to education and employment opportunities, create fertile ground for radicalization and recruitment by terrorist groups.

Weak governance structures, corruption, and ethnic and tribal tensions exacerbate security challenges, allowing terrorist organizations to exploit governance deficits and inter-communal conflicts for their agendas.

Geographical proximity to conflict zones, such as the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, exposes the NMDs to spillover effects of violence, while inadequate border management facilitates the movement of militants and illicit goods. Pervasive radical ideologies, sectarian tensions, and the propagation of extremist narratives further contribute to the perpetuation of terrorist activities in the region. Following the Taliban's rise to power in Afghanistan, Pakistan witnessed a staggering 73% surge in terrorist attacks during the initial 21 months. This increase is markedly higher compared to the corresponding period before the Taliban's takeover. Since the Taliban assumed control of Kabul in August 2021, Pakistan has experienced a notable uptick in incidents of terrorist violence. Over the span of 21 months, from August 2021 to April 2023, there has been a concerning 138% rise in the number of fatalities resulting from these attacks. The report underscores that the escalating patterns of terrorism will exacerbate Pakistan's enduring security challenges. These include the ongoing Taliban militancy in the KP and the former tribal areas, the Baloch nationalist insurgency in Balochistan, ethno-nationalist violence in Sindh, along with escalating religious extremism and radicalism.

Addressing effective measures to combat terrorism and extremism and preventing the wave of terrorism in Newly Merged Districts, involves several approaches. Firstly, promoting infrastructure and functional mechanisms, as well as organic structures of institutions, can help protect the fundamental rights of the people, as enshrined in the Constitution of Pakistan, thereby addressing the issue of terrorism to some extent. Secondly, applying Lederach's pyramid as a problem-solving framework emphasizes engaging with communities and individuals to foster

long-term, sustainable conflict transformation, rather than simply managing or containing conflict through political settlements. Thirdly, desensitizing and demilitarizing the environment of Newly Merged Districts can promote a culture of education, dialogue and academic and physical activities. Implementing sophisticated reforms in the National Action Plan (NAP) to counter terrorism and extremism in the regions, and apprehending outlawed militant groups, is crucial. Most importantly, fostering harmony among civil-military relations is essential to build confidence and ensure state security. Last but not the least, Pakistan should establish and improve its relationship with Afghanistan, while also taking the initiative of non-involvement and fostering relations with global powers. This will pave the way to tackle terrorism and strengthen internal dynamics, enhancing the social contract between the people and the state.

*(Zakir Ullah —
Pakistan Observer,
March 27, 2024)*



Terrorizing the CPEC

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's upcoming official visit to China, intended to strengthen the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), is clouded by concerns following two recent terrorist attacks targeting Chinese nationals. One attack near Bisham city in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province resulted in the death of five Chinese nationals and a Pakistani driver en route to the Dasu hydroelectric dam project site. Another attack was thwarted in Gwadar, Balochistan, where armed assailants affiliated with the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) targeted the Gwadar Port Authority Complex, vital for CPEC. These incidents raise security apprehensions ahead of Sharif's visit.

Recent attacks targeting Chinese interests have underscored escalating security concerns surrounding the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Pakistan swiftly condemned the attacks, emphasizing the safety of Chinese nationals and projects. High-ranking Pakistani officials, including the Prime Minister and Federal Ministers, along with religious figures like Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman, visited the Chinese Embassy to express condolences and pledge to bring the perpetrators to justice. The Pakistani Foreign Office reiterated its commitment to combating terrorism, attributing the attack to enemies of Pakistan-China friendship and pledging support for China. Conversely, China strongly condemned the attack, urging Pakistan to swiftly investigate and ensure the safety of Chinese nationals and CPEC projects. China reaffirmed its commitment to supporting Pakistan in fighting terrorism and safeguarding their partnership and shared projects like CPEC.

During Premier Shehbaz's visit, security threats are likely to be a

key focus, underscoring the delicate balance between economic cooperation and security in the Pakistan-China relationship. Despite recent incidents, Pakistan reaffirmed its commitment to providing high-level security for Chinese workers involved in the second phase of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Minister Ahsan Iqbal assured the Chinese Ambassador of extensive efforts to safeguard Chinese personnel. Both sides committed to accelerating CPEC's second phase and forming a working group for various corridors, including job creation, innovation, green energy and regional development. Discussions emphasized a strategic approach to maximize the success of Special Economic Zones (SEZs), with proposals for knowledge exchange visits and collaboration with Chinese provinces and industry groups. The importance of enhancing regional connectivity through projects like Gwadar Port and the M-8 motorway was highlighted to strengthen trade links and regional integration. Despite security risks, Pakistan affirmed its determination to maintain uninterrupted progress on CPEC projects, recognizing security as vital for development.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) faces a multitude of internal and external security threats, posing challenges to its successful implementation. Internally, insurgent groups and ethnic-based separatist movements in the Balochistan province have targeted CPEC infrastructure projects, aiming to disrupt operations and undermine the stability of the region. Externally, the geopolitical rivalry between India and Pakistan poses a significant threat, with India viewing CPEC as a strategic encroachment by China into South Asia.

*(Asif Khurshid — Pakistan Observer,
April 03, 2024)*

Afghan govt's reluctance to take action against TTP

DURDANA NAJAM

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The return of the Taliban to power in August 2021 was both a matter of joy and comfort for Islamabad. The expected outcome of the transition was peace returning to Pakistan's long-embattled western borders. That was not to be. In fact, the number of strikes against Pakistan from the militants based in Afghanistan grew to an alarming rate. Pakistan's repeated appeals to the Afghan interim government to rein in the rouge element using Afghanistan soil to attack Pakistan, at best, fell on deaf ears and, at worse, developed a cleavage between both countries. Today, Pakistan's western border has turned into a battleground. As patience wore off with the Taliban's persistence to ignore all international and diplomatic norms as well as their refusal to obey the peace accord Pakistan brokered between the Taliban and the US, no other option was left but to hit the militant sanctuaries across the border through an air strike. The retaliatory artillery fires by the Afghan Taliban have now turned the situation extremely volatile. Tension with Afghanistan presents one of the major foreign policy and security challenges to the newly installed government, as the escalating incidents of terrorism can easily eclipse any development initiative involving foreign investment.

Combating the TTP is becoming difficult, given the Afghan government's reluctance to take action against them. According to Pakistani officials, 5,000 to 6,000 TTP fighters are based in Afghanistan. Last week's air strike on the Afghan border provinces of Paktika and Khost was in retaliation to the TTP's attack on a security checkpost in North Waziristan, resulting in the killing of seven soldiers and officers. The attack was one of the most heinous carried out so far by the TTP, which in the last two years has killed more than 300 security personnel. Not only is the TTP provided with a haven in Afghanistan to operate with impunity against Pakistan, but at their disposal are highly sophisticated weapons.

This was the first time that Islamabad openly admitted to the action. In other words, it is a tacit warning to the Afghan

regime that if it fails to take action against TTP, Pakistan will not hesitate to take the war across the border. Pakistan, as is evident, is increasingly becoming frustrated by the Afghan regime's inertia. The frustration further increases as Islamabad sees decades of political effort in bringing an anti-Indian and pro-Pakistan regime in Afghanistan failing miserably. Instead of mellowing down, as would have been expected in Pakistan, the Kabul regime has taken a definite position after the strikes. The Afghan defence minister has said that his country would use every force to defend its national sovereignty.

Though calm has returned to the borders, that does not mean peace has prevailed. The situation can become hostile anytime if the cross-border militant attacks on Pakistani security forces are not stopped. The attack on a military convoy in the northwestern district of Dera Ismail Khan a few days after the Pakistan airstrike indicates the as-usual approach of the Afghan regime.

The question is: can Pakistan afford a full-blown military action against Afghanistan? Realising the consequences of such an adventure, which threatens regional peace, the new government has taken a cautious approach to dealing with the situation. Pakistan's defence minister has shown interest in solving the terrorism issues with Afghanistan through a dialogue. In this regard, a delegation led by Commerce Secretary Khurram Aga has arrived in Afghanistan to open talks on bilateral trade. Both sides have pledged "to tackle existing hurdles in the transit areas with joint and concerted measures". It is also essential to make the Afghan Taliban realise that after decades of foreign occupation, making the same mistake of harbouring militants could pose severe threats to Afghanistan's internal security. It might as well pave the way for new interventions. The recent attack by the Daesh Khorasan in Kandahar, killing dozens of people, should be enough for the regime to smell the coffee.



Afghanistan has to dislodge itself from TTP

SHER ALI BUKHARI

Pakistan
OBSERVER
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Since the arrival of Afghan Taliban 2.0 in Kabul on 15th August 2021, Pakistan's key concerns revolve around the elimination of TTP which enjoys institutional support from the rank and file of Afghans. Experts view that the Afghan Taliban and Pakistan Taliban are different sides of the same coin because of similar ideological goals, and ethical and religious attachment. Furthermore, some experts view that the Afghan Taliban is paying back to TTP because the latter segment greatly helped the Afghan Taliban during the last two decades of the war against terrorism (2001-2021).

Regardless of the divergence of opinions, facts never tell a lie. A recent report by the UNSC on Afghanistan depicts that TTI is gaining ground in Afghanistan due to the support of the Afghan Taliban. Furthermore, Pakistan's own defense and foreign ministry inside reports concluded a similar opinion as Pakistan has witnessed 60 percent increase in terrorist attacks in the country during last year (2023), the highest number of terrorist attacks in years.

These alarming situations posed the political and military leadership of Pakistan to undertake a correct decision to terminate any possible peace talks with TTP as conditions of peace talks with TTP led to total surrender of state at the moment. Furthermore, assessment reports from the US Institute of Peace depict that Pakistan's military is crystal clear about terrorism and TTP - which have to be terminated from the surface of the country.

However, despite the strategic and legal right decision of Pakistan about TTP, the Afghan Taliban have remained adamant about the changing situation. First, they remained in denial of any nexus between the Afghan Taliban and TTP. Second, they push harder for bridging peace talks between Pakistan and TTP, which is unacceptable to Pakistan. And now, they are actively backing fractions of banned terrorist outfits in Afghanistan, especially TTP. The result is obvious: Deterioration of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations.

Despite the reckless behaviour on the side of the Afghan

Taliban, Pakistan has to follow a multilayer approach in dealing with the issue of TTP along with maintaining a goodwill relationship with Afghanistan owing to the immense strategic importance of the landlocked country.

First of all, Pakistan should initiate full kinetic and military response to terrorist attacks from Afghanistan in the form of TTP. We have the full military capability to undo the menace of terrorism as Pakistan's military successfully conducted the military operation against terrorists during *Swat Operation* (2008), *Operation Sherdil* (2007-2013), *Operation Zarb-e-Azb* (2016) and *Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad* (2017-present), mainly in KP and former FATA. Furthermore, owing to a large consensus between political and military leadership, Pakistan should actively ask for counter-terrorism cooperation with the USA for the prevention of Afghanistan as a terrorist hub.

Second, Pakistan should actively manage its border to contain the threat of terrorism from Afghanistan. For that purpose, Pakistan's military has successfully undertaken fencing of a largely porous border of 2611 km, which could greatly help in managing the nefarious activities of TTP. Furthermore, the Pakistan government should actively pursue the Afghan Taliban for accepting the Durand Line as an international border.

Third, last year, Pakistan made a correct decision to deport illegal Afghan refugees, which stands at 600,000 out of 3-5 million total Afghan refugees who have staying in Pakistan since the 1980s. Owing to security and economic pressure, this deportation scheme has been undertaken; however, it can equally generate pressure on the Afghan Taliban to dislodge themselves from TTP. Nevertheless, at the same time, Pakistan should respect international norms and value while deportation program of Afghan refugees.

