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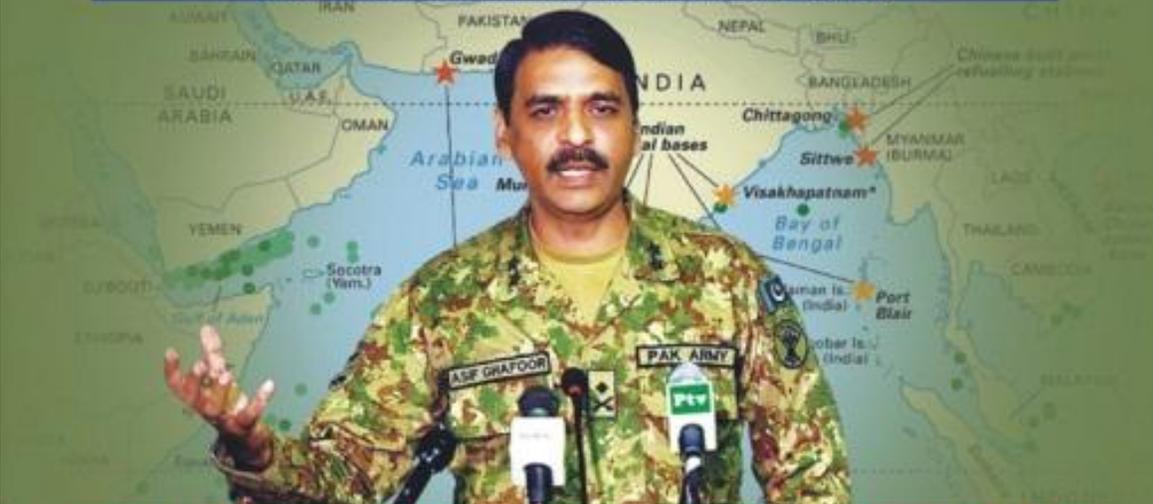


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Italy endorses China's belt and road plan in first for a G7 nation

Non-Proliferation: treat India and Pakistan equally



Pakistan's hands cannot be tied in non-proliferation issue



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Editorial

Non-Proliferation: Treat India and Pakistan Equally

Pakistan is responsible nuclear power, a stance the country has not only maintained but displayed through its actions from time and again. Pakistan has remained an advocate of peace and has served as the worst enemy for all kinds of terrorism, more so than many world powers who claim to be the lead peace makers. Pakistan has been more successful against terrorists than any other country. It is clear as day now that neighbouring powers are sponsoring terrorism in Pakistan and that the country is a victim of its neighbour's cowardice. Despite all of Pakistan's achievements and losses bias attitude towards her has not stopped. India's Ajit Doval has repeatedly openly made claims of sponsoring terrorism in Pakistan, claiming that it is India's right to spread bloodshed and anarchy on Pakistan's soil. Their defence analysts are stating on record that India should de stabilize Pakistan by agitating Baluchistan. Their acting naval officer has been caught in Pakistani soil and has accepted on record to have been sponsoring terrorism on Pakistan's soil, despite all this not single action has been taken against India to put it on a leash, the so-called peace loving global powers have resorted to display open biasness against Pakistan. Indian government officials have gone so far as to say that they will practice restraint in terms of nuclear proliferation if it means de-stabilising Pakistan. Indians have claimed that they have every right to wreak havoc in Pakistan and that they will adopt any means to do so, even it involves handing nuclear weapons to the terrorists. It's a very serious thing to say, one that points out the difference between a rogue and a responsible nation. No country, however, condemned this stated or moved to put India in its place, for no one in their right minds would speak against America and Israel's henchman. It seems that the seal of responsibility and peace loving is only provided to those who are favoured by USA and Israel. It doesn't matter if such countries are hell bent upon bringing world's worst fear of a dirty bomb, to life. It doesn't matter if such a country is involved in the massacre of innocent people of Kashmir and elsewhere in India, it doesn't matter if religious extremism is prevailing and that extremist hindus are ruling India right now and it certainly doesn't matter if there have been multiple instances where rackets for uranium have been busted in India. All that matters is the approval of USA and Israel. In short, all the lies and incorrect claims made about Pakistan in the past decade have materialised in India but the world has chosen to turn a blind eye towards this reality because truth is only what USA, Israel and the Western world believes and what is in their interest. The height of the matter is that even now when India has wrongfully attempted to engage Pakistan in a war without any proof and only for its internal politics even then, Pakistan is being told to work on non-proliferation. Such statements are irrational and they openly display biasness towards Pakistan as Pakistan's nuclear security measures are state of the art and there has never been any proven instance of nuclear proliferation attributed to Pakistan. In contrast India has a proven history of nuclear proliferation and their nuclear security measures are a joke, despite this, Pakistan is being targeted. But India has been allowed atomic reactors of civil purposes to use for military purposes. It is a case of double standard. This must end now and the world should understand that we have had enough. Pakistan is a responsible military and nuclear power and our nuclear power status was only developed to maintain balance within the region whereas, India is the reason that NPT came into existence. DG ISPR Pakistan has made it very clear that we are in no

mood to face any undue pressure and that the topic of nuclear non-proliferation should only be discussed with Pakistan if it is being discussed with India on the same terms. Otherwise, Pakistan is in no mood to even consider this issue and the country's military and nuclear deterrents are enough to prevent it from being bullied.

Roundtable Conference on Yom e Pakistan

Wednesday the 20th March 2019 at Regent Plaza Hotel Karachi

Pakistan: Multiple challenges and way forward

Chief Guest: Gen. ® Moinuddin Haider Former Governor Sindh

Speakers: Nusrat Mirza, Vice Admiral Asaf Humayun, Commodore Obaidullah, Ambassador® Hassan Habib, Prof. Sema Naaz Siddiqi, Prof. Dr. Uzma Shujaat, Zafar Imam Advocate, Syed Samiullah

General Moinuddin Haider emphasized that if we have the will we can resolve all the problems. 25 million children could go to school.

Mr. Nusrat Mirza said that we have security challenges and the challenges for lack of facilities for our people. There is inflation, water, energy and other problems. Regarding Defense Security, Pakistan has robust defense. Even in conventional warfare Pakistan has defeated India in seven fronts: Air, Army, Navy, Cyber, diplomatic, Media and Hybrid war by organizing Pakistan Super League Cricket matches.

Commodore Obaidullah said that the question raised by FATF are important and we have respond to them.

Vice Admiral ® Asaf Humayun was of the opinion that all problems can be solved we become sincere. Ambassador® Hasan Habib said we are facing all sorts of Indian Conspires and have so far successfully neutralized them.

Prof. Dr. Uzma Shujaat has pointed that Pakistan has to face environmental and Food security Problems. Prof. Seema Naaz Siddiqi considered that higher education is the solution of all our problems. The seminar was attended by the students and professors of different universities.

Multiple Challenges of Pakistan and Way Forward

Prof. Dr. Uzma Shujaat

- Extremism
- Economy
- Education
- Population Growth
- Water shortage

Pakistan is on the verge of an ecological disaster if authorities do not urgently address the looming water shortages. Estimates show that by 2025 the country will be facing an 'absolute scarcity' of water, with less than 500 cubic meters available per person just one third of the water available in parched Somalia (UN Source).

These are myriad challenges internally faced by Pakistan

Food Security

Rising population (growth) triggers many other crises, including food (security) shortages, energy and resources crises, and disease outbreak.

The challenge and response theory of Toynbee a global historian suggest that "if the challenge falling a civilization, a country or a society is too great as in the artic, then the struggle to survive in the harsh climate leaves no room to develop. Conversely if there is hardly any challenge as in the South Seas where the weather is pleasant all year around and fruit and fish abundant the lack of challenge provides no spur to change. Progress comes out of the crucible of facing and overcoming challenges.

The skepticism abroad and inside labelling the country on the edge of chaos is and was always there. Many time echoes, but reality is different yes challenges persist internally and externally with new challenges like climate change, terrorism.

EU-Pakistan

New political framework, 5 year engagement plan was launched in 2009 till todote this plan provided a framework of cooperation in areas of counter terrorism, trade, development, energy, human rights and democracy the challenges faced by Pakistan.

But the dynamics of relationship between Pakistan and EU after 9/11 was changed actually that event changed the fabric of global politics and compelled global players to revisit and review their strategies while playing a political economic, strategic and cultural chess.

EU is quite unique in the age of transnationalism and interdependence as the era of Pax Economica not only demands economic ties but also the conducive environment like governance, eradication of extremism and consolidation of peace and security. These are key areas of relations between EU and Pakistan. Pakistan was a victim of US doctrine of preemption, paid a huge cost of human, social, economics in the fight against terrorism and in the age of complex interdependence, EU is strong participant in this war against terrorism.

The scheduled EU-Pakistan summit – the first ever – in June 2009 is a positive first step. This is the source of European leverage and would facilitate greater access to Islamabad. Enhancing economic opportunities could also help curb militant violence and reduce the threat emanating from Pakistan. For instance, the EU should continue to restore trade relations and consider ways of including Pakistan in its Generalized System of Preference Plus (GSP+) scheme – which has the support of the European Parliament – as well as greater access for Pakistan's exports, which could, in time, lead to talks on a Free Trade Agreement. A boost in trade and investment is not possible without a stable, sincere polity as well as sound state security.

Way Forward

A dynamic foreign policy however, with Pakistan's lesser reliance on China is the need of the hour. We are passing through testing times as Islamabad looks to shed off its debt and aims at reviving its economy through stringent measures proposed by IMF.

On the Afghan front through rational decision making Pakistan can balance off various stakeholders in Afghanistan and can ensure an inclusive solution. Iran another important if not indispensable aspect of Pakistan's foreign policy is its relations with its western neighbours. 2019 promises a great deal for Pakistan, yet its foreign policy needs to centre on using economics as a tool for building trade relations and play a constructive role in the region as well as in the global community.

What though of the future?

The solutions to the country's problems are self-evident. While population growth needs to be further reduced, there is a youth dividend. Pakistan needs to cash in on its youth dividend by making education top priority.

Pakistan's resilience has proved to its strength. On the occasion of 23 March 3 days ahead make a pledge that we are going to strive for a bright future. Though Pakistan's development may have been uneven, the momentum of its 214 million inhabitants whose indomitable spirit has overcome so many challenges, shall always carry it forward.

Prof. Dr. Uzma Shujaat former Director Institute of European studies Karachi University.

Summarized News & Articles

Nation celebrates Pakistan Day with commitment to ensure progress, strong defense

Islamabad (March 23, 2019) Today's ceremonies mark commemoration of the passage of Lahore Resolution on this day in 23rd March 1940, under which the Muslims of the sub-continent set the agenda of a separate homeland for themselves. The day dawned with thirty-one-gun salute in the federal capital and twenty-one-gun salute each in provincial capitals. Special prayers were offered in mosques after prayers for progress and prosperity of the country.

The main feature of the day was a spectacular military parade at Parade Avenue in Islamabad where three wings of the armed forces demonstrated their professionalism and military prowess.

Air Chief Marshal Mujahid Anwar Khan has reiterated PAF's commitment to safeguard the air frontiers of Pakistan. Air Chief led the formations of PAF fly-past aircraft on the auspicious occasion. Keeping the tradition of his predecessors, Air Chief Marshal Mujahid Anwar Khan flew over the venue in an F-16 Block 52 aircraft performing a magnificent vertical roll over the parade square.

The Turkish and Chinese pilots also demonstrated aerial maneuvers, which were applauded by the audience. A formation of Chinese Air Force presenting excellent aerobatics spread spiral of red and green smoke symbolizing Pakistan-China time-tested friendship.

Civil and military leadership, Malaysian PM Mahathir Muhammad and foreign dignitaries and ambassadors witnessed the parade. The parade also featured troops from Azerbaijan, China, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Bahrain and Sri Lanka.

Mechanized columns including tanks, armored personnel carriers, rocket launchers, air defense system, tactical communication system, indigenously built UAVs, short and long ranged missiles Ra'ad, Nasr, Ghauri and Shaheen were showcased on the occasion. Paratroopers from Pakistan Army, Air Force and Navy demonstrated marvelous free fall.

Prime Minister Imran Khan, Defence Minister Pervez Khattak, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee General Zubair Mehmood Hayat and Services Chiefs witnessed the parade.

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad was the guest of honor of the parade. Minister of Defence of the Republic of Azerbaijan Colonel General Zakir Hasanov, Commander National Guard of Bahrain Sheikh Mohamed Bin Isa Bin Salman Al-Khalifa, foreign diplomats, a large number of people from all walks of life, including artists, sportsmen, women and children witnessed the parade.

The parade culminated with presentation of a special song with the theme 'Pakistan Zindabad.'"

Pakistan's hands cannot be tied in non-proliferation issue while giving India a free hand

(March 25, 2019) In an interview with a Russian news agency, he said Pakistan holds the position that this capability eliminates the possibility of conventional war. No sane country having this capability would talk about using it. Asif Ghafoor also pointed out Pakistan will take steps towards non-proliferation of nuclear arms but only if India does the same. Pakistan will undertake anything, which is based on equality. He said the hands of Pakistan cannot be tied while keeping those of India open.

DG ISPR rejected India's claim that Pakistan used US made F-16 to down Indian aircraft, stating that JF-17 Thunder combat aircraft developed jointly with China were used in the recent conflict. He, however, stressed that the country would use whatever it deemed necessary if it came to legitimate self-defense.

Referring to the standoff with India, Major General Asif Ghafoor said the Indian jets violated the Pakistani airspace on February 26, dropping payloads without inflicting any casualties or damage to infrastructure.

Asif Ghafoor said whilst staying within our airspace, we first chose and locked the targets. He said Pakistan only wanted to tell the Indians that the country has the capability to hit. He said Pakistan has the footage of the operation.

Asif Ghafoor said Pakistan would welcome including that of Russia, which can bring peace in the region.

The DG ISPR said Pakistan valued Russia's role in the Afghan settlement process and recognized its importance in regional processes. On military cooperation with Russia, the DG ISPR said Pakistan is negotiating defence industry cooperation with Moscow in the areas of aviation, air defense systems and anti-tank missiles.

Pakistan Air Force shoots down two Indian fighter jets: one pilot arrested

ISLAMABAD (Wed. 27 Feb. 2019) Pakistan shot down two Indian aircraft violating its airspace on Wed. The February 27 and captured one its pilots Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman. The News Editor Investigations Ansar Abbasi Tweeted, "Wing commander Nauman shot down SU 30 while Sqn Leader Hassan Siddique hit MIG 21."

One plane (MIG 21) crashed in the Kohi Rata sector of Azad Kashmir while one (SU 30) crashed in Indian-Occupied Kashmir's Budgam area. In a video, the Indian pilot identified himself as Wing Commander Abhinandan. His service number is 27981 and he is a flying pilot.

India's ministry of external affairs has accepted that one of their planes was shot down and that a pilot was captured.

Pakistan returns Indian pilot shot down over Kashmir in 'peace gesture'

Lahore(1st March 2019) Pakistan has returned an Indian pilot who had become the face of the worst military crisis between the two countries in decades, in a gesture aimed at demonstrating its willingness to de-escalate the conflict. Wing commander Abhinandan Varthaman, who was shot down during the first publicly acknowledged dogfight between the countries in 48 years on Wednesday, was returned to India at the Wagah border crossing in Punjab on Friday evening 1st March.

Pakistan's prime minister, Imran Khan, had announced his impending release in parliament on Thursday, calling it a "peace gesture".

The diminutive iron gates on both sides of the border slid open and Varthaman strode out onto the no-man's land in between. For a moment soldiers from both sides came face-to-face. Varthaman shook the hand of an Indian officer, and another took him by the waist and walked him onto Indian soil. The two gates were slammed shut behind him.

Pakistan Navy detects Indian submarine, foils intrusion into its waters

KARACHI (4-3-2019) According to the spokesperson, the Pakistan Navy detected an Indian submarine and stopped it from entering Pakistani waters. By doing so, the Pakistan Navy foiled every attempt of the Indian submarine to avoid being detected, dealing a setback to India in the seas. "The Submarine was detected and localised in Pakistan's maritime zone on March 4, 2019," mentioned the statement. "The submarine is being kept under watch along with monitoring of other Indian Navy units. The detected submarine is one of the latest submarines of Indian Navy," added the statement. Footage of Indian submarine released by Pakistan Navy.

This was the second occasion since November 2016 when the Pakistan Navy detected an Indian submarine trying to wade into Pakistani waters. Previously on Nov 14, 2016, Pakistan Navy caught Indian Navy submarine operating in Pakistani Exclusive Economic Zone. "In order to maintain peace, the Indian submarine was not targeted which is a reflection of Pakistan's desire for peace," the statement said.

"Learning a lesson from this incident, India too should show its inclination towards peace," it added.

Pakistan Navy used its specialised skills to ward off the submarine which was equipped with the latest technology. The achievement is an evidence of Pakistan Navy's capabilities and shows it is ready and vigilant at all times to defend the country's maritime frontiers, the spokesperson said. Pakistan Navy is capable of giving a jaw-breaking response to any aggression, the statement added.

The latest intrusion comes as tensions between India and Pakistan are at an all-time high following Indian incursions into Pakistani airspace and subsequent downing of two Indian aircraft by Pakistan Air Force.

Pakistan successfully test-fires long-range 'smart missile' from JF-17 Thunder

ISLAMABAD: (March 12, 2019) The Pakistan Air Force (PAF) successfully test-fired indigenously developed extended range "smart weapon" from JF-17 multi-role fighter aircraft on Tuesday 12 March. The experiment marked a great milestone for the country as the weapon has been developed, integrated and qualified solely through indigenous efforts of Pakistani scientists and engineers, said a statement issued by the PAF. "The successful trial has provided JF-17 Thunder a very potent and assured day and night capability to engage variety of targets with pinpoint accuracy," it added. Lauding the efforts of Pakistani scientists and engineers, Chief of the Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Mujahid Anwar Khan congratulated the PAF personnel on the achievement of this monumental indigenous capability. "Pakistan is a peace loving nation but if subjected to aggression by adversary, we would respond with full force," he was quoted by the PAF spokesperson as saying.

Roar of thunder: JF-17 upgrades to Block 3 as it tests a new weapon

(News Desk) About two weeks after the JF-17 underwent its first dogfight, the jet fighter is back in the news with major developments. The development and production of JF-17 Block 3 are underway aimed at enhancing its "informatized warfare" capability and weapons, Chief Designer of the China-Pakistan co-developed fighter jet, Yang Wei said. All related work is being carried out to upgrade the JF-17 Block's informatized warfare and weapons, according to a report of China Aviation News. Wei Dongxu, a Beijing based military analyst told Global Times that the JF-17 Block 3 is likely to be fitted with an active electronically scanned array radar, which can gather more information in combat, enabling the fighter jet to engage from a farther range and attack multiple targets at the same time. It is in competition against the Indian-made Tejas and the South Korean F-50. With an initial purchase of 12 units, Malaysia

is also looking to have an option for an additional 24 units in the future. A helmet-mounted display and sight system could also allow pilots to aim whatever he sees. Pakistan, the main user of the JF-17 could further share information between the fighter and other platforms taking advantage of the whole combat system to effectively defend against strong opponents, Wei said. With the new upgrade, the JF-17 Block 3 will match an improved version of the F-16 fighter jet, he added. JF-17, or the FC-1, is a single-engine multi-role light fighter jet jointly developed by China and Pakistan for export.

The Non-Military Pre-emptive Surgical Strike (NPSS) General Mirza Aslam Beg | Former COAS, Pakistan

The Indian Defense Secretary explained to the press:

“NPSS means that a military target has not been hit because hitting a military target would be construed as an act of war.”

Similarly , our military spokesman said:

“Our air defense did spot the Indian aircrafts intruding across the L of C but did not engage them because no military targets were engaged.”

There appear to be the logic between the two concepts to limit the surgical strikes, developing into a full fledged war. Yet what happened last night at the working boundary is amazing. In response to Indian ingress, Pakistani ground troops knock-out half a dozen Indian posts, killing a number of enemy soldiers. This morning two Indian aircrafts intruded into our territory, in support of the Indian ground troops. Our fighter aircrafts took no time to shoot them down. One of their pilots has been captured.

The previous night our fighter aircrafts took-off from Nur Khan Air Base to cover ten minutes nautical miles distance in a record time of two minutes, to engage Indian aircrafts at Balakot. Indian aircrafts were being provided security cover, from across the borders by SU-30 aircrafts, armed with Israeli missiles with a range of 80xkm. The 4xmirage 2000 dare not face Pakistani fighters and ran for their life, dropping the bombs and the fuel tanks, into the Atarshisha mountains, where I had been footing the area, on SSG exercises, during the period 1950s. My driver, Ghulam Mohammad comes from Jabba. He gave minute to minute account of the so-called Indian Surgical Strike at Balakot.

Well-done Pakistani forces, by giving a bloody nose to the Indian War Jingoism. May Allah bless you with greater success. Ameen. No doubt, the area selected for our surgical strike would give impetus to the freedom movement inside occupied Kashmir.

Indian general credits ISPR on doing excellent work for Pakistan

LONDON: Retired senior Indian military commander Lt. General (retd) Syed Ata Hasnain has praised the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) for doing a phenomenal job in disseminating information,

connecting with the masses and setting the correct narrative beyond just Pakistani sphere. The former General Officer Commanding 15 Corps (HQs Srinagar), Indian Army, was speaking at a seminar organised by the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) on the subject of "Civil Society in Jammu & Kashmir: democracy vs terrorism".

Rahul Roy-Chaudhry, Senior Fellow for South Asia IISS chaired the seminar and other speakers included Dr Shabir Chaudhry, President Foreign Affairs Committee of United Kashmir People's National Party (UKPNP) and Nitin A. Gokhale, Chief Executive Officer and Editor-in-Chief, Bharat Shakti, India.

One of India's most decorated military officers, General Ata spoke about the ISPR in his opening remarks and then returned to discuss it various times during the question and answer session. He retired in June 2013 as the Military Secretary, after 40 years of service in the Indian armed forces. In occupied Jammu and Kashmir, he served as the GOC 15 Corps, with headquarters in Srinagar, from 2010 to 2012. "I give full marks to Pakistan for the manner in which it has played out the information strategy. The ISPR has done an outstanding work for Pakistan," he said in his speech claiming that India started losing narrative in Held Kashmir in the 90s and has not been able to wrest control.

He said that in India "everyone knows what the ISI is but nobody what the ISPR is" and only military professionals know about the ISPR. General Ata Hasnain said that the aspect of hybrid warfare has not been understood in India and authorities in India have failed to grasp that "the hybrid can only be countered by hybrid and not by conventional means". He gave the examples of Iraq and Afghanistan where the Americans have spent billions of dollars but failed to achieve the desired results. "Hybrid in Iraq and Afghanistan should have been fought by hybrid but hybrid was fought by going conventional."

He advised India to take a leaf out of Pakistan's strategy and use information strategy, counter radicalisation to connect with Kashmiris if it was serious to address the causes of alienation.

He said that for the India-Pakistan relations Pervez Musharraf's period of 2004-2008 was the best as it looked like that borders will become irrelevant and the issues will be resolved but then it became apparent that Musharraf's formula didn't have acceptance within the Pakistan Army.