Fourth, Pakistan should maintain a high level of political, military and ideological contacts with the Afghan Taliban to maintain a potential leverage on them. For that instance, these contacts should revolve around

germinating goodwill among the political, military and religious leadership of both countries to foster a friendly relationship. For instance, since the arrival of the Taliban, Pakistan has tried to maintain a full level of contact with the Taliban at various levels.

Fifth, owing to four decades of war in Afghanistan, the country has witnessed an alarming rate of humanitarian crisis. Pakistan is among the first countries to send humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. Pakistan should continue to allow this humanitarian aid to Afghanistan to create goodwill between the Afghan Taliban and the Afghan people.

Sixth, being a war-ridden country, Afghanistan is desperately looking for economic activities, investment and aid. For that, both Pakistan and China can actively pursue the agenda of economic recovery of Afghanistan. For instance, the expansion of CPEC into Afghanistan and later to Central Asian Republics, can equally benefit each country of the region and make the region an economic hub and regional connectivity and development, a dream of CPEC and BRI.

Finally, Pakistan along with regional countries and the international community has to build a consensus on the issue of stability of Afghanistan. For example, terrorism, inclusive government, human rights, women's rights and girls' education should be agenda of talks with the Afghan Taliban. Terrorism should be a red line among them. Regional forums such as SAARC, ECO, SCO and Moscow Format Consultation can be used as effective platforms for building a consensus on Afghanistan.

In a nutshell, the Afghan Taliban should not live in foolish paradise dreaming of hoping for recognition of the regime while siding and aiding with terrorist outfits. Concerns of Pakistan are legitimate; therefore, Afghanistan has to dislodge itself from TTP to maintain a good relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The choice is obvious for the Afghan Taliban: TTP or Pakistan. On the other side, Pakistan should maintain a strategy of stick and carrot to pursue the Afghan Taliban in sensitive areas of Pakistan. One can conclude that Pakistan does not lose patience while dealing with the Afghan Taliban and maintaining a multilayer approach to protecting its core national interests in Afghanistan and the region.

Afghanistan must realize that Pakistan is not its enemy

INAM UL HAQUE

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The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) finds itself in deep quandary when its sole benefactor, Pakistan, seems to have turned away from overwriting its many shortcomings. The shift in Pakistan's policy was discernable, gradual and forced by recalcitrance of 'some' elements within the IEA. Pakistan's policy shift contains many firsts. For the first time, the GoP is serious in repatriation of illegal Afghan refugees, a staggering 0.7 million. For the first time, realising the IEA's inability and unwillingness to 'restrain' TTP (as eviction is impossible), PAF struck at TTP hideouts at Birmal (Paktika province), and at Spera (Khowst province) in eastern Afghanistan.

Aside from the IEA's claims of women's and children's casualties, these attacks were precise, as Afghan government didn't allow press coverage in the aftermath. And unlike in the past, GoP took responsibility for the strikes. For the first time, GoP seems to mean business when it comes to IEA's harmful hospitality of TTP...that stands undeniable given a recently leaked media clip showing Commander Yahya of TTP's Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group giving marching orders for attacks against Pakistan's LEAs, while inside Afghanistan, at Dangar Algad in Paktika.

IEA is not recognised and although Russia accepted its Military Attaché, and China its ambassador recently, the regime lacks wider diplomatic legitimacy, curtailing its much-needed access to international financial system etc. A severe drought in the Southwest is forcing Afghans to migrate to Iran. On women and minority rights, IEA faces immense pressure. Governance is challenged by the Emirate's lax border control, especially along Pakistan, making cross-border terrorism possible.

TTP virtually challenges the territorial writ of Kabul. Afghan

economy is reeling. IEA is divided between the pragmatic North and the more puritanical South over TTP handling. IEA also suffers from division on a range of issues internally. The IEA Army lacks unity of command that comes alongside traditions. Morphing from a resistance movement to a stable government is becoming bothersome. Anti-Taliban forces in the north and west are lurking in the shadows.

And most of all IS-K considers Afghan Emirate less Islamic, for being more friendly towards China, Iran and Russia – countries that IS-K perceives nemesis of Islam and Muslims, being antagonists to IS-K's Salafi ideology, and complicit in shedding Muslim blood; China in its Turkestan; Russia in Afghanistan, Syria and Chechnya; and Iran partnering with Russia in Syria, and having anti-Salafi credentials. In a spate of bombing from Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan, IS-K in a bid to outperform other nihilist groups is now focusing on spectacular attacks with mass casualties, as the 22nd March theater attacks in Russia killing over 137 amply suggest. The latest came on 26 March on Chinese workers along KKH 'presumptively'. IS-K is Emirate's biggest threat, whose ranks it fears will swell, if and when, IEA cadre or TTP rank and file are infected with discontent. The internal politics by 'some' within the IEA leveraging TTP against Pakistan for 'some' tactical gains, complicate the already complex situation for Kabul, that is comparatively short on diplomatic schooling and geo-strategic nuances. This is further obscured by muddy thinking and obstinate shutting of eyes from ground realities.

IEA is wrong, that Pakistan will compromise on the TTP issue now or in future. IEA is wrong, that TTP will acquiesce to 'some' saner voices within the Emirate suggesting restraint, while 'others' encourage it against Pakistan. IEA is wrong, that TTP issue can be resolved through negotiations. Mindsets cannot be corrected through talks; more so, IEA needs to try this antidote vis-a-vis IS-K first. IEA is wrong, that TTP fighters will lie low. IEA is wrong, that pursuing trade relations with Pakistan while keeping TTP on the back burner will work. IEA is wrong, that it can re-orient its trade and commerce through Iran, as it knows re-orienting this centuries-old arrangement, cemented by ethnic bonds, is not possible, and that Tehran is more exacting than Islamabad. Elements within the IEA would be dead wrong, if they feel they can pressurise Pakistan in any manner on TTP or other issues, as they have no clue of Pakistan's negative and positive leverages.

Afghan diaspora in particular is wrong, to pursue and persist in an anti-Pakistani, anti-Punjabi mindset, that will harm Afghanistan more than Pakistan. Rather than filibustering without reason on all sorts of media platforms, seeing reason would be more beneficial for Afghans, and not wayward emotionalism.

Following on from the above environment for Afghanistan and for IEA vis-à-vis Pakistan, the suggested strategy for Afghanistan should be where "...Kabul addresses the immediate 'variables' with spoiler potential in bilateralism. And these are TTP, bilateral trade and the Durand Line, in that order. And it pursues in parallel, the historic 'constants' of common geography, ethnic ties, inter-dependence, trade relations, religious affinity etc."

On TTP, the most problematic 'variable', the suggested contours of IEA policy should be:

One, developing a consensus within the IEA over handling, disposal and future of TTP. If TTP is to be used against IS-K, it should be merged with IEA Army. If it is retained as a leverage against Pakistan (as the noise in analysis suggests), such notions should be corrected being more harmful to Afghans and Afghanistan.

Two, as IEA has no ability of desire to evict TTP from its entrenched havens in Kunar, Paktika and Khowst, in eastern Afghanistan, Ameer-ul-Momineen, the venerable Moulvi Haibatullah Akhundzada, should outlaw anti-Pakistan violence through a "verifiable and enforceable" fatwa. Elements within TTP unwilling to fall in line then, be dealt with "in close collaboration" with Pakistan, using all means possible. Three, TTP cadre should be dispersed all over Afghanistan. One understands that IEA would not like to create enclaves all over the country, but for effective management and control, it must take their havens away from Durand Line in whatever manner it deems fit. Pakistan may be requested some logistic assistance. While choosing TTP or losing Pakistan, obstinacy and obduracy will have implications. IEA should know that the looming fight against IS-K tomorrow will be facilitated by Pakistan and its alliances.

Four, IEA needs to make concerted efforts to educate its functionaries and public that Pakistan is not their sworn enemy like the former USSR, or the West Plus per se. Most Afghans need to be reminded constantly. And lastly, wrong lessons should not be learnt from the USSR's dissolution or the US/NATO withdrawal!



Lessons from foreign policy management

HINA RABBANI KHAR

INTERNATIONAL
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I am often surprised by how many people believe that foreign policy is something that can be changed or should be changed radically every few years. Foreign policy is not just a written document or a policy statement; it evolves every day and is an amorphous result of the decisions we take at various multilateral and bilateral levels. It is a product of a complex web of our actions and engagements. This complex web works well if there is clarity at the executive level of our broad goals and what we seek to achieve through the multiple layers of activity and engagement.

It is also important to then clearly convey the same priorities to the implementing arm of foreign policy, the able men and women of the Foreign Office, both at the headquarters and at various capitals of the world. Every government since 1947 has promised to pursue an independent foreign policy. So, it is important to determine what really is an independent foreign policy. An independent foreign policy simply means that a country has the space, resources, and muscle to pursue relations with other countries or blocs strictly in the hard pursuit of its national interests. That begs the question: what are a country's national interests? And who defines them? According to the constitution of Pakistan, the people of Pakistan, through their elected representatives, define the country's national interests and empower the executive to pursue them through policy decisions.

We have seen that when democratic structures are weak, governments tend to sideline parliament to play a useful role in foreign policy formulation. It is often considered efficient and smart to keep the role of parliament to a minimum. Countries that have been able to pursue their national interests on the international stage successfully almost always have strong parliamentary oversight and input in foreign policy formulation. One very good example is how

in 2003, the Turkish parliament denied US troops access to Iraq through southeast Turkey, despite months of negotiations on the financial, military, and political levels. The argument here is not whether it was the right or wrong policy, the argument here is that a country needs to have institutional structures that can determine the correct policy for its long-term interests.

We take for granted that in Pakistan institutional structures do not exist for parliament to play an effective role that can benefit the country. As the new government takes over, it is a good time to recall how foreign policy management can be broadened to create space for the government as it interacts with the rest of the world. The 2008-13 term was remarkable for the strengthening of democratic institutions in Pakistan. This was a time after the martyrdom of Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto Shaheed, so the country was in a precarious place.

As foreign minister, I remember we were able to use parliamentary bodies especially the National Security Committee which was headed by Senator Raza Rabbani and had senior representation from all opposition, to chart out the path forward when Pakistan was faced with the Salala incident, where 24 of our servicemen lost their lives to 'friendly fire' without any acknowledgment or apology from our friends. A joint session of parliament was immediately called to chart out the way forward for Pakistan. I think this is a guiding example of how a government should not only go back to the people's representatives for guidance but also create space for itself to negotiate with friends on the new terms of engagement which was required after such an incident. This should serve as proof of how democratic institutions can be strengthened and used to serve national interests.

This was also a time when the presidency under president Asif Ali Zardari played a crucial role in

guiding foreign policy. Although the presidency is not involved in the day-to-day management of foreign policy, I remember how his guidance on some crucial decisions stood the test of time and guided a government that wanted to respond to the immediate pressures of close friends by remaining steadfast on its own course.

When the Arab Spring took over the Arab world, many of our closest friends, both from within the region and in Western capitals, expected this to herald a period of stability for countries like Egypt, Syria, Libya. At that time, our official position was that we would let these countries decide what they choose for themselves and would rather not interfere in their internal affairs. As a slew of Western capitals started celebrating and supporting elements responsible for the ‘Arab Spring’, immense pressure emanated from close friends.

‘Friends of Libya’, ‘Friends of Syria’ groupings emerged, and very friendly and important countries started pressuring Pakistan to join these groupings. I remember at that time, many of our ambassadors stationed in the same countries also felt the need to reconsider our position and not be left on the wrong side of the winds of change. At that time, then-president Zardari’s counsel that ‘watch the Arab Spring turn into a harsh Arab Winter’ turned out to be more accurate than anyone could have imagined, and it guided us at the Foreign Office to keep our position.

Another breakthrough that we have to squarely give credit to the presidency of that time was how the then-president Zardari insisted on visiting China as president every quarter. He was insistent that his visits were not to Beijing only but to different far-flung areas of China. Typically, bureaucrats react badly to anything novel in its scope and prefer to stick to the script. A president visiting one country multiple times in a year – and that too, not the capital city – can be a protocol nightmare and was certainly outside of the rule book. This constant engagement with China’s leadership and visits to different areas of China laid the groundwork for CPEC.

As the new government is taking the reins of the executive, it would be well advised to strengthen democratic institutional structures inside parliament and make foreign policy as inclusive as possible.

Foreign policy management must not fall prey to

the ‘instant gratification’ way of thinking. Amongst all the policy domains the executive has to manage, this perhaps is the most complex, and must always have a long-term trajectory in mind. Only then can ‘all things merge into one and one river run through it’.

Foreign policy is not made in a vacuum or a stagnant pool. It is like sailing in an open ocean; you have to change gear and tact in response to the condition of the ocean.

Likewise, there is no one good policy for all times to come. A policy that is good when the environment for it is conducive becomes bad when the environment has changed for the better or worse. A very good example of that is our relationship management with India.

Pakistan’s relationship with India is perhaps one of the most consequential and also the most complex. Historian and writer Stephen Cohen put the Pakistan-India relationship as one of the most ‘intractable’, in his book ‘Shooting for a Century, The India- Pakistan Conundrum’. Intractable conflict is defined as ‘intense, deadlocked, and resistant to de-escalation or resolution’.

This book was published in 2013. Soon after leaving office as foreign minister in 2013, I shared the stage with the late Cohen and was aghast that he would argue that this conflict is likely to shoot for a century and persist till 2047 and beyond. I remember thinking to myself: these old men have no idea that we have set our relationship on a track of uninterrupted and uninterruptible dialogue – a course that would quickly graduate to the zone of dispute resolution.

With hindsight, perhaps my optimism was tainted by our success in launching dialogue normalization post-Mumbai and also buoyed by the PPP government’s brave decision to break away from a decision post-1965 war that trade with India would not be normalized unless the question of Occupied Kashmir was resolved. No government, democratic or dictatorial, after that had the guts to reverse it.

If you speak to anyone in the Foreign Office who has served on this desk, Pakistan-India normalization has been a tale of missed opportunities. I once put it like this: “When Pakistan goes sane, India goes crazy, when India goes sane Pakistan goes crazy”.

In Pakistan, we were a government that was keen on seizing the opportunity to move forward and unencumber ourselves from our stated positions mode and move towards dispute resolution. The thing with dispute resolution is that it can only take place in an environment of trust. New to the Foreign Office, I had imagined it to have a fossilized approach towards India, and be an ‘immovable feast’ on any fresh way of thinking. Over the years, we had somehow divided the issues between India and Pakistan as ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’, Occupied Jammu and Kashmir was our issue, terrorism and trade was their issue.

In any institution the key to progress is not just to come up with what needs to be done or how to do it; a very important, if not the most important, element is to ensure that there is ‘group think’ and ‘group ownership’ of the what and the how. One thing I realized soon in office was that as an institution we were thinking in silos. The South Asia Division was thinking and propagating the same stated positions on India. That made us institutionalize ‘group think’ in the form of weekly high-level (additional secretary) meetings, which were thinking meetings. In these meetings, we moved away from the immediate issues on our table and deep-dived into the consequential ones. These meetings soon became a place of alternate thinking, deep discussions and free speech, and I soon realized that ‘group think’ was different and better than ‘file think’.

On India, somewhat miraculously we were able to build ownership of the need to move out of our ‘stated’ way of thinking and proactively push for dispute resolution.

Nothing can be done if the stars are not aligned in throwing champions that can partner in achieving any of these wins. The stars were aligned – we had a commerce secretary who was keen to move forward, a foreign secretary who had full ownership of solving the Gordian knot, and all of this was because there was a political push, both at the Presidency with Asif Ali Zardari and with PM Gilani at the PMO. We were also a government that took all other political parties into confidence. I remember as I embarked on an important bilateral trip to India in July 2013, PM Gilani personally took every parliamentary party leader into confidence. Interestingly, across the border, in Nirupama Rao, the foreign secretary



in India, the stars truly were aligned.

Due to this coalition of the willing, ownership at the Foreign Office and the political push, we were able to start the dialogue process to give space so as to find space to move forward. This is not remarkable by any means; it is a very simple and logical way to pursue your interest, one that is grounded in dispute resolution, not dispute perpetuation.

With this approach, Pakistan was able to break the decades of stated position that we cannot move forward on trade unless we move forward on Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. I made the point in the FO that anyone who says that, in fact, never wants to move forward on Kashmir.

The logic was simple: you cannot solve intractable problems in an environment of mistrust; you need a degree of normalization to be at a place to even start talking about solving the intractable. In the same way, we challenged India’s claim that terrorism was their issue. Terrorism was Pakistan’s issue before it was India’s, as we suffered at its hands, and made the point that we would be better served to look at terrorism as a mutual problem/threat.

All of this led us to start the trade normalization process. We were able to move the positive list to the negative list, and also move towards granting MFN status to India. A summary on that was also submitted to the cabinet and was only sent back with minor observations to be brought back for a positive decision. Almost right after that, judicial activism led to the departure of the prime minister and instability ensued.

Unfortunately, the government that followed in Pakistan fell into the trap of holding back green lighting this process until a new government was formed in India. And we all know that the new government India got has not shown any intent to

move forward in earnest with Pakistan; its ethos essentially revolves around a version of India that feeds on division and animosity for Pakistan.

The point of giving this long history of the short years in office is to demonstrate that good policy in a conducive environment becomes bad policy when the environment is hostile. In the current environment, we have to de-risk from taking any decision that is not de-risked from hostile behaviour from our eastern neighbour. The risk of doing the right thing at the wrong time is that it is not stable and consistent, and risks being undone before reaping any real benefits.

In foreign policy, you give space to take space to move forward. But if you give space to give more space with no possibility of moving forward then you are just pursuing a wish, not a policy. I remain the strongest proponent of normalizing trade with all of Pakistan's neighbours. Whether in office or outside of it, I have always maintained deep concern that we must not use trade as a coercive tool on the western border. We are unable to appreciate that trade with Afghanistan is not only bilateral trade but also the conduit/trade corridor for the entire Central Asian Republics.

As far as I know, we have always maintained that Pakistan's strength lies in exploiting its location as a trade corridor between South and Central Asia. When we arbitrarily close our western border for trade for bilateral reasons, we are sending a message that this is an unreliable trade corridor and diverting the future flow of investments in its hard and soft infrastructure.

I write this detailed account because without any doubt the new government will be faced with the India dilemma. Sometimes the best policy is to wait the tide out.

As we entered the Foreign Office in 2022, with FM Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, we were clear-headed on how India had transformed under Modi. There was no delusion that India was serious about moving forward. While in office, almost through all policy decisions the Modi government has demonstrated that it is more attached to stoking hatred for Pakistan specifically, and Muslims in general, than to looking for peace westwards of India.

When the option of going in person to attend the SCO meeting came, we made the difficult decision

to go in person. Once the FM had decided through an in-house discussion, that included a short retreat with former foreign secretaries of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we took others into confidence.

The decision was based on three principles; one, we do not leave an important regional meeting such as the SCO because of location – it is never wise to lock yourself out of that space. Two, and keeping more nuance in mind, we thought this would be a good opportunity to give India a chance to show whether it wants to build a positive posture following this gesture by Pakistan. Three, and perhaps most importantly, there would be an obligatory mention of IIOJK both in the statement and anywhere else where peace and conflict were under discussion.

We all know that the Indian foreign minister's vile and undiplomatic press conference clearly sent the message that they were not interested in pursuing the path of peace in any way. It was sad, and another opportunity lost – but it is what it is.

It has to be mentioned that at the operational level, India gave all the courtesies that are to be expected, but it was clear that at the political level, they were attached to the idea of stoking hatred rather than creating opportunity.

We cannot change our geography; we have to own our geography and look for opportunities to normalize this region. Trade and people-to-people contact is the only way forward, but when the other country decides to go rogue on all its international commitments and bilateral agreements, it can only be foolish to remain starry-eyed about the possibility of moving forward. And you would be equally foolish not to move forward as soon as the circumstances change.



Learning from better economies

AMAR Z KHAN

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My recent article in these pages ('Reckless borrowing', March 18), while appreciated for its candidness, has also evoked a strong sense of despondence among readers. The question that pervades everyone's mind is how to escape the spiral and whether there is a way out. I must confess that, having waded through both articles and TV programs by economic experts, I have noticed a complete paucity of practically implementable steps for building a journey towards generating foreign revenue. I share below my thoughts based on observations and experiences in countries I have visited and worked in.

The core point is to appreciate that the country must earn, and not borrow, foreign exchange for its domestic consumption. Unless we have more resources, we must curb and rationalize expenditure. This requires the courage to allow 'wrong' businesses to close and radical diversification and upscaling of exports with the help of international collaboration. Our present preoccupation with protecting import substitution and building exports exclusively off local raw materials or produce will continue to retard our export aspirations. Successful countries look outward to identify gap trends in international demand in the medium term and build and revamp their capacity to service this need gap. This is radically different from our current approach.

Let me share strategies adopted by countries facing similar crises that enabled them to successfully turn around their economies while living within objectives similar to Pakistan's. This warrants building a national consensus supported by all political parties. For this, we first need to be transparent with the nation to prepare people for short-term dislocation and hardship, with a view to the light at the end of the tunnel. First, new FDI should initially be only permitted into predominantly export-generating projects, not import substitution. We have examples to consider here: Malaysia initially required foreign investors to seek cabinet approval which was only given if the project was wholly for exports.

India adopted a similar strategy and it permitted Honda and Coke to invest in the country if the project generated \$5 foreign currency income for every \$2 of foreign exchange consumed by this investment by way of imports, other foreign expenses, royalties and profit repatriation. Second,

existing businesses and manufacturers – whether local or foreign-owned – should be informed that they are welcome to sell products and services to meet domestic demand but they must generate their own foreign exchange (through expansion into exports) for their import needs or source this in a Dutch auction of residual foreign currency left over after the government had met essential needs like foreign currency debt repayment, and other critical essentials (including, oil, defence, exporters' import needs).

For instance, Nigeria in 1983 when faced with a similar foreign currency crisis announced that it could no longer underwrite the nation's foreign currency consuming demand by increasing the country's foreign currency borrowings. Today, despite similar corruption levels and other fiscal indiscipline, this bankrupt country now boasts a Sovereign Fund as a consequence of import-substituting businesses either dying or retooling and expanding into becoming world-class exporters. Third, instead of relying on building the export momentum on the back of existing local businesses that had developed a local delivery capacity, countries opted for new manufacturing directly for export for which there was no past local experience. In the early 1980s, South Korea started exporting washing machines to the Gulf countries – even when its local population had not seen or used washing machines. Thailand started manufacturing motor vehicles from scratch at scales, quality and prices that made them competitive for export. Malaysia similarly launched chip manufacturing in Penang in the '90s directly for export without any local use. Vietnam likewise boasts multiple such export projects; China's toy manufacturing in the late 1980s is another example. Fourth, the government must admit to the nation that it does not have the capacity to underwrite domestic foreign currency-fueled demand as it cannot afford to increase the country's foreign debt burden which would have to be borne by future generations. A similar strategy was adopted by Nigeria in the 1980s.