General Ata said India has made many mistakes in its military approach but one of the biggest ones has been about "the Military-Civic Action (MCA)". He added: "The MCA is not soft power. It's not psychological. In 30 years, India has made many mistakes as far its strategy is concerned but one of the major mistakes is to think that the MCA is a psychological operation, it's information operation. It's not. "If anyone has taught us how to play information operation, it's the ISPR of Pakistan who have done it marvellously, I would like to give it back to them, always. Credit to them."

He claimed that India and Pakistan have been engaged in hybrid war in Kashmir where sometime India had upper hand and sometime Pakistan but "from 2012 onwards Pakistan got upper hand and the change of the generation and social media made all the difference. We didn't know how to carry the information side of things but Pakistan has done it extremely well".

He said that India has been thwarted in Kashmir by the rise of social media from 2010 onwards. He said the new generation of Kashmir used social media to promote “Azaadi” narrative and that has gone against India. He said that the character of Kashmir has changed locally from once being home to Sufiism and shrines to the radicalisation of these mosques and tremendous amount of passion at funeral of Kashmiris killed by Indian forces and religious affiliation.

He defended the use of hard power in Kashmir but agreed that it has not worked but said that in the end India will come to give up the muscular power and come to the soft power. Nitin Gokhale defended the use of power by India against Kashmiris. He said that India tried all other options but failed and then decided to use the harshest methods, including choking finances of the pro-independence leadership. He justified that India was right to use all kinds of methods.

Rahul Roy-Chaudhry told this scribe: “In view of the Pulwama suicide bombing attack that led to India and Pakistan almost coming to the brink of war, this session focused on key issues of governance, radicalisation, separatism, terrorism and the media in Kashmir, amidst looming parliamentary elections. It provided an opportunity to 'look forward', not 'backwards', towards political and regional stability.”

Dr Shabir Chaudhry condemned the illegal detention of Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) leader Yasin Malik and other Kashmiris. He criticised the Indian government for banning the JKLF last week. He said that use of hard power by India such as pellet guns, torture and killings -- had played a big part in the alienation of Kashmiris.

Famous singer Shahnaz Begum passes away

KARACHI: Eminent singer Shahnaz Rahmatullah known to most Pakistanis as Shahnaz Begum, who was loved for her flawless rendition of “Jeevay, Jeevay Pakistan” & “Sohni Dharti Allah Rakhe “ died of cardiac arrest early on Sunday morning at the age of 67. According to Bangladeshi media, she was laid to rest at Dhaka's Banani graveyard.

She is survived by her husband, a son and a daughter. Shahnaz Begum emerged as a notable singer in Dhaka during the mid-1960s, according to The Independent. She was born on Jan 2, 1952, in that city.

In the late 1960s and early 70s, she sang the memorable National song, Sohani Dharti Allah Rakhey, in addition to Jeevay Jeevay Pakistan.

She is the recipient of the Ekushey Padak in 1992 and Bangladesh National Film Award for best female playback singer for the film Chhutir Phande (1990).

Brief News International

New Zealand 50 martyred as 'terrorist' attack at two mosques

New Zealand bans military type semi-automatic weapons used in mosque massacre

An Australian gunman martyred at least 50 people during Friday prayers at two mosques in Christchurch the worst attack in the Pacific country's history. New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern told a news conference that the mosque shootings appeared to be a well-planned "terrorist attack".

"This is, and will be, one of New Zealand's darkest days," an ashen-faced Ardern said. The prime minister also said two explosive devices attached to suspect vehicles were found and were disarmed. The mosques on target were the Masjid Al Noor in central Christchurch and another one in suburban Linwood.

Sam Clarke, a reporter with TVNZ, spoke with several people inside the Masjid Al Noor mosque when the shooting began. He told Al Jazeera a man entered with an automatic weapon and began firing.

"A gunman - dressed in black with a helmet carrying a machine gun - came into the back of the mosque and started firing into the people praying there," said Clarke. It was later confirmed that 30 worshippers were killed at the mosque, including women and children.

'Australian' attacker : As many as 41 people died at one mosque, seven at another and one person died in hospital, New Zealand's Police Commissioner Mike Bush told reporters, describing the attack as a "very well-planned event". Bush said four suspects, including a woman, were apprehended in connection with the attacks. One of the arrested men had been charged with murder.

New Zealand attack: Suspect donated money to Austrian far right

Austria's Chancellor Sebastian Kurz says there is a link between a far-right movement in his country and the suspect in an attack on two mosques in the New Zealand city of Christchurch in which 50 Muslims were shot dead.

The suspect, a 28-year-old white supremacist identified as Australian-born Brenton Tarrant, donated 1,500 euros (\$1,700) to the anti-immigration Identitarian Movement in Austria (IBOe) in early 2018, according to prosecutors.

On Monday 25th March, the home of Identitarian Movement spokesman Martin Sellner in Austria's capital, Vienna, was searched as part of an investigation into possible links to the suspect.

"It has been confirmed that there is a financial link between the man who perpetrated the attack in New Zealand and the Identitarian Movement in Austria," Kurz told reporters following a cabinet meeting. He also said the link would be investigated thoroughly and that he had talked to interior and justice ministers about dissolving the far-right Identitarian Movement. Austria's intelligence body also said the suspect visited Austria last November.

Taliban leader Omar lived next to US Afghan base

ISLAMABAD: Taliban founder Mullah Omar lived within walking distance of US bases in Afghanistan for years, according to a new book that highlights embarrassing failures of American intelligence. Washington believed the one-eyed, fugitive leader had fled to Pakistan, but the new biography says Omar was in fact living just three miles from a major US Forward Operating Base in his home province of Zabul before his death in 2013.

"Searching for an Enemy", by Dutch journalist Bette Dam, reveals the Taliban chief lived as a virtual hermit, refusing visits from his family and filling notebooks with jottings in an imaginary language. Dam spent more than five years researching the book and interviewed Jabbar Omari, Omar's bodyguard who hid and protected him after the Taliban regime was overthrown.

According to the book, Omar listened to the BBC's Pashto-language news broadcasts in the evenings, but even when he learned about the death of al-Qaeda supremo Osama Bin Laden rarely commented on developments in the outside world.

Following the 9/11 attacks in 2001 which led to the fall of the Taliban, the US put a \$10 million bounty on Omar and he went into hiding in a small compound in the regional capital Qalat, Dam writes.

The family living at the compound were not told of the identity of their mystery guest, but US forces twice almost found him.

At one point, a US patrol approached as Omar and Omari were in the courtyard. Alarmed, the two men ducked behind a wood pile, but the soldiers passed without entering. A second time, US troops even searched the house but did not uncover the concealed entrance to his secret room. It was not clear if the search was the result of a routine patrol or a tip-off. Omar decided to move when the US started building Forward Operating Base Lagman in 2004, just a few hundred metres from his hideout. He later moved to a second building but soon afterwards the Pentagon constructed Forward Operating Base Wolverine -- home to 1,000 US troops, and where American and British special forces were sometimes based -- close by. Despite his terror at being caught, he dared not move again, rarely even going outside and often hiding in tunnels when US planes flew over. According to Dam, Omar would often only talk to his guard and cook, and used an old Nokia mobile phone, without a sim card, to record himself chanting verses from the Holy Quran.

Palestinians mass at Gaza border to mark protest anniversary

Nidal al-Mughrabi

GAZA (Reuters) - Tens of thousands of Palestinians rallied at the Israel-Gaza border on Saturday 30 March, facing off against Israeli tanks and troops on the first anniversary of the 'Great March of Return' demonstrations. Israeli forces had massed the other side of the fortified frontier, with tensions already high after a rocket attack from Gaza and Israeli air strikes earlier in the week. Four Palestinians were

killed on Saturday, Gaza medical officials said. Three were 17-year-olds shot dead by Israeli troops while protesting, they said, adding another person was killed at an overnight protest hours before the main rally. But Saturday's rally was smaller than expected, despite concerns that the anniversary would see a major escalation. Loudspeakers at border protest camps played Palestinian nationalist songs and Hamas, the armed Islamist movement which controls Gaza, had ordered schools to shut for the day to encourage participation.

The protesters are demanding the end to a security blockade imposed on Gaza by Israel and Egypt, and want Palestinians to have the right to return to land from which their families fled or were forced to flee during Israel's founding in 1948.

Israel rejects any such return, saying that would eliminate its Jewish majority.

Hundreds of Palestinian men, some from Hamas, were deployed in bright orange vests to deter people from going near the fence. There was also less acrid black smoke swirling around with little sign of tyre-burning, as on previous weekends. The Israeli military said there had been around 40,000 protesters, some hurling grenades and explosives.

YEAR OF PROTEST : Around 200 Gazans have been killed by Israeli troops since the protests started on March 30 last year, according to Palestinian Health Ministry figures. An Israeli soldier was also killed by a Palestinian sniper.

Trump backs Israeli sovereignty over Golan

President Trump said it was time for the United States to recognize Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights that it seized from Syria in 1967, giving a boost to Prime Minister Netanyahu in the middle of his re-election campaign. "After 52 years it is time for the United States to fully recognize Israel's Sovereignty over the Golan Heights, which is of critical strategic and security importance to the State of Israel and Regional Stability!" Trump wrote on Twitter.

Recognition of the disputed area, captured by Israel in the 1967 Middle East war and annexed in 1981 in a move not recognized internationally, would mark a major shift in U.S. policy days before Netanyahu arrives in Washington to meet with Trump and address the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). Netanyahu has been pressing for the United States to recognize its claim to sovereignty over the Golan Heights and raised that possibility in his first White House meeting with Trump in February 2017.

US blasted at UN for recognizing Israeli sovereignty over Golan

27-3-2019 | US widely denounced at UN Security Council after Trump signed off on Israel's 1981 annexation of Syria's Golan Heights. The United States came under sharp criticism from 14 other UN

Security Council nations for its decision to recognize Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights in violation of international law. The Security Council met at the request of Syria, which in a letter to the council called the American move a "flagrant violation" of UN resolutions.

President Donald Trump signed a proclamation Monday in which the United States recognised Israel's annexation of the strategic plateau that it seized in 1967 and annexed in 1981.

Speaker after speaker at the council session supported Syria's sovereignty over the Golan Heights and opposed Israel's annexation after Trump's proclamation.

"This unilateral action does nothing to assist in finding a long-term peaceful solution to the conflict in the Middle East," South Africa's UN Ambassador Jerry Matjila said.

Syria's closest ally, Russia, urged governments to continue to view the Golan Heights as Israeli-occupied territory. "If anybody feels any temptation to follow this poor example, we would urge them to refrain from this aggressive revision of international law," Russia's Deputy Ambassador Vladimir Safronkov said.

France warned any attempt to turn away from international law was "doomed to fail", as the United States prepares to unveil its Middle East peace proposals.

US deploys THAAD missile defense systems to Israel for very first time

4 Mar, 2019 | (Source: RT News)

The US military has delivered THAAD missile defense systems to Israel for the very first time. The deployment comes as a part of a joint exercise and is aimed to show the US' "continued commitment" to Israel's "regional security."

The advanced systems were deployed to Israel in early March, US and Israeli military officials revealed. The THAADs Terminal High Altitude Area Defense systems will be stationed in the country's south, alongside some 200 US military personnel.

"During the deployment, our service members will work in various locations throughout Israel and will practice operational procedures for augmenting Israel's existing air and missile defense architecture," the US European Command said in a statement, adding that the exercise serves as a "demonstration of the United States' continued commitment to Israel's regional security."

"The American THAAD system is considered among the most advanced systems in the world, and together with our defense systems, we are stronger in dealing with threats, close or distant, emanating from all areas of the Middle East," he said.