Fifth, a radical shift in agricultural production out of low revenue-yielding crops into higher revenue-generating crops for exports. This policy is complemented by a shift away from a dated perspective of meeting food security through domestic production to instead importing the lower cost

crops the production of which has been de-emphasized. It is important to note that China over the past 20 years has de-emphasized production of low-revenue grain (which it now imports) and instead increased from 15 per cent to 55 per cent the proportion of acreage deployed for growing higher-value fruits and vegetables. Similarly, Malaysia has progressively de-emphasized the growing of rubber trees and vegetables and has shifted its arable acreage to oil palm agriculture.

Sixth, building a national consensus on how the country's scarce foreign currency should be rationed to maximize sustainable benefits for the country. A prime example to consider is that of Britain. In the 1970s, after the oil price hike, when faced with a severe foreign currency crunch Britain televised multiple national debates to determine how the population would prioritize its foreign currency-consuming choices. Seventh, the export of raw commodities and minerals should be discouraged/prohibited and instead processing for local value addition should be made mandatory and incentivized. This has been done before. Nigeria over the late 1980s and 1990s reduced crude oil export and invested in refining, crackers and petrochemical plants to convert crude oil into value-added products for exports. Multiple Asian countries including India have also adopted this approach for minerals and commodities extraction.

Eighth, understand the importance of free-floating the exchange rate. The government should not give in to the temptation to manage the currency rate as this will result in greater fiscal deficits or an increase in unaffordable external borrowing. This encourages imports and inhibits exports. Pakistan's history of deteriorating balance of trade over the past 70 years illustrates the folly of not adopting this discipline.

Ninth, the country must avoid fiscal deficits. Cut the government's role to what it can afford based on the revenue it earns. The absence of this discipline causes inflation which causes greater poverty for the poor and middle classes; loan interest rates to rise, inhibiting manufacturing and employment; it increases the government's future debt service obligation further and reduces its future capacity to spend on current needs; and results in spiralling depreciation of the currency

This caution is further heightened for Pakistan given the current government's desire to invest in affordable housing, more public transport, healthcare, education and tree planting. Nigeria followed eight out of the nine points. It consequently illustrates all the negative consequences tabulated above. OECD countries by adopting this discipline in the last two decades reflect the consequent benefit of low inflation throughout this period.

UAE's economic rise: Opportunities for Pakistan

ZAHEEN QURESHI

Pakistan
OBSERVER

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In fewer than fifty years, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has evolved from a small rentier state administered by the United Kingdom to a modern society with a diverse economy and a strong regional presence as well as a worldwide network of friends and partners. The once-divided and marginalized state is seen today as a rising middle power with the second-largest Arab economy. In the international arena, the UAE has clear ambitions: rather than being known just as a regional power, it aims to be more like Singapore, wielding technological and economic power that is greatly disproportionate to its size. But the story of UAE's development is not complete without the mention of the Pakistani diaspora played a vital part in its growth, particularly in sectors such as health, construction and education. On top of a deeply entrenched Pakistani diaspora, UAE being the largest source of remittance for Pakistan and the third largest trading partner diaspora signify strong Pak-UAE relations and situates Pakistan in a perfect position to leverage the rise of the UAE for the benefit of both nations.

The UAE's remarkable technological ascent and economic diversification sprout from a heterogeneous approach covering strategic initiatives and progressive policies. Key among these is substantial investment in cutting-edge infra-structure, spanning transportation, telecommunications and airports, laying a solid groundwork for both economic expansion and technological advancement. Moreover, concerted diversification efforts outlined in Vision 2021 and Vision 2030 have propelled the UAE away from oil dependency towards sectors like tourism, finance, real estate, renewable energy and technology. Even though oil and gas revenues still account for 15 percent of its GDP, its share in the composition of the economy is markedly less than other GCC states.

Initiatives like the Smart Dubai Initiative and Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030 further underscore the UAE's com-

mitment to leveraging technology for efficiency gains, enhancing government services and fostering knowledge-based industries, solidifying its position as a global innovation leader and premier investment destination in the MENA region. According to the recent United Nations' Technology and Innovation Report, the UAE is the leading Arab country in technology and is ranked 37th out of 166 countries. Moreover, the UAE has also emerged as a thriving entre-preneurial hub with more than 40 percent of the country's start-ups being technology-based. The prime example in this regard is Careem that was acquired by Uber for \$3.1billion in 2019.

The increasing focus on the knowledge-based economy and technology in the UAE offers significant opportunities for Pakistan. With Pakistan producing 20,000 IT graduates annually, there's a pool of talent ready to tap into these oppor-tunities. The migration of skilled workers to the UAE not only benefits the individuals themselves but also benefits Pakistan's perennial current account deficit through remittances. On the flip side, UAE's financial institutes can also invest in Pakistan's budding IT sector, which has a huge upside potential, with up to 100 percent growth recorded last year. Besides, these investments would also ease the constraints faced by Pakistan in accessing the financial resources required to invest in advanced technologies, infrastructural development, and technology acquisition.

Furthermore, investment by the Pakistani Government in education and skills development programs tailored to emerging technologies can prepare Pakistan's workforce to effectively leverage UAE's technological advancements

as the country currently lacks the expertise in sectors such as artificial intelligence, and advanced manufacturing. These education programs can include vocational training, STEM education initiatives and scholarships for advanced studies in relevant fields.

Additionally, the UAE relies heavily on food imports to meet the needs of its rising population. Investing in agricultural opportunities in Pakistan could indeed align well with the UAE's National Food Security Strategy 2051, particularly in terms of diversifying food import sources. The Special Investment Facilitation Centre (SIFC) could play a crucial role in facilitating such investments by showcasing the agricultural investment potential in Pakistan to UAE investors. This move could enhance food security for the UAE while also fostering economic cooperation between the two countries.

Moreover, Pakistan can learn from the UAE's success in developing a thriving tourism and hospitality industry. By following the UAE and promoting its rich cultural heritage, natural beauty and historical landmarks, Pakistan can at-tract tourists from all over the globe.

In conclusion, the relationship between Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) stands poised for further growth and collaboration across various sectors. The UAE's remarkable transformation into a global economic powerhouse, fuelled by visionary policies and strategic investments, presents abundant opportunities for Pakistan to leverage. Furthermore, there are abundant areas in which closer cooperation can benefit and be a win-win situation for both nations.



Vision Pakistan 2047

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MALIK AHMAD JALAL

Martin Luther King declared, “I have a dream”, not “I have a plan”. This illustrates the superiority of a vision over policy or plan in bringing about transformative change. ‘I have a dream’ expresses the essence of visionary leadership, which not only serves as a source of inspiration, emotional connection but also provides a sense of destination and meaningful context for the people to undertake sacrifices in realizing the vision.

Vision matters. First, transformation involves losses and uncertainties for interest groups. No matter how adverse your current situation is, it is known and familiar. Transformation requires letting go of your current status, taking a leap of faith into an uncertain future in the hope that your gains are greater than your sacrifices. A vision is a guiding path through the fog of uncertainty, reassuring the people that their sacrifices are worthwhile. Second, transformation requires a connection with people’s emotions. Emotions fuel people’s commitment to transformation, while intellect or logic follow suit. Convincing, motivating, and emotionally engaging people is the first step in achieving national buy-in for the transformation, and this can be achieved through a vision.

The power of vision of Gen Park Chung-Hee in leading South Korea into an industrialized economy on the model of post ‘Meiji Modernization’ Japan, led to South Korea’s GDP per capita increasing from \$146 to over \$29,700 in two generations. Whether the Declaration of Independence of the US, Vision2030 of Saudi Arabia or The Crazy Ones campaign by Apple, the central role of a vision in charting the path to a new prosperous future cannot be overstated.

Pakistan is going through a painful economic and socially divisive period due to misguided policies of the last thirty years. We are struggling to generate jobs or wealth, which is leading to the flight of both financial and human capital from the country. This has created a sea of discontent and contributed to our political and social instability. Therefore, our outdated economic model needs a transformation.

Our economic transformation is being implemented through the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) under a combined military, political and civil service leadership. The SIFC has a wide policy mandate to mobilize all government departments for economic

revival through investments and exports. It has a number of successes, such as attracting investment in the Reko Diq project and changes to foreign currency earning regulations to facilitate tech exports. However, the SIFC’s actions are misunderstood and often resisted by the public as well as interest groups. These misunderstandings stem from a disconnect between policy actions and the context of the economic transformation in which the SIFC is operating. Take for instance, the decision to deport illegal Afghan immigrants, which is an unpopular and highly criticized move. While painful and considered a violation of human rights, these are essential steps for economic revival by stopping the leakage of an estimated \$15 million per day of foreign exchange through smuggling to Afghanistan. As Friedrich Nietzsche stated, “He who has a Why to live for, can bear almost any How”. Therefore, the SIFC needs to go beyond policy fixes and instead start with ‘why’ sacrifices are necessary for a prosperous economy and a thriving society – this why is the vision of transformation. Once our citizens embrace the vision, they will be unified in their support of ‘how’ such a vision is realized.

The SIFC must lead on policy action but also in formulating the country’s economic vision. The vision acts as a bridge to walk over from our past to a prosperous future or link our everyday struggles with aspirations for a better future for ourselves and our families. The vision will forge the nation’s commitment to action.

The Saudi Vision 2030 is a superb example of a cohesive vision directing the Saudi nation towards an empowered future, starting from a vision statement for a ‘vibrant society’, a ‘thriving economy’, and an ‘ambitious nation’. The implementation of Vision 2030 is primarily through the Public Investment Fund (PIF), which brings together all aspects of private and public-sector capabilities to deliver transformation projects. The SIFC has the potential to be Pakistan’s ‘PIF’ but is missing an equally grand vision of transformation for Pakistan, that can be Pakistan 2047.

A powerful and emotive vision will magnify the actions of the SIFC and ensure longevity and sustainability of reforms, as in the case of South Korea and Saudi Arabia. Pakistanis are well-aware and sceptical of our history

of five-year plans, which fizzled out without sustainable impact or economic transformation. A Pakistan 2047 vision plus SIFC will be the bridge between the current reality of economic stagnation and our citizens' dream of economic prosperity.

A plan without a vision does not have the power to change reality. Visionary leaders have demonstrated that transformation can be achieved. However, it takes a clear, compelling and powerful vision calling for self-sacrifice, collaboration to take risks and change behavior in order to change our future. Our leaders must formulate this vision of Pakistan 2047 for steering the country towards a prosperous and self-reliant future. A compelling vision is the beginning of the transformation journey of a nation. A crucial, though often overlooked, second part of transformation is effective implementation. I have previously emphasized the importance of a visionary roadmap, like Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' speech, but here I delve into the essential aspect of execution that turns dreams into reality.

A 'vision' is a grand plan or a direction to a destination. However, a vision alone is like having a map without a

car – it remains an aspiration without a practical path to success. Implementation is the bridge that connects a vision to its realization, and it is here that nations like Pakistan have failed, while others like Saudi Arabia or South Korea have succeeded in achieving economic transformation.

Lack of public-sector capability is reinforced by Saudi Arabia and China demanding an alternative implementation structure than our current bureaucratic system for strategic projects like CPEC. Another hindrance to large-scale project execution is policy inconsistency and frequent changes due to political shifts.

Even that did not work. In 2023, another attempt at economic transformation is made through the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC). However, the SIFC's mandate must extend beyond single-window facilitation to project execution. What Pakistan needs is a project implementation arm, much like the Public Investment Fund (PIF) of Saudi Arabia. The PIF is not merely a sovereign wealth fund; it serves as a project development and investment holding company. With a substantial budget and 1500+ personnel, the PIF drives

Road to SIFC

FARHAN BOKHARI

As Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's government takes charge amid the worst economic downturn in Pakistan's history, the future of an investment-starved country remains the biggest challenge for the foreseeable future.

In this lacklustre environment, Pakistanis have for months debated the utility or not of pursuing investments led by the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC). The council has been the proverbial talk of the town, formally bringing together Pakistan's top civil and military leaders on a common platform.

And its principal focus remains embedded in providing agricultural land in central and southern Pakistan to prospective investors from the oil-rich Middle East. For the moment across Pakistan, a host of players have questioned the SIFC as a game changer to lift future prospects. But few have stepped ahead to welcome the SIFC as an alternative to steer the country out of its immediate economic crisis.

As this debate continues, Pakistan is urgently in need of a long-term plan to carry the country away

from recurring economic crises. Given Pakistan's history, meeting the challenge will come about not just through the creation of another platform as in the SIFC. On the contrary, the eventual outcome on this front must emerge from carving out a road map through a series of reforms aimed at transforming Pakistan.

The Pakistani public's hopes of witnessing such a staggering investment figure quickly led to unbridled pessimism. The lesson, if one was to be learnt from that exercise, was vitally just one – that taking up an initiative through a vast dollar sum runs the risk of having to deliver it quickly. As for the future of projects under the SIFC, two interrelated initiatives will be vital for its success.

First, Pakistan must strive to open the doors for domestic investors in the agriculture sector as it lays the ground for the inclusion of foreign investors. This is an area that has remained neglected for long. Domestic investors armed with funds to bankroll investments in this area including the introduction of newer technologies will help finance a key gap

transformation projects – like NEOM, King Salman Park or digitization of public healthcare etc – at private sector speed with full backing of the government. For national transformative projects, the PIF is the interface between foreign investors, local private players and the public sector, co-opting, collaborating and implementing.

The PIF has an exceptional management team drawn from the private sector. Its direction is set under Vision2030, and governance oversight is by a sub-committee of the Saudi Council of Ministers chaired by the Crown Prince. It is private sector driven with public sector governance.

Pakistan needs a PIF-like structure that implements transformative projects in key industrial verticals like mining, technology, agriculture. Pakistan's PIF equivalent or SIFC-Development Company would be a public-private partnership, responsible for not only implementing projects but also initiating investments and partnerships on behalf of the government. We have successful examples of a similar public-private structure during the last term of former Punjab Chief Minister Shehbaz Sharif. Disappointed by bureaucratic delays, a series of project or programme-specific Section 42 companies were seeded by the Punjab government in

power, infrastructure, and health sectors. These entities hired civil servants and private-sector operators on a commercial basis and their quick execution was one of the reasons for the government gaining the reputation of 'Punjab Speed'.

There were fifty-six project-specific entities in Punjab, which created governance and control problems and so a single SIFC-Dev Co with an overarching governance, and sector-wise subsidiaries will give SIFC initiatives a credible implementation vehicle, plus a consistent and long-standing counterpart to the foreign investors. The SIFC subsidiaries will gain sector expertise and a commercial track record that can be monetized in the future by listing on the stock exchange. Additionally, these sector subsidiaries can expand internationally, participating in projects in other Belt-and-Road Initiative countries, generating foreign exchange revenues for Pakistan. The complex multi-sectoral, multi-regional projects the SIFC intends to undertake cannot be effectively executed by centralized bureaucracies – the collapse of the Soviet Union's planned economy is an example. Development is almost always private-sector-led and public-sector facilitated – and hence large-scale economic transformation in Saudi Arabia, South Korea,

surrounding Pakistan's farm sector. Eventually, there is a chance for Pakistan to make investments more popular in agriculture, which remains central to the country's economic health. There is also a chance of the benefits including a rise in the production of food commodities domestically, helping to reduce dependence on food imports.

On the other hand, opening up parts of the agriculture sector to landless peasants will inspire fresh popular confidence in the future of Pakistan. This too has been a much neglected area. The choice of arming landless peasants with land potentially could mark the first step towards battling afresh the largely neglected incidence of rural poverty. Together, these two steps as a precursor to the SIFC could lift popular confidence in SIFC and strengthen the argument for foreign investors to take stakes in Pakistan.

At a time when Pakistan faces an unprecedented crisis surrounding its food security, building expensive new train lines or highways or other elements of infrastructure must remain on hold.

In Punjab, newly appointed Chief Minister

Maryam Nawaz's promise of building five new IT cities or delivering an air ambulance service were examples that were devoid of deep thinking over Pakistan's prevailing economic challenges. Punjab remains Pakistan's bread basket, though its ability to deliver on the country's food needs remains behind its potential. Rather than new infrastructure projects, the province needs to focus on revitalizing its agricultural resources in support of Pakistan's overall well-being. This must be done through initiatives such as reviving the provincial agricultural extension services, revitalizing the irrigation network and ensuring the delivery of quality seeds and fertilizers to farmers. Ultimately, Pakistan with a population of more than 240 million people – a country surrounded with major economic risks – needs to move rapidly to secure its future. That requires a rethinking of economic priorities that have run the country almost aground. Breathing life into the SIFC must be preceded by a refocus on food security, long neglected in Pakistan.

(The News, March 13, 2024)

Taiwan or post World War II Germany had extensive private sector participation.

Our exploration through the Pakistan 2047 series shows that the starting point of any transformation is a grand vision. The second step is backing the vision with an implementation capability to translate the dream into a reality. After focusing on the 'why of the vision', and 'how to implement it', we turn to 'who is best suited' for bringing about transformation. History offers compelling examples from countries that have escaped poverty. The common theme among these economic miracles is an entrepreneurial private sector-led economic and development model with the government as a facilitator.

Take the case of South Korea. It was not state-owned enterprises, but rather private conglomerates or 'chaebols' that accelerated South Korea's GDP per capita from \$146 to \$29,700 in forty years. In South Korea's economic transformation, its leader General Park Chung hee leaned upon first-generation entrepreneurs like Chung Ju-yung, founder of Hyundai, who helped build the country after the devastation of the Korean War. Similarly, Saudi Arabia's Aramco began as a private enterprise with the technical expertise of Standard Oil of California. Aramco is a valuable case study of a private-sector-led approach coupled with public-sector facilitation building a huge economic engine of growth – Aramco now generates an annual surplus of \$161 billion.

The third example of private sector-led development is the Dutch East India Co or VOC, which was licensed by the Dutch government to explore the spice trade in Asia. VOC was a joint stock company with private management and shareholders. It operated 50,000 ships and made the Netherlands a sea-faring empire and Rotterdam a shipping hub.

This approach has led to large deficits and a decline in export competitiveness. As per the World Bank, Pakistan's SOEs are the worst in South Asia and their combined losses are Rs. 458 billion per annum. In 2021, SOE loans or guarantees were ten percent of GDP, posing a significant drain on national resources and a risk to our financial sovereignty. The Asian Development Bank has the highest proportion of failed projects in Pakistan, and we have lost almost all arbitrations against foreign investors. This demonstrates a depleting capability of the state to effectively negotiate and implement projects with foreign counterparts. Similarly, the failure of the Soviet Union's state-led economic model resulted in its collapse and disintegration.

In the context of Pakistan's Vision 2047, we earlier

proposed the establishment of a SIFC Development Company (SIFC DevCo), akin to Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF), to implement economic transformation projects. The success of such an approach to transformation hinges on sound governance and crucially a management team capable of driving the transformation agenda. Taking the examples of Aramco and the Dutch East India Company, the vision and governance were provided by the public leadership of the country. For the PIF, it is a sub-committee of the Saudi Council of Ministers and so in the case of Pakistan, governance and vision will be the domain of the public stakeholders represented in the SIFC. And, similar to the PIF, the implementation arm or the SIFC DevCo management must be drawn from the private sector. A combination of public oversight and private management with technical subject-matter expertise can result in the successful implementation of Pakistan's transformation projects.

The CEO of the PIF is a prime example of the type of management capabilities required. Yasir Al Rumayyan is an investment banker with extensive private-sector experience from the Capital Markets Authority and the Stock Exchange, and not a former public-sector official. Right from the CEO of the PIF to its various project entities, such as Neom or Lean, are led by private-sector professionals with the technical know-how and business relationships necessary to drive the economic transformation. An advantage of private-sector management is their ability to operate beyond the short-term political cycle and take their roles as competitive career progression. This long-term perspective is crucial for sustainable development and building capacity within these 'super organizations'. Private-sector professionals are more likely to be market-oriented, collaborative, and deal-focused, bringing in a different skill set to investment facilitation and project implementation. They are also natural counterparts to international investors.

SIFC DevCo as the principal investment and project development entity, along with its sectoral subsidiaries in mining, agriculture, technology, infrastructure can be listed in the future and earn significant windfall for Pakistan. For example, Aramco is now valued at \$2 trillion. However, to achieve this outcome, SIF DevCo must have a private sector DNA. As Pakistan reverses its economic slide and becomes a financially sovereign nation, it requires an innovative and out-of-the-box solution. A parallel private-sector-led implementation structure with public-sector governance could be our

transformative solution.

For Vision Pakistan2047 to materialize as more than just a dream, it necessitates a shift to a private-sector-led economic and development model, under the guidance of a public leadership that envisions the transformation. It is time for us to embrace a new paradigm, free from the legacy of the past, with the government as a catalyst rather than an active player in our economy. It is often stated that Pakistan's economic challenges are due to the breakdown of an economic contract between its key stakeholders.

This contract is popularly referred to as the Charter for the Economy - an agreed-upon set of rules governing economic activities and sharing of economic resources. The absence of a charter creates a state of economic lawlessness, hiding of your income or wealth, and capital escaping to foreign jurisdictions. It encourages short-termism and discourages long-term investing. Individual economic players win, but the state loses. Supporters of the economic charter claim that it will create a level playing field and allocate resources based on competitiveness, which creates a win-win incentive between economic players and the state. However, most countries do not have such a charter and yet they prosper. Economic players compete without harming the state's interest. So successful states must be underpinned by a deeper contract that prevents players from damaging the state even as they compete for its resources.

This deeper contract that forces citizens to act for the benefit of the state is in fact between the citizens, their dead ancestors, and their unborn children. Our ancestors embody our country's history and legacy. They are its architects, and we owe a charter to them to continue their struggles for the betterment of society and the state. This charter is a commitment to our ancestor's legacy. Without this connection to the past, a society detaches from its values, as well as its purpose to create a greater future for all citizens. A successful society honours its charter with the dead, by protecting and furthering the success of society and the state.

Renewing the charter with the dead means rising above your narrow selfish interest to serve society and the state, which is our ancestor's legacy, continues to prosper and succeed. Equally critical for perpetual prosperity is our charter with the unborn children or our next generation - for they benefit or suffer as a result of our actions and our legacy. Our responsibility to the unborn is to leave behind a state that supports their growth and prosperity.

The charter with your ancestors and the unborn future

generation enables societies to make decisions that may be painful for a few or in the short term but are for the collective good of the state and its future generation. This Charter for Perpetual Prosperity is a continuum through which successful states get handed down from one generation to the next, each inter-generational handover better than the previous one.