'We aren't slaves':

Erdogan defies US pressure over S-400 deal with Russia, says S-500 may follow

Ankara is not a slave to an America in which Washington decides which weapons system Turkey can purchase, the country's president proclaimed, stressing its deployment of Russia's S-400 air defense systems will proceed as planned. Ankara's resilience against US pressure over the purchase of the S-400 systems remains rock solid, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan clarified on Wednesday, stressing that Turkey is a sovereign nation which has the right to choose its trade partners and arms suppliers. "It's done. There can never be a turning back. This would not be ethical, it would be immoral. Nobody should ask us to lick up what we spat," Erdogan told Kanal 24.

Turkey can buy Su-35s from Moscow if US doesn't ship promised F-35s

Washington risks losing the Turkish arms market if it continues to delay the delivery of F-35s agreed upon with Ankara, as Turkey can simply switch to buying warplanes from Russia, RT was told.

"If the US fails to ship the jets to Turkey, Ankara can certainly buy the Su-35s from Russia instead," Viktor Litovkin, a military analyst with the Moscow-based TASS news agency, told Russian News(RT).

Both aircraft have comparable characteristics, Litovkin said, adding that Moscow wouldn't risk leaking sensitive military technology because the jet's software is hard to crack. It would not require much effort to smoothly integrate the planes into the Turkish military either.

Politicians in Washington have been trying to pressure key NATO ally Turkey to drop its deal to buy S-400 anti-air missile defense systems from Moscow. This week, US senators tabled a draft bill calling for a ban on the transfer of 100 F-35s, previously agreed with Turkey, unless it guarantees that it won't buy weapons from Russia. The delivery of the US-made planes was already effectively blocked by the Senate last year.

The Turkish leadership, meanwhile, strongly defended its right to buy arms from whoever it wants, and repeatedly reaffirmed that it will stick to the S-400 contract.

The attempts to pressure Ankara are "a sign of unfair competition" the US employs to "steamroll" the sale of its own anti-air missile defense system, the MIM-104 Patriot Pac 3, Litovkin said. He believes that Washington is likely to continue blackmailing its ally for as long as it can, but at some point will be forced to concede and deliver the promised jets to Turkey.

Power in space: Mission Shakti Space debris warning after India destroys satellite

NEW DELHI (28 March 2019) India has entered an elite space club with the Defence Research and Development Organisation blowing up a satellite in a Low Earth Orbit into smithereens. India is the fourth country to have carried out an ASAT test. India expects space debris from its anti-satellite weapons launch to burn out in less than 45 days, its top defense scientist said, seeking to allay global concern about fragments hitting objects. The comments came a day after India said it used an indigenously developed ballistic missile interceptor to destroy one of its own satellites at a height of 300 km (186 miles), in a test aimed at boosting its defenses in space.

Critics say such technology, known to be possessed only by the United States, Russia and China, raises the prospect of an arms race in outer space, besides posing a hazard by creating a cloud of fragments that could persist for years.

G. Satheesh Reddy, the chief of India's Defence Research and Development Organisation, said a low-altitude military satellite was picked for the test, to reduce the risk of debris left in space.

"That's why we did it at lower altitude, it will vanish in no time," he told Reuters in an interview. "The debris is moving right now. How much debris, we are trying to work out, but our calculations are it should be dying down within 45 days."

Few satellites operate at the altitude of 300 km, from which experts say the collision debris will fall back to earth, burning up in the atmosphere in a matter of weeks, instead of posing a threat to other satellites.

In 2007, China destroyed a satellite in a polar orbit, creating the largest orbital debris cloud in history, with more than 3,000 objects, according to the Secure World Foundation. Because the impact altitude exceeded 800 km (500 miles), many of the resulting scraps stayed in orbit. "Some of it could still be there," Reddy said, adding that India had been much more careful in conducting its test. The acting US defence secretary has warned that the testing of anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons can create a "mess" in space after India destroyed one of its own satellites. Patrick Shanahan said the US was still studying the Indian test, which Delhi insisted it carried out in low-earth orbit to not leave space debris. The U.S. military's Strategic Command was tracking more than 250 pieces of debris from India's missile test and would issue "close-approach notifications as required until the debris enters the Earth's atmosphere," Pentagon spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Dave Eastburn said.

Reddy identified the military satellite shot down as Microsat R, weighing about 750 kg (1,653 lb) and launched on Jan. 24. by the Indian Space Research Organization for the purpose of the test. A week after launch, it was moved into a different orbit in preparation for the test.

"The technology has been completely proven, we hit it with centimeters of accuracy, probably less than 10 cm," Reddy said.

Once Rafales come, Pakistan won't come near LoC or border

CHANDIGARH: Indian Air Force (IAF) Chief B S Dhanoa said that Rafale jets will be the best combat aircraft in the Indian sub-continent and once these are inducted, Pakistan won't dare to come near the Line of Control (LoC) or the international border.

In an exclusive talk with ANI on Rafale's air-to air capability in a combat situation, Dhanoa said, "When the Rafale comes in, it will ensure that the deterrence of our air defence will increase manifold and they (Pakistan) will not come anywhere near our Line of Control or border. That kind of capability we will possess for which presently they (Pakistan) don't have an answer."

On the sidelines of a function organised here for the induction of four US-made Chinook helicopters, he was asked about the situation on February 27 when Pakistani F-16 jets tried to attack Indian military positions, a day after the IAF strikes in Balakot in Pakistan in response to the Pulwama terror attack.

The first Rafale aircraft under a 36-plane deal with France is scheduled to be delivered in September to the IAF.

In military circles, there has been a talk that if Rafales were in the IAF, these would have not have allowed the Pakistan planes to come close to the LoC. The Rafales will be armed with Meteor air-to-air missiles which have the capability of shooting down enemy planes at strikes ranges upto 150 kms.

Air Chief Marshal Dhanoa asserted that at present, it is going to be the best aircraft in terms of the weapons capability in the Indian sub-continent and would be also the best in comparison with what China and Pakistan have.

"We are going to get Rafale in the month of September. Rafale will give a tremendous jump to our capability and it is superior to all the aircraft in the inventory of both our adversaries," he said.

Ethiopian Airlines jetliner crashes shortly after takeoff, killing all 157 people on board

An Ethiopian Airlines flight with 157 people on board crashed in eastern Africa on Sunday 10 March morning. Investigators have recovered both flight recorders from the Ethiopian Airlines Boeing 737 that crashed just outside Addis Ababa, killing all 149 passengers and eight crew, according to the carrier. "The Digital Flight Data Recorder (DFDR) and Cockpit Voice Recorder (CVR) of ET302 have been Recovered," the state-owned airline announced.

The Boeing 737 MAX 8 aircraft, which was bound for the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, came down minutes after taking off from Ethiopia on Sunday. It was not immediately clear what caused the crash of the recently-acquired Boeing 737 MAX 8 model, which was involved in another aviation disaster in Indonesia last year.

Michael Ryan :

Irishman Michael Ryan was among the seven dead from the UN's World Food Programme (WFP), a Rome-based humanitarian organisation distributing billions of rations every year to those in need. The aid worker and engineer known as Mick was formerly from Lahinch in Co Clare in Ireland's west and was believed to be married with two children and living in Cork. His projects have included creating safe ground for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and assessing the damage to rural roads in Nepal which were blocked by landslides.

Joanna Toole :

Joanna Toole, a 36-year-old from Exmouth, Devon, was heading to Nairobi to attend the UN Environment Assembly when she was killed.

Italy endorses China's Belt and Road plan in first for a G7 nation

Giselda Vagnoni : Reuter : 23 Mar. 2019

ROME (Reuters) - Italy endorsed China's ambitious "Belt and Road" infrastructure plan on Saturday, becoming the first major Western power to back the initiative to help revive the struggling Italian economy. Signing ceremony was the highlight of a three-day trip to Italy by Chinese President Xi Jinping, with the two nations boosting their ties at a time when the United States is locked in a trade war with China. The rapprochement has angered Washington and alarmed some European Union allies, who fear it could see Beijing gain access to sensitive technologies and critical transport hubs.

Deputy Prime Minister Luigi Di Maio played down such concerns, telling reporters that although Rome remained fully committed to its Western partners, it had to put Italy first when it came to commercial ties. "This is a very important day for us, a day when Made-in-Italy has won, Italy has won and Italian companies have won," said Di Maio, who signed the memorandum of understanding on behalf of the Italian government in a Renaissance villa. Taking advantage of Xi's visit, Italian firms inked deals with Chinese counterparts worth an initial 2.5 billion euros (\$2.8 billion). Di Maio said these contracts had a potential, future value of 20 billion euros. he Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) lies at the heart of China's foreign policy strategy and was incorporated into the ruling Communist Party constitution in 2017, reflecting Xi's desire for his country to take a global leadership role. The United States worries that it is designed to strengthen China's military influence and could be used to spread technologies capable of spying on Western interests.

ISIL defeated in final Syria victory: SDF

(23-3-19) The US-backed fighters in Syria have declared military victory over ISIL , ending a four-year battle against the group that once held territory spanning a third of Syria and Iraq. After weeks of heavy fighting, the tent camp where the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, or ISIS) fighters) had made their final stand in the village of Baghouz was bombed to shreds.

A field pitted with abandoned trenches and bomb craters, and littered with scorched tents and the twisted metal carcasses of vehicles, was all that remained. Half buried in the dirt was a tattered shred of ISIL's notorious black flag, while a giant yellow flag belonging to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) fluttered atop a shell-pocked building.

"Baghouz is free and the military victory against Daesh has been achieved," tweeted Mustafa Bali, a spokesperson for the Kurdish-led SDF, referring to ISIL by its Arabic acronym.

The elimination of the last stronghold in Baghouz brings to a close a gruelling final battle that stretched across several weeks and saw thousands of people flee the territory and surrender in desperation, and hundreds killed.

It is not known whether the group's leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, is still alive or where he might be hiding.

It spells the end of the ISIL group's so-called caliphate, which at its height four years ago was home to some 8 million people, but the group still maintains a scattered presence and sleeper cells across Syria and Iraq. The campaign to take back the territory by the US and its partners has spanned nearly five years and unleashed more than 100,000 bombs and killed untold numbers of fighters and civilians.

South Africa to downgrade status of its embassy in Israel once 'modalities' are finalized

Concerned with Israeli treatment of Palestinians and the lack of willingness to negotiate a two-state solution, the South African President announced that he remains committed to downgrading his country's embassy in Tel Aviv. "We are clear on our support for the achievement of the Palestinian state, alongside the right of the state of Israel to exist in peace and security with its neighbors," Cyril Ramaphosa told the parliament this week, urging the government to implement South Africa's ruling party's 2017 resolution which called for downgrading the country's embassy in Israel to the status of a liaison office, because of the "continued Israeli violations of the rights of Palestinians."

The South African government remains seized with the modalities of downgrading the South African Embassy in Israel and we will communicate once Cabinet has fully finalized on this matter.

Israeli-South African diplomatic ties have been something of a love-hate relationship over the last seven decades. After South Africa become one of the first nations to recognize Israel in 1948, its ties with the Jewish state flourished under its white-minority rule. However, following the collapse of the notorious apartheid political system, which discriminated against the black majority, the country began to lean towards support of Palestinians, staging demonstrations and boycott campaigns against the state of Israel.

Ferry capsizes kills nearly 80 in Iraq's Mosul

(MARCH 21, 2019) Most of the casualties on the ferry were women and children who could not swim, said the head of Mosul's Civil Defence Authority Husam Khalil. He said the ferry had been loaded to several times its capacity. "It can normally carry 50 people. There were 250 on board before the incident," he said.

Five ferry workers were arrested after late on Thursday, security sources said. Rescue workers were still looking for missing passengers. The boat was ferrying people to a man-made island used as a recreational area by families, according to one witness. "I was standing near the river bank when suddenly the ferry started to tilt left and right, and passengers began screaming before it capsized," said Mohamed Masoud, a local civil servant.