Our actions of economic mismanagement, and debt accumulation are creating a fragmented state of Haves and Have-Nots - worsening with each successive generation. Selfish decisions that advantage individuals, clans or tribes are risking the collective freedom and economic sovereignty of our future generations. The broken charter with our ancestors and our unborn children is evidenced in the catastrophic debt burden on newborns. According to Tabadlab, a child born in 2011 was indebted to the tune of Rs. 71,000, and this debt increased 4.5 times to Rs. 321,000 in 2023. In our selfish economic decision-making, we are mortgaging our future generations. Pakistan faces a dire situation, as evidenced by 800,000 of our brightest youth immigrating abroad in the last three years. Our ancestors leave with their children and sadly find their final resting abode in foreign lands. Our land is no longer considered fit for the dead or the unborn.

But this decline can be arrested and reversed. To reverse our social fragmentation and economic decline, we must re-commit to this personal-social contract with our dead ancestors and our unborn. This commitment to making the interest of the state superior to the selfish short-term interest of our tribe, sect, or family is destroying the state and leaving our next generation in servitude of debt. The charter is a recognition that our actions ripple through time to affect our future generations. Revitalizing our Charter for Perpetual Prosperity is not just a theoretical or philosophical endeavor; it's a pragmatic necessity for Pakistan's survival and prosperity. The commitment to the dead and the unborn is a commitment to Pakistan's perpetual economic success that transcends an individual's life or tribal interest. It is a call to honour the past and pave the way for a positive prosperous future for the next generations. Such a renewed Charter for Perpetual Prosperity can build a resilient, self-sustaining Pakistan for generations to come.



How to solve the 'bijli' problem?

ENGINEER KHURRAM DASTGIR-KHAN

INTERNATIONAL
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Electricity draws incessant howls of outrage from Pakistanis. From industrialists to lifeline consumers, from plutocrats to labourers; everyone is unhappy. Pakistanis demand cheap and plentiful electricity – everywhere all at once – and it is nowhere in sight. A library can be filled with reform advice, reports, books, diagnostics, and the ‘way forward’ for the electricity sector published over the last three decades. Yet no subject is as resistant to positive change, and no other is as complex and consequential for the national economy. The sector has hundreds of thousands of employees spread in every nook of the land, has massive exposure to international donors, and has an annual turnover of more than Rs. 3000 billion.

The Power Division, which administers the electricity sector, is probably the most challenging assignment in the federal government. It has five distinct quagmires: generation, transmission, distribution, finance, and the regulator. This exceedingly complex morass gets compressed each month into a single piece of paper: the bill for the consumer. The electricity bill is a summary of Pakistan’s historically poor governance. No wonder reading the bill is a nightmare. It is cross-hatched with a plethora of tariff categories, taxes, adjustments, and fees that have nothing to do with electricity. It is a vehicle for obtaining revenue that the citizens do not pay otherwise or the officials neither have the ability nor the integrity to collect. On one hand, many regions of the country deem free electricity their ransom for staying with the federation or payment for a deprivation the federal government owes them to rectify. On the other hand, central regions pay for the brazen theft in other parts of the country. In an insightful recent monograph on the subject, Prof. Ijlal Naqvi calls electricity losses “an indicator of state capacity”. The federal government collects bills in the areas where its state capacity is better – the five distribution companies beginning with Islamabad and ending at Multan. The rest of the country – north, west, and south – lies in a deep pit of theft and losses, precisely the areas where the writ of the state is feeble.

All is not despair, however. Although the public saw

only higher bills, the 2022-23 PMLN-led government made the landmark achievement of shifting of balance in Pakistan’s electricity generation decisively towards domestic fuels. In a mere sixteen months, the Shehbaz Sharif government added more than 5000MW new generation capacity to the system, two-thirds of which is domestic or sustainable energy. The addition included the completion and operationalization of pending CPEC projects, 1980MW from Thar coal alone. The K3 nuclear plant 1100MW was completed and put into operation as well as the Karot Hydroelectric generation of 720MW capacity. The state-of-the-art 1266MW Haveli-II LNG plant was completed and put into operation. There was consequently a remarkable decrease in loadshedding from summer 2022 to summer 2023.

Rules and processes for an open and free market for competitive trading and bilateral contracts in electricity were notified. The Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) project was launched to install direct-reporting electricity meters for all industrial, commercial, bulk, and agricultural users nationwide. Transmission lines for the Diamer-Basha and Sukhi-Kinari projects as well as downstream grid stations were launched to ensure ready evacuation before generation begins. One achievement on this account was the completion and operationalization of the crucial Thar-Matiari transmission line within four months. The landmark Pollan-Jeevani transmission line connecting Iran’s grid directly to Gawadar was agreed upon, built, and completed swiftly ahead of time and inaugurated jointly by PM Shehbaz Sharif and the president of Iran.

Shehbaz Sharif’s previous government restored electricity and rebuilt destroyed infrastructure swiftly nationwide in record time after the devastating 2022 floods. It also reduced the circular debt of electricity by Rs. 154 billion on June 30, 2023 compared to the record level on March 31, 2022 left by the previous government. Sharif’s government removed import duty on all components for domestic manufacturing of solar panels and removed GST on the import of solar panels. Moving ahead of the rest of the world, PM Sharif broke ground last summer

on the 1200 MW Chashma 5, which will be the largest nuclear-powered electricity plant in the country. Yet, the killing piece of paper, the dreaded electricity bill remains. How to deliver inexpensive and abundant electricity to Pakistan? How to unshackle the consumer from crushing capacity charges? How to reduce the purported 'theft' but also the subsidies that are twice the amount of theft? How to reduce expensive electricity and increase less expensive electricity? The answer is in one comprehensive phrase: energy transition. First of all, PM Sharif should reiterate clearly his previous government's policy that all new power generation in Pakistan shall henceforth be based upon indigenous resources, of which major ones are: solar, Thar coal, hydel, nuclear, and wind. The new government should ensure full-steam progress on under-construction large-scale hydel-power projects at Dasu and Diamer-Basha. Ensure Chashma-5 is built at pace and commissioned.

Second, PM Sharif should revive and push in full force his 10,000MW solar initiative from 2022, beginning with the first 600MW. Part of the solar initiative is the extant proposal for thousands of 1-4MW rural-grid-based micro-solar plants and the conversion of all federal government-owned buildings to solar. These projects foundered previously because of strict import controls that discouraged bidders. Now they are feasible eminently, all the more so because the international price for panels has declined substantially.

Third, replace all 33 million plus electricity meters in the country with AMI meters. This single technological innovation will reduce theft, enhance data collection, improve the quality of billing dramatically, and thereby enable further efficiency-enhancing and theft-resistant reforms. Fourth, categorically reject all extensions of existing contracts with independent power producers (IPPs). Most of these contracts are due to expire in the term of this government (2024-29). Concurrently, negotiate with remaining contractors an extension in terms of debt instead of smaller current repayments. Fifth, undertake massive reform in all five parts of the electricity sector and re-engineer the Power Division, which has become a hollow, under-qualified, and obsolete administrative shell. Nothing should be unthinkable when reforming. Nothing. The above suggestions are by no means a comprehensive list but first steps towards mending a broken sector. These will perform indispensable pro-poor and pro-growth functions: reduce the price of electricity; reduce the strain on our balance of payments; and reduce carbon emissions.

If the current government has the will to reform, follow up, and do the tough work necessary, Pakistan's future generations will benefit from clean, economical energy to generate new employment and power our coming economic growth.

Capitalizing on coal

AMMAR HABIB KHAN

INTERNATIONAL
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The government has been the biggest borrower from banks over the last decade, making up more than 70 per cent of banking assets. This has effectively crowded out private sector credit, stalling overall economic growth in the process. Banks are now effectively deposit mobilization shops to finance the government's fiscal extravagance. Since banks can generate historically high profits just by lending to the government, there is little incentive to actually lend to the private sector, do long-tailed project finance, and contribute to economic growth.

Pakistan being in the very early stages of development needs long-tailed capital to execute infrastructure and other industrial projects that can contribute to economic growth. Banks being largely focused on short-term have barely been doing any such financing, with loans having a maturity of greater than three years being less than one-fifth of total financing. The inability to mobilize local capital has led to a situation such that major infrastructure projects are executed through external debt, which strains the foreign currency reserves and increases exposure to the depreciation of the rupee. The inability to execute projects also means heavy reliance on imported energy sources, which further drains foreign currency reserves.

The incumbent finance minister recently announced that lending would be directed towards priority sectors. A sector that should be among the top priorities is indigenous coal. Over the last year, Sindh has been able to extract coal from the Thar Coalfields. Currently, more than 15 million tons of coal are extracted from the Thar Coalfields, powering 2,400MW of power plants. As initial excavation has been done, there exists potential to considerably scale up the mines to eliminate

the need for imported coal. Through local coal power plants, Thar Coalfields can generate the cheapest electricity, with a fuel cost in the range of Rs4.4 per unit (kWh). Meanwhile, power plants operating on imported coal generate electricity at an average of Rs15 per unit (kWh). Effectively, the fuel cost of electricity generated from Thar Coal is almost one-third of electricity generated from imported coal power plants. The same is from the latest available merit order of the National Transmission & Despatch Company.

There are currently around 4,600+ MW of power generated from imported coal, while significant coal is also imported by the cement industry. Through the conversion of power plants designed to operate on imported local coal, it will not just be possible to significantly reduce the cost of power generation, but also save the outflow of precious foreign exchange reserves. It is estimated that to completely substitute imported coal, local coal mines need to scale up to produce more than 50 million tons of coal. Through such a maneuver, it will be possible to save more than \$3 billion of foreign currency outflows, while also significantly reducing the cost of electricity – spurring industrial growth in the process.

Such a turnaround reduces electricity cost, reduces imports, and catalyzes economic growth in the process. But the same cannot be done without access to capital. Due to an ever-increasing circular debt situation, banks already shy away from taking exposure to power and energy segments.

Financing for indigenous resources needs to be prioritized, as the economic multiplier of the same would be the highest among other sectors. Unlocking long-term capital for coal can enable coal mines to scale up, and substitute imported coals. This can enable generation of power at considerably lower rates, resulting in a decline in weighted cost of electricity. The availability of lower-cost electricity can then be redirected towards export-oriented segments to catalyze exports.

There can never be any sustainable industrial growth, and neither can there be any industrial policy without reforming the power sector and ensuring the availability of affordable electricity. Another key ingredient is availability of long-term capital. It is only after the presence of these building blocks, an industrial base can be established. Before we prioritize specific industries, it is time to prioritize capital accumulation,



and power.

The government has multiple tools at its disposal to nudge the same. The same can be done through mandating lending targets for coal-oriented financing, whether conversion of power plants or scaling up of mining operations. Another tool is to have in place a lower tax rate for revenue generated through such financing. The same tool can also be utilized for other export-oriented priority sectors as well. Before any of this can be done, the government will also have to plug its fiscal deficits as well and reduce its borrowings from banks to create the fiscal space for reallocation towards private sector lending. None of this can be done if fiscal deficits continue to increase incessantly.

There exists an argument that utilizing coal would lead to a more expansive carbon footprint. Important to note here that Pakistan has one of the lowest carbon emission rates on a per capita basis. Any incremental emissions are already being countered by a fairly carbon-neutral energy mix, which heavily relies on nuclear, and hydel power for baseload. Pakistan is in fairly early stages of development. To achieve any semblance of sustainable growth above its population growth rate, it needs access to affordable and indigenous energy. There can never be a prosperous country without access to affordable energy. If policymakers are serious about sustainable growth, it is time to double down on capital accumulation and allocate the same indigenous energy and export-oriented industrial growth. We can either create policies for increasing incomes across the board, or we can continue to increase the income of a rent-seeking elite, succumbing the rest of the country to misery, while moving from one bailout to another. The choice should be fairly clear at this point.

Gaza: Madness of war

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VEN BHIKKHU BODHI

Acute hunger is a far different creature than the growling we feel in our stomach when we miss a couple of meals or the craving that floods the mind when our taste buds yearn for novel flavors. Acute hunger transfixes our entire organism, pushing everything else aside in favor of our most basic urge for survival. When we're gripped by extreme hunger, we can think of nothing but food, have no interest in anything but food, and dream of nothing other than a decent meal.

I experienced this kind of hunger myself during my first two years as a monk in Sri Lanka back in the early 1970s. At that time the country was experimenting with new economic policies that led to severe cuts in the food offerings at the rural monastery where I was living. After a few months of insufficient nourishment, I could even feel the cells and tissues of my body crying out for the nutrients they need to perform their life-sustaining functions. At times, I would glance at my rubber slippers in the corner of my hut and wonder whether they were edible.

Acute hunger, however, is not merely a condition that besets individuals as isolated units. Under the impact of larger forces, hunger can acquire a collective dimension, enveloping whole regions and even countries. The consequences of collective hunger can be grave. They include economic decline, epidemics, shorter life spans, and heightened social tensions. Children at risk of hunger are more likely to have poor health and struggle in school, and when these children grow up, their health issues can become a burden on their societies.

Such collective ordeals of hunger are closely connected with conflict, and the causation can flow in both directions. Poverty and hunger may lead to conflict, but more often conflict intensifies hunger. According to the World Food Programme, "Conflict is the #1 driver of hunger in the world." Eight of the world's ten most severe food crises are driven by war and conflict, which have pushed 158 million people into acute levels of hunger. When acute hunger occurs in time of war, the suffering it entails can be multiplied many times over.

However, while conflict and hunger are intertwined, we can distinguish those cases where hunger is an

incidental consequence of conflict from those where hunger is used tactically as a means of punishing an enemy population. The current crisis in Sudan is an example of hunger occurring as an incidental consequence of conflict. Armed conflict between two rival military factions has engulfed the country and pushed nearly 18 million people into acute and emergency levels of hunger. Eddie Rowe, the WFP Country Director in Sudan, said that "more and more people are struggling to eat a basic meal a day, and unless things change there is a very real risk they won't even be able to do that."

In contrast, one side in a conflict may attempt to force its opponents to surrender by deliberately starving them. At present, starvation is being weaponized in such ways in the conflicts taking place in Ukraine and Gaza. Russia's tactical use of hunger in its war against Ukraine has involved deliberately cutting off civilians' access to food, water, electricity, and fuel; attacking facilities essential to food production, including water supplies and transport vehicles; and weaponizing agriculture, as when Russian forces destroyed over 270,000 tons of foodstuffs in the summer of 2023.

The tactical use of hunger, however, is starkest today in Israel's campaign against Gaza. In the days following the Hamas attack of October 7, Israeli officials announced they would be stopping all deliveries of food, water, and fuel into Gaza, and they have rigorously followed up on this threat. While, under international pressure, Israel has allowed some aid to enter the territory, the quantities provided are a mere fraction of what is needed. Israeli officials are certainly not unaware of the consequences of this policy. It seems they simply don't care how it affects Gazans.

The blockade of food has pushed the entire population, including children, to the brink of starvation. Writing for *The Guardian* in late January, Alex de Waal, the author of *Mass Starvation: The History and Future of Famine*, said that "Gaza is experiencing mass starvation like no other in recent history." He predicted that Palestinian children in Gaza will die, in the thousands, even if the barriers to aid are immediately lifted. A couple of weeks later, Unicef's Deputy Executive Director for Humanitarian Action and

Supply Operations, Ted Chaiban, warned: “If the conflict doesn’t end now, children’s nutrition will continue to plummet, leading to preventable deaths or health issues which will affect the children of Gaza for the rest of their lives and have potential intergenerational consequences.”

Since these warnings were issued, the blockade has continued with no sign of abating and the predictions are coming true. Already, reports have appeared that at least twenty-five children have died from dehydration and malnutrition, and it is feared that this is just the start of an escalating death count. To rub salt into the wounds, most recently, when aid convoys do arrive to distribute food, Israeli forces have been shooting people waiting for food at designated distribution points. Several hundred are reported to have been killed in this way. The only way to avert this catastrophe – or at least to mitigate it – is to end the war at once and for Israel to lift its blockade of humanitarian relief.

Legal action is currently underway to force an end to the blockade. Oxfam and Human Rights Watch have accused Israel of using starvation as a “weapon of war” and South Africa has cited the starving of the Gazan population as a genocidal act in its case against Israel at the International Court of Justice. Most recently, South Africa has asked the ICJ to order additional emergency measures against Israel, highlighting the starvation policy that Israel is imposing on Gaza.

Apart from the legal issues, however, from an ethical perspective the weaponization of hunger must be viewed as a profound moral travesty. Amid the chaos and devastation of war, civilians often have to contend with such challenges as the loss of their homes, forced displacement, lack of access to medical care, personal injury, and the death or injury of loved ones.

Excerpted: ‘Let Them Eat Bread! On the Abhorrent Use of Starvation as a Weapon of War’.

Ramadan in a genocide

As Ramazan starts today across the Middle East, the people of Palestine – displaced, wounded, and starving – wonder how to survive. The starving faces of the children, women and men of Gaza are an indictment of what we call the ‘world order’. The fact that a genocide has been televised and reported live by its own victims is a twist in this modern tale of impunity that no one would have imagined when social media was starting to take over a sour primary source of information. Where will the people of Gaza live during Ramazan? Where will they find refuge from the relentless acts of violence by Israel? Where will they pray, given that Israel has destroyed more than 1000 mosques since October 7? And what will they eat?

Food continues to be in short – or none – supply in Gaza. Its people are starving, with reports saying that according to surveys around 97 percent of the people say they are rationing food to survive. And even survival has been hard to come by. We now have a situation where if Israel won’t kill them directly, it will starve them to death. More than 25 Palestinians are already reported to have died of starvation. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestinian refugees says that the death toll continues to rise while aid is continually deprived to the people in northern Gaza. Despite more and more calls for a ceasefire and for aid to be allowed inside Gaza, nothing has been done to ensure that this genocidal forced famine does not become worse. Israel has been intensifying its attacks in the Gaza Strip. Since October 7, more than 31,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza. Those who are alive are living in hunger and displacement, almost all Palestinians in Gaza having become refugees in their own land.

All this is going on as the main cheerleader for Israel – the US – continues to lend its complete and total support to a genocide. Not just that, the US has also been funding Israel’s war on the Palestinian people. US President Joe Biden’s unwavering support for Israel has managed to also unveil the very thin fig leaf American policymakers were wearing regarding what they really think of human rights when it comes to brown bodies in the Global South. The backlash to this open support for Israel’s war crimes has been far louder than ever before though. This may explain the rather odd interview given by Biden a few days back, during which he tried to sound stern regarding Israeli PM Netanyahu’s plans to target Rafah; in the same breath, the American president again reiterated that the US would never leave Israel. With more than 31,000 Palestinians killed by Israel in Gaza, and a ceasefire that still doesn’t look close to being finalized, there are no guesses as to what every Palestinian’s wish for Ramazan will be. Will the world join in?

(Editorial — The News, March 11, 2024)

The children of Gaza

The silent victims of war

Pakistan
OBSERVER
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ADV FIZZA ALI

Amidst the suffering endured by the children of Gaza, the impassioned plea for justice transcends mere rhetoric; it resonates as a resounding summons to the moral compass of humanity, beckoning to its collective conscience, should it remain intact. This narrative, steeped in sorrow and strife, has plagued the region since the inception of the colonial project. For the besieged inhabitants of Gaza, it is a harrowing saga that has unfolded over the years, burdening them with a weight of despair and indignation too burdensome to bear.

Newly uncovered proof of unlawful assaults in the region, collected by Amnesty International, underscores Israel's flagrant disregard for international humanitarian laws. In their relentless pursuit, they are guaranteeing the proliferation of a generation rendered malnourished, destitute, subjected to incessant bombardment, and deprived of the most fundamental pillars of existence: healthcare, education, and the nurturing embrace of parental affection. In a poignant declaration made recently, the head of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), entrusted with the solemn duty of aiding displaced Palestinians, has underscored a harrowing reality: that more children have been killed in Israel's war against the Palestinians in Gaza than in four years of conflict around the world. This stark revelation not only underscores the gravity of the situation in the region but also serves as a testament to the disproportionate suffering borne by the most vulnerable amidst the throes of geopolitical discord.

In the year 2024, it is almost unfathomable that despite global abundance, Palestinian children face the harrowing spectre of starvation. International law is clear as daylight on the point of starvation as a war crime. Both Protocol II of the 1977 Amendment to the Geneva Conventions and the Rome Statute of 1998 stand as pillars of this principle, leaving no room for

ambiguity or escape.

Israel's actions in Gaza are not merely erasing generations; they are etching a grim legacy of devastation. Children, innocent and vulnerable, fall victim, their lives taken in numbers reminiscent of the darkest chapters of warfare's brutality. This transcends mere politics; as it delves into the essence of human existence. It speaks to the irreversible loss of lives and the enduring trauma inflicted upon survivors. It echoes the confusion and fear experienced by countless innocent souls caught in the crossfire of incomprehensible violence.

It condemns the dehumanization of Palestinians by those in positions of power, who justify brutal collective punishment under the guise of maintaining order—an unforgivable sin against the very essence of moral decency. Perhaps, to unravel the tragic reality of why so many innocent lives, particularly children, are caught in the turmoil of Gaza, one should refer to the genocidal intentions emanating from Israeli officials and politicians. We need to listen to how Israel describes the children of Gaza. In a later deleted tweet, Netanyahu described Israel's conflict with Hamas as a battle between “the children of light and the children of darkness, between humanity and the law of the jungle.”

In this deluge of human suffering, one might turn to the timeless wisdom of James Baldwin. He poignantly reminds us that every child, regardless of geography or circumstance, belongs to all of humanity. Indeed, failing to acknowledge this fundamental truth may reveal a deficiency in our moral compass. Thus, let it be known: that the defense of children is not merely an obligation but a sacred trust, inviolable and unwavering in its resolve. Regardless of our political affiliations, individual viewpoints, or personal histories, it is imperative that we muster every ounce of strength to address this genocide.

We must heed the silent cries of these innocent souls, offering not just material aid, but the warmth of human empathy and understanding. Urgency demands a concerted global effort towards lasting peace, sparing future generations from the anguish of this perpetual conflict. It is imperative that the global community rises with concerted diplomatic vigor, wielding the power of persuasion to forge a path towards swift and decisive resolution.

We have been witnessing this cycle of violence and retaliation for decades, and the longer it goes on, the more we lose—and children lose most of all. Given the landmark interim ruling by the International Court of Justice, affirming the tangible and imminent risk of genocide, there is an increasing urgency for all states to push for an immediate and sustained ceasefire in Gaza. In the insightful analysis by Norman Finkelstien, he illuminates a disturbing reality, “when you say that your enemy is Amalek”, in the midst of a war, in a country that is schooled in the bible, “then you are calling for the destruction and the killing of every man and woman and child.” With each passing moment left unattended, the specter of suffering looms larger than ever, bearing witness to the irretrievable loss of cherished souls.