Mozambique cyclone claims more victims as death toll exceeds 400

BEIRA (Reuters) - The number of people killed in Mozambique after a cyclone tore through southern Africa and triggered devastating floods has risen to more than 400, a government minister said on Saturday 23 March, as the United Nations warned of the risk of further flooding. Cyclone Idai lashed the Mozambican port city of Beira with winds of up to 170 km per hour (105 miles per hour) last week, then moved inland to Zimbabwe and Malawi, flattening buildings and putting the lives of millions at risk. "The situation is getting better, still critical, but it's getting better," Land and Environment Minister Celso Correia said, adding that it was becoming easier to work on the ground.

"But unfortunately the number of dead is increasing, we have now 417 people who have lost their lives," he said. The floods have left thousands of people scrambling for shelter, food and water. "Courtesy Reuters"

Al Shabaab attack on Somali ministry in Mogadishu kills at least 15

MOGADISHU (23-3-2019) - Somalia's al Shabaab stormed a government building on Saturday, detonating a suicide car bomb in the heart of the capital Mogadishu with at least 15 people, including an assistant minister, killed during the ensuing gun battle. In the latest bombing claimed by al Shabaab, an Islamist group which is fighting to establish its own rule in Somalia, based on a strict interpretation of sharia law, a huge explosion shook central Mogadishu and a large plume of smoke rose above a building housing Somalia's ministries of labour and works.

The four militants who attacked the building were shot dead. Another militant was a suicide car bomber and so he also died," Major Ali Abdullahi, a police officer told Reuters.

In India's Assam, Muslim families evicted weeks before elections

Authorities evict more than 600 families from their homes accusing them of illegally occupying government land.

by Abdul Kalam Azad

Hojai, India - After battling for life for five days at a hospital in Guwahati, the capital of the northeastern Indian state of Assam, Kulsuma Begum succumbed to her injuries on March 11.

Her mother-in-law alleged police and paramilitary forces barged into her house to physically remove Kulsuma - who had given birth to a baby boy just two hours ago - during an eviction drive at Sarkebasti village in central Assam's Hojai district, about 150km east of Guwahati.

Authorities in the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) forcibly evicted more than 600 Muslim families from their land in Hojai, saying the families, including Kulsuma's, had encroached upon government land.

"Seven to eight policemen entered the house and started ransacking it. I could take some stuff out. When I came back I saw Kulsuma was lying on the floor and couldn't move," Ramisa Khatun told Al Jazeera.

"I took up the baby as I feared they might kill him," said Ramisa, 50. As Kulsuma was being ushered out of the house she collapsed, said Ramisa.

Seven to eight policemen entered the house and started ransacking it

RAMISA KHATUN, EVICTEE

The 22-year-old was rushed to Guwahati after a local hospital in Hojai referred her to Gauhati Medical College and Hospital, where a doctor said she had "suffered shock".

'Harassed, discriminated': Story of Assam's Bengali origin people

In one corner of the Guwahati hospital corridor, the newborn baby was sleeping next to Ramisa on a visibly dirty blanket. The baby has now been handed over to the family.

Articles

Israel's fingerprints are all over India's escalating conflict with Pakistan

By Robert Fisk

When I heard the first news report, I assumed it was an Israeli air raid on Gaza. Or Syria. Airstrikes on a "terrorist camp" were the first words. A "command and control centre" destroyed, many "terrorists" killed. The military was retaliating for a "terrorist attack" on its troops, we were told. An Islamist "jihad" base had been eliminated. Then I heard the name Balakot and realised that it was neither in Gaza, nor in Syria not even in Lebanon but in Pakistan. Strange thing, that. How could anyone mix up Israel and India?

Well, don't let the idea fade away. Two thousand five hundred miles separate the Israeli ministry of defence in Tel Aviv from the Indian ministry of defence in New Delhi, but there's a reason why the usual cliché-stricken agency dispatches sound so similar. For months, Israel has been assiduously lining itself up alongside India's nationalist BJP government in an unspoken and politically dangerous "anti-Islamist" coalition, an unofficial, unacknowledged alliance, while India itself has now become the largest weapons market for the Israeli arms trade.

Not by chance, therefore, has the Indian press just trumpeted the fact that Israeli-made Rafael Spice-2000 "smart bombs" were used by the Indian air force in its strike against Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) "terrorists" inside Pakistan. Like many Israeli boasts of hitting similar targets, the Indian adventure into

Pakistan might owe more to the imagination than military success. The “300-400 terrorists” supposedly eliminated by the Israeli-manufactured and Israeli-supplied GPS-guided bombs may turn out to be little more than rocks and trees.

But there was nothing unreal about the savage ambush of Indian troops in Kashmir on 14 February which the JeM claimed, and which left 40 Indian soldiers dead. Nor the shooting down of at least one Indian jet this week. India was Israel's largest arms client in 2017, paying £530m for Israeli air defence, radar systems and ammunition, including air-to-ground missiles most of them tested during Israel's military offensives against Palestinians and targets in Syria.

Israel itself is trying to explain away its continued sales of tanks, weapons and boats to the Myanmar military dictatorship while western nations impose sanctions on the government which has attempted to destroy its minority and largely Muslim Rohingya people. But Israel's arms trade with India is legal, above-board and much advertised by both sides.

The Israelis have filmed joint exercises between their own “special commando” units and those sent by India to be trained in the Negev desert, again with all the expertise supposedly learned by Israel in Gaza and other civilian-thronged battlefronts.

At least 16 Indian “Garud” commandos part of a 45-strong Indian military delegation were for a time based at the Nevatim and Palmachim air bases in Israel. In his first visit to India last year preceded by a trip to Israel by nationalist Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu recalled the 2008 Islamist attacks on Mumbai in which almost 170 civilians were killed. “Indians and Israelis know too well the pain of terrorist attacks,” he told Modi. “We remember the horrific savagery of Mumbai. We grit our teeth, we fight back, we never give in.” This was also BJP-speak.

Several Indian commentators, however, have warned that right-wing Zionism and right-wing nationalism under Modi should not become the foundation stone of the relationship between the two countries, both of which in rather different ways fought the British empire. Brussels researcher Shairee Malhotra, whose work has appeared in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, has pointed out that India has the world's third largest Muslim population after Indonesia and Pakistan upward of 180 million people.

“The India-Israel relationship is also commonly being framed in terms of a natural convergence of ideas between their ruling BJP and Likud parties,” she wrote last year. Hindu nationalists had constructed “a narrative of Hindus as historically victims at the hands of Muslims”, an attractive idea to those Hindus who recall partition and the continuing turbulent relationship with Pakistan. In fact, as Malhotra pointed out in Haaretz, “Israel's biggest fans in India appear to be the 'internet Hindus' who primarily love Israel for how it deals with Palestine and fights Muslims.”

Malhotra has condemned Carleton University professor Vivek Dehejia for demanding a “tripartite” alliance between India, Israel and the US since they have all suffered “from the scourge of Islamic terrorism”. In fact, by the end of 2016, only 23 men from India had left to fight for Isis in the Arab world, although Belgium, with a population of only half a million Muslims, produced nearly 500 fighters.

Malhotra's argument is that the Indian-Israeli relationship should be pragmatic rather than ideological. But it is difficult to see how Zionist nationalism will not leach into Hindu nationalism when Israel is supplying so many weapons to India the latest of which India, which has enjoyed diplomatic relations with Israel since 1992, has already used against Islamists inside Pakistan.

Signing up to the “war on terror” especially “Islamist terror” may seem natural for two states built on colonial partition whose security is threatened by Muslim neighbours. In both cases, their struggle is over the right to own or occupy territory. Israel, India and Pakistan all possess nuclear weapons. Another good reason not to let Palestine and Kashmir get tangled up together. And to leave India's 180 million Muslims alone.

'Courtesy The Independent'

ISIS: Israel and Americas Blood Thirsty Child

Mirza Kashif baig

Afghanistan has become the new gathering point for ISIS. Much like any parent child relationship, ISIS and its parents US and Israel cannot remain further apart from each. The parent in the form of USA has suffered losses in Iraq and Syria by the hands of Iran and Russian coalition. As a result ISIS fighters started gathering in Afghanistan since 2015. Americans were and still are facing much retaliation from Afghan Taliban and are in a pitiful state in Afghanistan. American and Afghani are being pushed against the wall by the Taliban resistance and their success rate is really high. Americans, it seems are looking for dignified way out from Afghanistan but at the same time they have a few tricks up their sleeve which they won't hesitate from trying. ISIS is their trump card and they intend to use it to enhance their influence in the region. America entered Afghanistan to enhance its influence in South Asia and abandoning their Afghan bases would mean that this goal of theirs will have to be compromised. As a result they are pitching ISIS against the Afghan Taliban. ISIS is many being aided by defectors of Afghan Taliban and Pakistani Taliban who fled the country seeking refuge in Afghanistan, out of fear of Zarb-i-Azb. They are also being backed by Islamic movement of Uzbekistan and other elements from within Afghanistan. ISIS fighters are mainly started their operations in the Afghan provinces of Kunar and Nangarhar province and here Afghan Taliban have ensured that ISIS isn't able to hold its ground. Once they are beaten from one province they escape into the other and in this way presently their presence is seen in Farah and Helmand provinces. ISIS poses a threat to all the players in the region, especially the ones who are opposing USA. While ISIS is unable to establish a firm footing in Afghanistan, they are certainly increasing in power. This is evident from the number of threats which have taken place since 2015. In 2015 2 attacks were attributed to ISIS, In 2016 ISIS claimed responsibility for 10 attacks, this number grew to 20 in 2017 and doubled in 2018 bringing the total to 40 attacks. This shows that ISIS is getting cosy in Afghanistan and all neighbouring countries should be on their guard. Pakistan has already faced the worse side of terrorism and while we have won the battle against terrorism on our soil we

must remember that there may still be some evil seeds remaining in the form of sleeper cells which might disrupt the country's peace. Also, it will bode well for Pakistan to remember that one wrong step and we could easily fall victim to atrocities of the American puppet, ISIS. We must remain vigilant should work closely with neighbouring countries as well as other major players in the region who are also threatened by ISIS. One must bear in mind ISIS was created to serve American and Zionist agenda, therefore it has a global approach with no respect or restraint for international borders. This means that countries like, China, Russia, Iran, Pakistan and other Central Asian Republics should be aware and must remain cautious of the danger posed by ISIS. In the present scenario, the Afghani Taliban are the better option as their agenda is limited to Afghanistan only and they only wish to rid their motherland of foreign invaders. It is important that the people of Afghanistan get peace and have an established system in place to govern their country, for which it is important and crucial to rid Afghanistan of ISIS and foreign invaders.