This is a struggle to preserve the floor, or even the basement, of our humanity. It is a battle waged against the encroaching shadows of indifference and cruelty, a solemn quest to uphold the sanctity of compassion and empathy in the face of adversity. Taking the life of a child is an egregious and indefensible act. Yet, to perpetrate such violence over many years, casting a long shadow of fear under which subsequent generations must live, is an abominable transgression beyond redemption.

Therefore, it is incumbent upon us, as conscientious observers of humanity’s collective narrative, to vehemently oppose such atrocities with every fiber of our being. For in our failure to do so, we risk not only the sanctity of those precious innocent lives lost but also the erosion of our own moral fabric.

Binding Israel

ABID RIZVI & SIKANDER AHMED SHAH

DAWN
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More than five months into Israel’s pogrom against Palestinians, the UN Security Council finally adopted Resolution 2728/2024. The resolution, proposed by the 10 non-permanent members of the UNSC (E10), received unanimous assent with one abstention by the US – Israel’s staunchest ally and a permanent member of the UNSC (P5) – and comes after four prior attempts at its passage, three of which were vetoed by the US itself and one by China and Russia.

While the resolution’s passage is a positive step, much like with the provisional orders issued by the International Court of Justice earlier this year, expectations must be tempered; neither the resolution nor indeed the ICJ’s provisional orders offer a panacea for the ongoing slaughter of Palestinian civilians, the death toll for whom has credibly exceeded 30,000. The resolution does, nonetheless, represent a watershed in international law and diplomacy as they intersect with Israel’s pogrom against Palestine.

It must first be emphasised that the resolution itself limits the ceasefire to the month of Ramazan, which is likely to end around April 10. Thus, even were Israel to immediately comply and cease hostilities, this would only yield a fortnight’s reprieve for Gazans before the likely resumption of bloodshed. Such a brief cessation of hostilities would render relief efforts incredibly difficult and arguably have little impact on the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza.

Immediately after the resolution’s passage, efforts were made to downplay its significance, with spin doctors attempting to frame the resolution as “non-binding”, and thus having no further legal effect than the numerous UN General Assembly resolutions on the matter. This characterisation is, however, inconsistent with the principles of statutory interpretation applicable to international legal instruments, including resolutions of the UNSC.

The UN Charter establishes the UNSC, lays out its powers, and delineates how the UNSC exercises those powers. The most overt of these powers can be found in Chapter VII of the Charter, which relates to the maintenance of international peace and security. Under this chapter, the UNSC is empowered to take any action – including military – in order to “give effect to its decisions”; as such, UNSC resolutions issued under this chapter are generally binding in nature. In this context, it is critical to note that Resolution 2728 was not issued under Chapter VII, but instead, in exercise of the UNSC’s general powers under and “guided by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations”. Proponents of the non-binding nature of Resolution 2728 cite prior UNSC resolutions where the text of the resolution clearly identifies the

UNSC's reliance on its Chapter VII powers. At best, this is a myopic reading of such instruments, as pursuant to Article 25 of the UN Charter, "Members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council in accordance with the present Charter".

Thus, focusing exclusively on the UNSC's Chapter VII powers misses the forest for the trees, as the Charter itself obliges UN members to comply with UNSC decisions, such as Resolution 2728. As described by the ICJ in its advisory opinion on South West Africa, "[a]rticle 25 is not confined to decisions in regard to enforcement action but applies to 'the decisions of the Security Council' adopted in accordance with the Charter. Moreover, that Article is placed, not in Chapter VII, but immediately after Article 24 in that part of the Charter which deals with the functions and powers of the Security Council. If Article 25 had reference solely to decisions of the Security Council concerning enforcement action under Articles 41 and 42 of the Charter, that is to say, if it were only such decisions which had binding effect, then Article 25 would be superfluous, since this effect is secured by Articles 48 and 49 of the Charter". In a press conference following the resolution's passage, E10 representatives confirmed that "all Security Council resolutions are binding, and every Member States are under the obligation to implement those resolutions". Though the South Korean representative sought to demur from this position, stating that "maybe legally speaking it's non-binding because in accordance with the UN Charter, all Security Council decisions must be implemented and are legally binding, but this resolution does not use the word 'decide'", an analysis of the resolution's language rebuts this perspective.

Firstly, the UNSC cannot 'decide' a ceasefire, any more than it can 'decide' a resumption of hostilities; instead, UNSC resolutions adopt text to give effect to the desired outcome. Secondly, the language of Resolution 2728 unequivocally "demands" (i) an immediate ceasefire, (ii) the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, and (iii) that parties comply with their obligations under international law in relation to all persons they detain. Resolution 2728 thus cannot be credibly interpreted in any other manner than for it to place binding legal obligations on the parties to the conflict, particularly in light of the ICJ's own jurisprudence, which has interpreted the use of the phrase "calls upon" in UNSC resolutions 269/1969 and 276/1970 to be similarly mandatory.

UNSC Resolution 2728 is not the 'silver bullet' Palestine and its supporters are hoping for; outside of meaningful, impactful sanctions – such as arms or trade embargoes – on Israel, no pronouncement from ivory tower institutions such as the ICJ or the UNSC will halt the wanton slaughter in Palestine. However, should Israel persist in its campaign against Palestine – in clear contravention of the ICJ's provisional orders or Resolution 2728 – it may be "suspended from the exercise of the rights and privileges of membership by the General Assembly" pursuant to Article 5 of the UN Charter, or expelled from the UN pursuant to Article 6 of the Charter. While such suspension or expulsion is subject to the "recommendation of the Security Council" – where it is unlikely that Israeli allies among the P5 would allow it to pass – it nonetheless represents further diplomatic and political isolation Israel – and its benefactors – are likely to experience going forward.



Speak up for Gaza

Since the outbreak of the war in Gaza, more than 200 cultural heritage sites have been destroyed alongside numerous archives, universities, and museums. There have been reports of the Israeli army looting historical artefacts and even displaying some of them at the Knesset. Destroying Gaza's heritage has far-reaching social, political, and emotional ramifications. It is a concerted attack on the existence of Palestine and its people. Beyond producing cultural amnesia around what it means to be Palestinian, heritage destruction symbolises the negation of Palestinian history and right to land. The Israeli obliteration of Palestinian memory is intentional. It is a genocidal strategy, according to the definition laid out by the Polish-Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term "genocide" in 1944. This effort to destroy physical links between Palestinians and their heritage is aimed at erasing Palestinian presence and legitimising Israeli settler colonialism.

The Israeli destruction of archaeological sites and looting of artefacts in Gaza also raises questions about archaeology's purported neutrality in our world. The reality is that archaeology can be deeply political. The ability to make claims in the present based on material records of the past endows archaeology with great power. Quite literally, archaeologists provide the physical evidence required for the making of historical narratives. Archaeologists thus carry a moral obligation to inform the public of its deeply political nature.

In this context, the silence of archaeological associations across the world on what is happening in Gaza has been deafening. In Europe, Irish and Ireland-based heritage scholars mounted pressure on the European Association of Archaeologists (EAA) to speak up. In early March, the EAA finally issued a statement.

But the text was disappointingly noncommittal and milquetoast in the face of atrocity. It referred to the genocides in Gaza as the "Israel/Gaza crisis" and used language ripped from UNESCO's World Heritage Convention of 1972. In other words, it spoke of heritage in terms of its socioeconomic value – its integrity or authenticity – rather than recognising the political ramifications of heritage destruction in a settler-colonial setting. The EAA's failure to reflect on how archaeology, and subsequently, the construction of heritage, is intertwined with power and history is dangerous, as it misrepresents the discipline as

purely objective.

Some people may be aware of archaeology's role in colonialism. Ever fewer, however, know how it informed 20th-century politics, crafting identities that rely on discovered, shared pasts and invented traditions, as historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger argued.

Archaeology forges links between the land and its people through possessing the past. Used correctly, it has the power to illuminate how people once lived in and related to our world. Used incorrectly, it becomes a technology of oppression, co-opted by power regimes who wish to harness one version or "vision" of the past to dispossess and displace others. It is no coincidence that, as the Palestinian-American anthropologist Nadia Abu El-Haj has written, Israel is known for using archaeology strategically to legitimise its status as a historical nation in the Abrahamic Holy Lands rather than a modern nation-state founded in 1948.

(Hilary Morgan Leathem — The News, March 17, 2024)

Eretz Israel

For many decades Israeli politicians have been working toward the goal of establishing what they call 'Eretz Israel' or 'The Greater Land of Israel' – a greater Israel composed of all of the Palestine mandate "from the Sea to the River Jordan" (their words). After the partition of Palestine under UN auspices in 1948, Israel has expanded its territory, by military and non-military means, and now comprises 78 per cent of what was once Palestine, plus Syria's Golan Heights.

There is a clear historical record of deliberate displacement documented by many scholars, including the book, "Plowshares into Swords: From Zionism to Israel," (Verso, 2008) by Princeton Professor Arno Mayer. Coming off the horrors of Russian pogroms and Nazi genocide, the early founders of the Israeli state were in no mood to respect the rights of the indigenous Palestinians.

It took an American-born Prime Minister of Israel, Golda Meir (1969-1974), to speak the ultimate antisemitism against the Arabs of Palestine, declaring "There is no such thing as Palestinian people... It is not as if we came and threw them out and took their country. They didn't exist."

(Ralph Nader — The News, March 20, 2024)

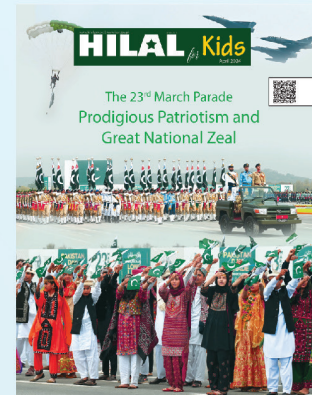
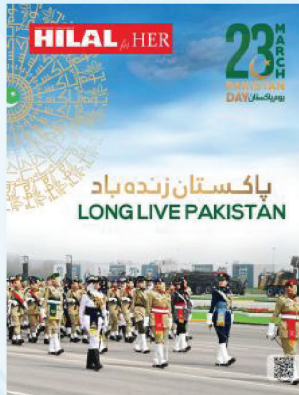
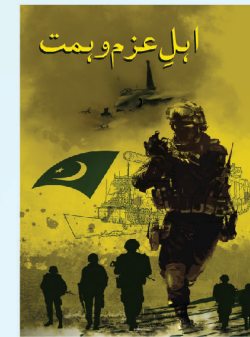
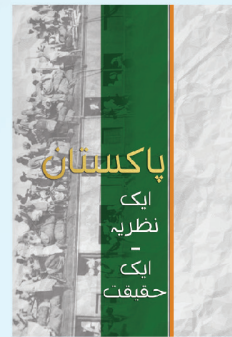
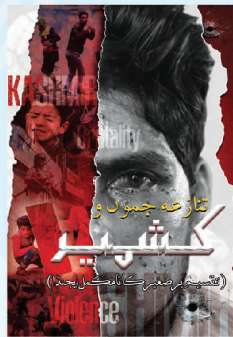
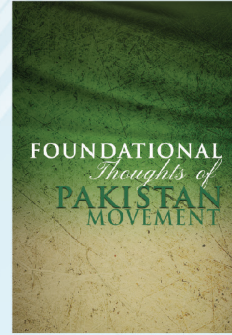
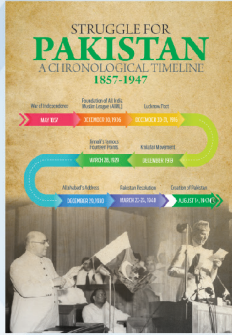
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