Regional Stability and ISIS-Taliban conflict

Mirza Kashif Baig

It is estimated that almost 12,000 ISIS fighters are present in Afghanistan at the moment. These fighters are being kept in check by the Afghani Taliban and both the factions are in the bloody conflict with the Afghan Security forces. This forms a vicious circle of bloodshed which is affecting not only the Afghan people but the neighbouring countries as well. Fact of the matter is that this conflict could have a devastating spill over effect. ISIS fighters are facing brutal opposition by the hands of Afghan Taliban and as a result they may seek to relocate to neighbouring countries to establish base, develop a stronghold and wreak havoc all across. Similarly, such a conflict awakens the extremist offshoots of defeated terrorist organizations who view it as an opportunity to revive themselves. This in turn gives rise to terrorism in neighbouring areas. At the moment, the South Asian region is witnessing an economic revival in the form of the CPEC and all other projects that are linked with it. This is a part of a great One Belt One Road initiative which promises to have global benefits. In the midst of all this economic activity, a terrorist spill over would serve to ruin an otherwise tasty dish. Pakistan while not directly in the line of ISIS activity, should be vigilant as there are still many sleeper factions of TTP remaining in Pakistan. While we have successfully defeated terrorism on our soil, we must be vigilant cautious to prevent it from raising its ugly head again. Pakistan Institute for Peace and Studies (PIPS) reports that splinter groups of TTP and ISIS serve as the most viable threat to the country's stability. This shows, that while we have succeeded in bringing down terrorist attacks, we have not eliminated terrorism entirely. This claim can be backed by the fact that 595 Pakistanis lost their lives in terrorist attacks in 2018, among these 595, 38% were killed in five vicious attacks in Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa claimed by ISIS. According to PIPS report 59% of these victims were from Baluchistan. All in all, the report highlights that 262 terrorist attacks were conducted in 2018, out of which 19 were suicide bombings. Out of these 262 attacks around 171 were planned and executed by TTP and its splinter groups. These facts show that while Pakistan has come a long way, there is long way to go further and that we cannot let our guard down when we are this close to achieving our end goal. Terrorism is one huge repercussion of this conflict, whereas there are many other factors which are disrupting the region. For instance drug lords

are thriving in Afghanistan right now. Terrorist organizations like ISIS and TTP generate revenue by producing and smuggling drugs to neighbouring countries. This in turn gives rise to crime and terrorism within the region restricting economic growth and social development. ISIS – Taliban dispute is threat to other countries of the region as well. For instance, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) is gaining strength by supporting ISIS which means that can cause serious problems for Uzbekistan but having Russian support and being a member of SCO would mean that it would not stand alone. Similarly Turkmenistan, which is already battling extremism at home may be affected severely by such conflicts, and the fact that it refuses to accept help from neighbours and that it has a very small proportion of armed forces, will not go in its favour. This means that the Afghan conflict must be resolved so that these spill over effects are contained and regional stability established.

Pakistan The global pivot state

By Andrew Korybko

Pakistan's promising economic potential, international connectivity capabilities, and unparalleled geostrategic location combine with its world-class military and proven diplomatic finesse over the decades to turn the South Asian country into the global pivot state of the 21st century. As astounding as it may sound to most observers, the global pivot state of the 21st century isn't China, the US, nor Russia, but Pakistan.

The South Asian state regrettably has a terrible international reputation as a result of the joint Indo-American infowar that's been waged against it over the past few decades, but an objective look at the country's geo-strategic and domestic capabilities reveals that it's in a prime position to influentially shape the contours of the coming century.

It therefore shouldn't be surprising that China had the foresight to partner with it decades before anyone else did, but other Great Powers like Russia are finally awakening to its importance, and this is in turn making Pakistan the most strategically sought-after country in the world. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is Beijing's flagship project of its world-changing Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) because it crucially enables the People's Republic to avoid the South China Sea and Strait of Malacca hotspots and obtain reliable access to the Mideast and Africa, which provide China with energy resources for its economy and growing consumer markets for its products, respectively.

BRI is redirecting global trade routes from West to East and literally building the basis for the emerging Multipolar World Order, so considering Pakistan's irreplaceably important role in this process by virtue of CPEC, China's South Asian partner can be reconceptualized as the cornerstone of Beijing's future world vision. This in and of itself makes Pakistan pivotal, but there's actually much more to it than just that.

CPEC isn't just a “highway” from Xinjiang to the Arabian Sea but a series of mega projects through which Pakistan can transform itself from being a passive object of International Relations to a leading subject of the rapidly changing global order if it creatively expands this central corridor throughout the rest of the super continent in order to become the Zipper of Eurasia.

India's “connect central Asia” strategy will heighten regional competition

The country's domestic economic potential is extremely promising when remembering that it's a nation of over 200 million people uniquely positioned at the crossroads of China's future trade route with the rest of the “Global South”. With this in mind, Prime Minister Khan recently told the world at the UAE's World Government Summit not to “miss the boat” and lose out on their chance to capitalize off of his country's expected growth.

It's little wonder then that major investment players such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE are jumping at the opportunity to take part in this before any of their competitors can, wanting to get ahead of the race by establishing a premier presence in Pakistan as it becomes the shortest trade route between their economies and China's. That's not all there is to it, however, since Pakistan is capable of expanding CPEC in the Northern, Western, and Southern directions via the CPEC+ branch corridors to connect itself with Central Asia and Russia, the rest of West Asia (Iran, Turkey), and Africa, which could altogether make it the Convergence of Civilizations and the antidote to Huntington's poisonous attempt to divide and rule the Eastern Hemisphere through his “Clash of Civilizations” thesis.

Building off of its CPEC+ civilizational-geostrategic connectivity prospects, Pakistan can institutionalize its role as the Zipper of Eurasia by bringing together the two incipient multilateral strategic partnerships that it's a part of the Multipolar CENTO with Iran and Turkey, and the Multipolar Trilateral with China and Russia to form the Golden Ring of Multipolar Great Powers smack dab in the center of Eurasia, greatly aided as it would be by the instrumental role that Islamabad will naturally play in the post-American multipolar blueprint for Afghanistan.

Pakistan can pull this off because it has a proven track record of diplomatic success in balancing between various powers, be it the US and China or Saudi Arabia and Iran, and its world-class nuclear-armed military is an impressive partner for all. Simply put, Pakistan is the pivot state upon which all of China's future plans depend, therefore recasting it as the kingmaker of the New Cold War and the world-changing multipolar processes of the 21st century. That said, Pakistan is also a pivot state in its own right, one that's capable of zipping together the various forces of Eurasia and becoming the convergence point of the Eastern Hemisphere's many diverse civilizations, which can be institutionalized through the Golden Ring framework that it's the key component of. Prophetically, Pakistani founding father MA Jinnah predicted all of this when he famously proclaimed in 1948.

Kick - starting the Karakoram Highway

By Major General Syed Ali Hamid

Many of us know about the role of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) in the construction of the Karakoram Highway (KKH). But I am sure that not many know that well before the Chinese, the United States Air Force (USAF) helped the Pakistan Army Engineers working on the Indus Valley Road as the KKH was called in the early 1960s.

A jeepable road to Gilgit through the Kaghan Valley had been constructed after Independence but gradients were very steep, particularly over the 4,000-metre Babusar Pass which was snowbound for six months of the year. A number of surveys for a road along the River Indus from Batgram to Chilas (a distance of 250 km), had been undertaken during the 1950s but it was only under the government of President Ayub that the project gained momentum.

In 1959, the Pakistan Army Engineers started work from both ends but the engineer company and stores required for the northern end had to be flown from Chaklala to Gilgit in 60 sorties of Bristol Freighters of the PAF and then transported by jeep 100 km down the valley to Chilas.

M-38 jeeps of the Pakistan Army Engineers took the USAF men back to Gilgit

There were serious delays at the northern end as it took the PAF six months to airlift the company which arrived at its destination with insufficient stores and no plant equipment. The only solution was to bring the required stores, particularly cement and construction equipment, by air. A disused airstrip that existed at Chilas was strengthened but the surface was weak and gave way after a few flights of Dakotas. At this stage Pakistan turned to the US for assistance.

In the first week of December 1960, six C-130s from the 322nd Air Division, USAF Europe, based at Evreux, France, arrived at Peshawar. In their mission brief at Peshawar, the US team was informed that the mission codenamed OPERATION ROAD GRADER had been tasked by the U.S. State Department. They were told that they were assisting in the construction of a runway at Chilas but there was no mention of the Indus Valley Road.

The classified mission briefing was operationally thorough, but intentionally sketchy on political details. The team was informed that they were supporting the Pakistanis in their battle against India over the disputed rights to Kashmir and were informed that it was a secret mission which remained highly classified for decades. They were also informed that the operation was classified because of the sensitivity of the situation a US ally (Pakistan) fighting against a US friend (India) in the disputed territory of Kashmir.

On the 10th of December 1960, a Combat Control Team (CCT) of a captain and three sergeants were para-dropped into Chilas. The team had no maps or photos of the area to study before the mission, and they were less than 100 m from landing when they realized that the drop zone was a field of rocks! They were very lucky that nobody was injured as they had no medics. The locals, who greeted them on the drop zone, couldn't believe they had jumped from an airplane. It was beyond their comprehension or experience.

USAF men relax over tea at a roadside shop on their way back to Gilgit after successful conclusion of their work at Chilas. Apart from their personal gear, the mission equipment consisted of a PRC-6 VHF-FM radio; a TRC-7B portable VHF-AM radio; a hand-cranked G-3 generator and equipment for measuring winds aloft. The drop missions commenced the next day and over a ten-day period, the six C-130s airdropped 64 tons of heavy construction equipment consisting of a road grader, a roller-compactor, a D-4 Caterpillar with their associated equipment and 600 tons of cement, steel rebars and other construction stores.

To avoid detection by radar (Chinese and Indian), the aircraft were briefed to fly through the river valley. In spite of these precautions, around 5 p.m. every evening, the team would see a plane come from the direction of China, fly over at about 5,000 feet and then head back. They assumed that this aircraft was taking pictures and checking the operation. Fortunately, the weather was good always cool, crisp and clear but at the drop zone, winds were constantly shifting. Therefore ten minutes before takeoff, the CCT provided the winds aloft for calculating a release point which was transmitted to Peshawar through Morse signals by the Pakistan Army Engineers.

While at Chilas, the team stayed in an old stone building with a fireplace. They slept on the dirt floor, which was certainly better than sleeping in tents. Their diet consisted of C-rations and partridges. The team had not been allowed to take military weapons and decided to use "survival gear" as a cover story for a shotgun a rudimentary form of team protection, which also came in handy for supplementing their diet. They were also kept well supplied with liquor through the airdrops.

Five days into the mission, a photographer arrived in a Pakistani L-19 to record the operation, for historical purposes. Just three months earlier, a formation of L-19s had carried out a preliminary reconnaissance of the Indus Valley in anticipation of the first historic flight to Gilgit, and the strip at Chilas had been cleared for an emergency landing. However, before taking off, the pilot informed the photographer that he wouldn't be back to pick him up since the strip was neither adequate nor safe.

On the 21st of December, the CCT left the mission area for Gilgit, from where they were to be flown back to Peshawar. The 100-km journey up the valley to Gilgit took the better part of two days during which they climbed over several landslides and had to walk over suspension bridges as it was too dangerous to ride across in a jeep. At Gilgit, a Bristol Freighter of the PAF was waiting to fly them back to Peshawar, and the American team made it home for Christmas.

Interestingly, the history of the Karakoram Highway published in 2011 is silent on this large airlift by the USAF. But a question that begs asking is: why were the Americans willing to assist? Relations between the US and Pakistan during the presidency of Eisenhower were at a high with a large consignment of military equipment delivered to the Pakistan Armed Forces and more in the pipeline. In return Pakistan had allowed the CIA to establish a strategic listening post at Badaber, which was staffed by over 1,300 US personnel.

Badaber was directed against the Soviet Union and rumour has it that the US asked President Ayub for another listening post at the Deosai Plains to focus on China. An airfield at Chilas and an offer of further assistance in the construction of the Indus Valley Road may have been a stepping stone for the

Americans to Deosai. Reportedly, even 45 years later during the tenure of President Musharraf, the US government again expressed an interest in having a base at Deosai in exchange for developing the KKH into a dual highway.

Major General Syed Ali Hamid on the little known construction role of the United States Air Force at Chilas, 1960.

A confident Pakistan Army recalibrates the country's regional policies

By Kamal Alam

Pakistan's military is playing a significant role in assisting the country's prime minister in the conduct of foreign and security policies, and usually with the objective of scaling down confrontations. Pakistan and India have just stepped back from the brink of an all-out war; Prime Minister Imran Khan has passed his first big foreign policy test after six months in office.

Behind the scenes, however, he was helped by Pakistan's military, who had set the scene for the country's regional diplomacy, and the efforts go back almost two years, as indicated by Pakistan Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa's speech at RUSI in 2017.

Bajwa made overtures to India well before Imran Khan's election, and set about fixing what was seen as a 'black hole' in Pakistan's foreign diplomacy, given the absence of a foreign minister for four years in the previous government. Prior to Khan coming into power in August 2018, Bajwa had also set things right with key allies Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

And, most significantly, Bajwa moved quickly to reassure China of Islamabad's unwavering commitment to the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) relationship after a less than certain start by the Khan government's commitment to Beijing. This includes the potentially contentious involvement of Saudi Arabia given tensions with Iran on the border as well as remarks by Khan's ministers about renegotiating certain CPEC projects.

That the Beijing Islamabad axis would ever be in doubt was itself remarkable given its importance to Pakistan. Still, that danger existed, and the uncertainty was removed: during General Bajwa's September three-day China visit, Zhang Youxia, the deputy chairman of China's powerful Central Military Commission, said that 'military ties are an important backbone of relations between the two countries'.

Confusion over CPEC

The viability of CPEC and its implementation were always going to be a cause for concern, given the fraught civil military tensions in Pakistan. Further to this, the provincial versus federal governance debate which has for decades plagued Pakistan was also at display with different parts of the country accusing each other of nepotism and ethnic bias. There was also a major question mark about the

corruption taking place with regards to CPEC projects and how Pakistan would overcome China's fears about delivering on pre-agreed projects on time.

Then, there were concerns that the newly elected prime minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, was somehow sceptical of CPEC; it was four years ago that his protests paralysed Islamabad and delayed the historic visit of China's President Xi Jinping. China had earlier this year also publicly moved to address the issue of Pakistan taking the CPEC for granted; Beijing made it clear that the CPEC was not a gift, but a project which needed to be earned.

Things came to a head when Imran Khan's key economic adviser, in an interview with the Financial Times, said that some of the CPEC projects needed a second look and renewed negotiations. In another interview with Nikkei Asian Review, Khan's key advisers said that there would need to be diversity in investments. China publicly came out criticising the article and challenged its narrative.

And there were other subtle indications that not all was well: as Imran Khan took office in August it was widely expected that his first official visit like that of all Pakistani leaders would be to Beijing, but instead Khan visited Saudi Arabia and the UAE, twice each before making his way to China. The prime minister's place was taken by Bajwa, who travelled to Beijing whilst Khan was in the Gulf.

Bajwa and the Pakistan Army have now set things right and restored what many would say is the real trajectory of the Pakistan China relationship: a military and defence-orientated axis where all other factors are secondary. Bajwa's recent trip has clarified the position. China's announcement reemphasised what was known to long-term observers: that the Pakistan China relationship is all about military geopolitics, fighter jets, nuclear warheads and a joint alliance to counter an American-led hegemony of South and Central Asia.

It was always about the military

Similarly on the Middle Eastern front, Bajwa made the rounds throughout 2018 to further bolster ties with Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar. While previously it could be argued that Pakistan could take sides in the Middle East, under Bajwa's leadership the Pakistan Army steered clear of the current political crisis which divides the Gulf.

While giving full support to safeguard Saudi sovereignty, Pakistan also committed to helping Qatar by providing the all-important security for the 2022 football World Cup, which Qatar will be hosting. The Qataris and Pakistanis also stepped up support for the Afghan regional dialogue. And while strengthening ties with all the Gulf countries, Bajwa also became the first Pakistan Army chief to make an official trip to Tehran in two decades, laying the groundwork for better relations with Iran.

In one of his first major speeches as prime minister, Imran Khan emphasised the fact that the civil and military leadership were now on the same page. This has helped guide the country's foreign policy, which has lacked strategic direction for almost a decade. The historic visits of the Saudi and UAE crown prince's took Bajwa's work further as Khan took over the mantle of fixing Pakistan's financial woes through economic diplomacy.

So as the dust begins to settle on the India Pakistan skirmish and the Taliban peace talks reach a key moment in Doha, the Pakistan Army and Khan may have managed to convince not only the Chinese, but also the Americans, Saudis, Qataris and even the Indians that Pakistan has a new regional diplomacy at play.

Kamal Alam is a Visiting Fellow at RUSI. He specialises in the defence diplomacy of the Pakistani army, with a focus on its relationship with the Arab states, Turkey and Iran. The views expressed in this Commentary are the author's, and do not necessarily reflect those of RUSI or any other institution.

Pakistan may soon hit oil, gas jackpot

Prime Minister Imran Khan on Thursday indicated that Pakistan was on the verge of hitting a kind of jackpot in the form of discovering a huge reserve of oil and gas. "Just pray that our hopes and expectations from the offshore drilling being carried out by the ExxonMobil-led consortium prove to be true," he said.

"There's already been a delay of about three weeks, but if the indications we are getting from the companies are anything to go by, there's a strong possibility that we may discover a very big reserve in our waters. And if that happens, Pakistan will altogether be in a different league," he said.

In an informal chat with a group of newspaper editors and other senior journalists, Mr. Khan didn't share details of the offshore drilling process. And there has been no official word from ExxonMobil and the international oil exploration company ENI which have been involved since January in drilling an ultra-deep well (230km inside the sea) for oil in what is known as Kekra-1 area.

ExxonMobil returned to Pakistan after nearly a decade after surveys were carried out last year suggesting the possibility of big oil reserves within the Pakistani waters. The prime minister believes that if big oil reserves are discovered, most of Pakistan's economic problems will be addressed and then there will be no stopping the country's progress.

Talking about various challenges his government was confronted with, Mr. Khan said that bringing about economic stability remained his biggest challenge. He said when he took charge, the foreign reserves were extremely low and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was putting extremely tough conditions, like "asking us to allow free floating of the rupee".

Mr. Khan said that with the help of friendly countries like the UAE, China and particularly Saudi Arabia, the government managed to improve the situation. Now, he said, even the IMF had relaxed its terms and things were moving in the right direction. He was quite critical of the Federal Bureau of Revenue (FBR) and said they had been scaring away businessmen, which "has compelled us to transfer their policy-making powers to another entity, leaving them with the task of collecting tax".

He said there were serious solvency issues as at the moment more than 60 per cent of the country's wealth was in the form of black money. The bulk of this money was being parked in real estate, with the

result that the property prices had been skyrocketing and hardly any money was being invested to boost trade and development.

This, he said, needed to be reversed for which some unpopular measures would have to be taken. Mr. Khan said apart from the challenge to revive the economy, the other problems included “institutional building and creation of jobs”. The massive housing scheme the government was coming up with would help address the latter to some extent.

Counter terrorism

The other challenge he spoke about in detail was of combating terrorism and the so-called “jihadi culture”. When asked to comment on the remarks of US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in a recent radio interview, Mr. Khan didn't respond directly but said the reality was that Pakistan could not live or survive in isolation. In fact, he said, no country in the world could allow private militias to operate at will. “Here is a situation that on the one hand India is wrongly blaming Pakistan for the Pulwama attack just because Jaish accepted responsibility, and on the other, even Iran is complaining that militant groups have been using our soil to carry out attacks.”

He said all the political parties had already agreed to the National Action Plan and by now the militant groups have been proscribed. Further action was being taken against them as his government could not allow any such activity on the soil of Pakistan. Tracing the history of jihadi outfits and “jihadi culture”, he said “these groups have existed since the days of the US-led Afghan war against the Soviets in Afghanistan, and have operated from here for decades”.

However, he said there was no room now for any such group in the country, as Pakistan would like the world to believe that it was not only a peace-loving country but it was sincere in eradicating this culture of “jihadism” and terrorism through short-term and long-term policies. Premier Khan said it was all the more important “as we have to satisfy FATF Financial Action Task Force of our compliance mechanism as we can't afford to be black-listed”.

Towards the end of the press talk when an unexpected question was thrown at the prime minister about the possible grant of extension to the chief of army staff, he handled it quite nicely. Mr. Khan was asked that since he and the COAS were on the same page on most of the issues, and the relationship was going well, was he considering giving him extension in service? His prompt reply was: “I have not even thought about it.” He went on to add that there was still a lot of time as “November is far away”. While remaining non-committal on the matter, Mr. Khan wrapped it up by saying “in politics even one week is a long time.”

Razor's edge

By Zamir Akram

Last month an attack by a lone Kashmiri on an Indian military convoy to avenge the abuse suffered at the hands of Indian security forces almost started a war between Pakistan and India whose forces already confront each other across the Line of Control in the disputed Kashmir region. Due to the brutal Indian repression of the Kashmiris, another such attack is waiting to happen. When it does, yet another spiral of military escalation would start, with no certainty where it would end. This underscores the reality that relations between nuclear-armed Pakistan and India are balanced on a razor's edge.

Deterrence exists when the opponent is convinced that its action will trigger a definite response causing unacceptable level of damage. In a nuclear context, this ensures Mutual Assured Deterrence (MAD) as the basis of credible deterrence. But deterrence is dynamic due to changes in technologies and doctrines.

Between Pakistan and India, MAD ensured deterrence after their May 1998 nuclear tests. This deterrence, however, neutralised India's numerical superiority in conventional weapons, leading to adoption of its "Cold Start or Proactive" doctrine to wage a limited conventional war "under a nuclear overhang" which would restore the salience of Indian conventional forces.

Pakistan responded by developing low-yield nuclear weapons mated with the short range Nasr missiles to blunt any Cold Start offensive, as part of its Full Spectrum Deterrence doctrine, deterring India at the nuclear and conventional levels in order to prevent the outbreak of war. This strategy aligns fully with the essence of nuclear deterrence which is that "nuclear weapons are meant to prevent wars, not to fight them".

With the de-escalation of the latest crises, a debate has ensued whether deterrence worked to prevent a full-scale war. To make an objective assessment, it is necessary to separate fact from fiction, especially the hysterical Indian warmongering and false claims. Faced with elections, Modi had to demonstrate a muscular response. He was also encouraged by American statements recognising Indian 'right of self-defence'. This led to the Indian bombing of an area within Pakistan, and even though it did not cause any real damage, it was an escalation beyond the usual exchanges across the LoC.

Yet the Indians were constrained to officially describe their operation as a "preemptive non-military strike" so that they could claim to have acted with restraint, even though their media alleged hundreds had been killed. Pakistan's response was one of measured restraint demonstrating that Indian military installations could have been destroyed but were deliberately spared.

In the ensuing aerial operations, two Indian air force jets were shot down and one of the pilots captured only to be returned as a goodwill gesture. Rejecting Pakistan's repeated offers for de-escalation and talks, India planned to carry out 6 to 7 missile strikes on Pakistani cities which was aborted only after Pakistan's threat to respond with a three times stronger missile attack. By then even the Americans realised that India needed to be restrained.

Throughout this crisis, India did not implement its Cold Start doctrine which indicates that Pakistan's Full Spectrum Doctrine policy proved to ensure credible deterrence. India was also careful not to cross Pakistan's red lines nor was able to use its numerical superiority in conventional weapons to its

advantage, even in the limited, short military exchanges. In particular, they could not prevent Pakistan from undertaking a sharp and swift conventional response. Therefore, neither side opted to go up the escalation ladder leading to a wider conflict which could have spiraled out of control.

But, unfortunately, the Indians and their friends do not seem to have drawn the sensible conclusion. India, with the US, British, and French support continues to focus on “terrorism” as the cause of the crises and not the Kashmir dispute and the gross Indian human rights violations. This is a purblind policy. More dangerously, Indian experts are calling for increased militarisation both in conventional and nuclear domains. An especially perfidious approach is for India to develop the capabilities to launch a pre-emptive nuclear strike to destroy Pakistan's nuclear arsenal.

Ostensibly responsible former Indian officials like national security adviser Shivshinkar Menon, defence minister Manohar Parrikar and Commander of Strategic Forces General BS Nagal, have advocated a “pre-emptive comprehensive counter force strike” to “completely disarm Pakistan of its nuclear weapons”. To do this, they recommend Indian development of Ballistic Missile Defence, Submarine launched Ballistic Missiles, Multiple Independently targeted Re-entry Vehicles (MIRVs), cruise missiles and, for good measure, hydrogen bombs all of which are already under development.

But to be assured of the efficacy of these weapon systems, India would need to carry out more nuclear tests. Indian nuclear scientists have already publicly called for more testing. Perhaps that is why India has refused to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. Most likely, India is waiting to build up its stocks of fissile material through the facility of the NSG waiver so that it can conduct its nuclear tests when it is no longer reliant on external supplies.

This Indian nuclear build-up is taking place with American support, especially development of missile defence and ICBMs, ostensibly to be used against China but can also target Pakistan. Ironically, it is Pakistan instead of India that has recently been blamed by US Secretary of State Pompeo, almost flippantly, of “proliferation” that allegedly threatens American interests.

This is inconsistent with even his own Administration's National Security Strategy which identifies Russia and China as posing a nuclear threat to the US and does not even mention Pakistan in this context. Besides, the US knows very well that Pakistan's nuclear capability is only meant to deter India. As in the past, Indian military build-up will have to be appropriately matched by Pakistan in order to ensure continuing credible deterrence against India. There can be no unilateral concessions or compromises by Pakistan. Consequently, both countries will continue to exist on the razor's edge.

Zamir Akram, is a former Ambassador who has served as Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva.

Pakistan's Military reaches out to India

By Kamal Alam

Senior Pakistani officers, led by Army Chief of Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa, realise that the way to peace and prosperity is through military cooperation with India. Will New Delhi reciprocate? In a historic first last month, Pakistan's Army Chief of Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa invited Sanjay Vishwasrao, the Indian military attaché, and his team to the Pakistan Day military parade in Islamabad.

And in a sign that ties between the two foes are warming up Javed followed this two weeks later by saying that the Pakistan military wanted peace and dialogue with India. The two countries will also take part in joint military drills in Russia in September, with Chinese participation. These initiatives come against a background of almost weekly exchanges of fire along the Line of Control in Kashmir. However, they mark a change in attitudes that started when Bajwa became COAS in November 2016.

Bajwa himself, speaking at RUSI last year, announced that 'the Pakistan army is now no more insecure and feels confident of its future and that he welcomes Indian participation in Pakistan's flagship infrastructure project, the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)'. Both countries have tried to forge relationships before. In the 1980, the Pakistani military leader, President Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, and then Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, became close.

In his book, *The Great Game in Afghanistan*, Kallol Bhattacharjee details the talks between Gandhi and Zia on the fate of Russia's invasion of Afghanistan, relations with Moscow and the US and, most importantly, the stability of South Asia. Like the ZiaRajiv meetings, Pakistani military leader General Pervez Musharraf and then Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee came close at a 2002 summit in Agra to resolving the Kashmir conflict despite a year-long tense situation on the border.

Approaches by Pakistani generals military have been welcome by some in India, because they are seen to be able to deliver on peace. Another senior Pakistani officer, Lieutenant General Aamir Riaz, headed the first-ever high level contact group with India as Director-General Military Operation. According to Riaz, Pakistan sees the CPEC project as key to its economic future and, he has made public his stance of welcoming Indian participation in this, Pakistan's largest infrastructure effort. However, he said that India could 'share the fruits of future development by shelving the anti-Pakistan activities and subversion'.

Another top officer, Major General Ahmed Hayat, the Director-General-Analysis of the Inter-Services-Intelligence, in 2013 authored the so-called India Plan in 2013, which tried to ascertain how and when Pakistan should approach India. He concluded that the Pakistani military would approach India once Pakistan's own defence diplomacy was strengthened and not under American threats or pressure. 'It is a no brainer that one cannot live in an environment of perpetual enmity with a neighbour six times your size, but the indicators have to be right', he said.

'History teaches us to be cautious when approaching India history paints India as an anti-status quo entity'. As Pakistan feels more stable politically now, Hayat's plan could come to fruition this year. A siege mentality in the Pakistani General Headquarters in Rawalpindi has meant that that there has been practically no major defence diplomacy between the arch-rivals. However, since the army launched anti terror operations Zarb-e-Azb in 2014 and Radd-ul-Fassad in 2017, Pakistan has seen a turnaround in its security.

The generals also feel that this strengthens their bargaining power with the US after President Donald Trump accused the Pakistanis of 'lies and deceit, thinking of our leaders as fools. They give safe haven to the terrorists we hunt in Afghanistan, with little help. No more!' Pakistan has also embraced Russia, and strengthened ties with Turkey and China.

With growing security and stability on the western border, the army understands that talking to India will help the country's upward economic trajectory and allow regional trade flourish. However, India has so far rejected Pakistan's offer of a transit trade dialogue on Afghan Indian commerce. But with a sustained approach by Pakistani officers to India, it could only be a matter of time before Delhi agrees to at least talk to Islamabad.

Despite continued tensions and fire-fights in Kashmir at their fiercest for a decade, Pakistan's generals want to talk and feel the ball is in India's court. There is some rapprochement, but it is stuttering and there's a long way to go yet. The views expressed in this Commentary are the author's, and do not necessarily reflect those of RUSI or any other institution.

AFGHANISTAN

The all - new great game

By C. Christian Fair

Piles of second-hand motorcycles headed to the bowels of Afghanistan, serpentine queues of brightly painted trucks, petrol-filled jerry cans piled up by the roadside: there's nothing to show that this is among the world's most dangerous roads. But, the India-built Delaram-Zaranj highway in Afghanistan has the potential to change the strategic map of the region and the fight to develop it is at the heart of a geo-strategic struggle for influence between India and Pakistan.

The 215km-road, also known as Route 606, links Zaranj, the capital of Afghanistan's Nimruz province that borders Iran, to Delaram, a transport hub that connects to the Kandahar Herat Highway. I recently visited Zaranj and travelled the road built by India. I wanted to assess the infra structural capacity and traffic through this border crossing. The border town integral to the highway's success already strains from the shipments coming from the Iranian port city of Bandar Abbas.

While Chabahar, a deep-sea port India is building in southeast Iran, offers the prospect to transform Zaranj, there is much work to be done.

On route 606

What I found in Zaranj surprised my interlocutors in Kabul, many of whom were under the impression that the crossing is under-utilised. Far from it. This dusty town was a busy hub and at full capacity even though little traffic is coming in from Chabahar -- most of the vehicles are from Bandar Abbas.

If India hopes the road to be an alternative to Pakistan's warm water routes, New Delhi should consider helping Afghanistan augment the infrastructure. For one thing, the bridge that links the two countries is too narrow for two-way traffic. It takes interminably long for a single truck to make the crossing.

Trucks are stacked up along the Zaranj-Delaram highway, making it difficult for regular traffic. Trucks may have to queue up for up to two months, clogging the narrow road. The customs and border facilities struggle with the operational tempo as do the counter-narcotics forces. Large amounts of precursor materials that convert opium to lucrative narcotics such as heroin pass through Zaranj but police lack detection devices.

As I spent two days in Zaranj speaking to drivers, businessmen and an array of officials, I could not imagine how this crossing could bear more traffic. Once in Iran, Afghan truckers report a bevy of woes, beginning with usurious visa charges, extortion, and inadequate quotas of petrol to make the journey. Truckers told me that they feel as if they have no advocates.

Everyone said they wish the border could be open all day, every day. They, however, claim the Iranians demure for various reasons. Truckers entering Afghanistan must countenance the Taliban as well as corrupt police officials.

The big picture

In 2003, India and Iran signed the so-called "Road Map to Strategic Cooperation". The centrepiece was the collaboration on the Chabahar port. India is also a stakeholder in the so-called North-South Corridor on which goods will move from India to Chabahar, pass through Iran via rail or road then onward to the Caspian and northern Europe. Because Pakistan has denied India access to its soil, for New Delhi, Chabahar is a needed byway to Iran, Afghanistan and beyond. Moreover, it is 171km from Gwadar, the port China is building on Pakistan's Makran coast as a part of the so-called "China Pakistan Economic Corridor".

In 2005, India also began work on the ambitious Route 606. Built by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) at a cost of Rs 600 crore, it was a constant irritant for Pakistan for various reasons. First, is the nature of BRO itself, whose website explains it is "committed to meeting the strategic need of (India's) armed forces".

Second, Islamabad understood that the route would reduce Afghanistan's dependence on Pakistan for access to warm waters. Islamabad has used Kabul's reliance on Pakistan as a tool of economic arbitrage and to preclude India from having ground access to Afghanistan. Third, Nimruz borders Balochistan, where Pakistan accuses India of interfering in collusion with Afghanistan.

Fourth, it is yet another visible symbol of India's presence in a country that Pakistan seeks to render into a vassal of Rawalpindi, the home of Pakistan's opprobrious army. Given Pakistan's control over the Taliban and other murderous organisations such as the Haqqani network, the road came under constant attack during construction and after it was handed over to Afghans in January 2009, by which time six

Indians, including a BRO driver and four Indo-Tibetan Border Police men, and 129 Afghans were murdered.

This road was to be the shortest route to move products between Afghanistan and Iranian ports. India retrenched from the project after the UN Security Council imposed sanctions on Iran in 2006, ceding space to China. In 2015, under President Barack Obama, China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom and the US along with the European Union forged a historic deal with Tehran to limit its ability to develop nuclear weapons, bringing Iran back into the comity of nations. The so-called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) cleared the path for India to re-engage in Chabahar.

India resumed work on the port with alacrity.

The shadow of Trump

Late 2018, the fate of Zaranj and Chabahar was in a limbo again, contingent upon the whims of the maladroit US President Donald Trump. When he assumed the presidency in January 2017, he began eviscerating the accomplishments of Obama. In May 2018, Trump withdrew from JCPOA and threatened sanctions against anyone dealing with Iran.

This disquieted India for several reasons. First, India imports more than 80% of its crude, of which about 10% comes from Iran. Indian refiners prefer Iranian crude due to better pricing and terms. Second, Chabahar, where India is developing three berths, would also have come under the sanctions. India is also building a rail link from Chabahar to the Afghan border. Not only would the snap-back sanctions restrained India's strategic goals, they would have also undermined the viability of the port.

Under the US law, Washington could exempt sanctions for activities that “provide reconstruction assistance for or further the economic development of Afghanistan”. Many analysts, including this author, strenuously argued that India should stand its ground and push for relief. India prevailed. The Trump administration offered New Delhi a waiver on both oil imports and Chabahar, including the planned rail link. It was a huge relief not only for India but also for Afghanistan.

If Afghanistan is to get the most from this border crossing, it will have to dedicate more resources to clean up corruption, enhance security and work with Iran to make life easier for the truckers. While the twin problems of corruption and insecurity perdure throughout Afghanistan, Kabul should prioritise the Zaranj crossing, which has the potential to transform this dusty little outpost with few opportunities other than trucking and hocking smuggled fuel.

India, which enjoys good relations with Iran and Afghanistan, is well positioned to help. In doing so, India will advance its strategic interests in the region while continuing to provide the value-added projects that have endeared Indians to Afghans.

A new way forward?

In September 2018, the Trump administration foisted upon the region yet another special envoy, Zalmay Khalilzad, with the hope that he could secure a negotiated settlement with the Taliban and conclude the

17-year war in Afghanistan. Scholars of South Asia were sceptical: few people are as loathed and distrusted by all sides as Khalilzad, who was in India as part of a two-week tour of the region early January 2019. Khalilzad's mission seemed pointless given Trump's announcement in December that he would withdraw troops from Afghanistan.

Why would the Taliban negotiate an end when they need not defeat the Americans and their Afghan allies? The Taliban only need to keep fighting to demonstrate that the Americans and Afghans cannot defeat them. This is the definition of an insurgent's victory. Why would Pakistan allow the Taliban to sue for peace unless that peace means Afghanistan's capitulation to Pakistan? Would Afghans who loathe Pakistan for the decades of devastation it has wrought ever agree to such peace terms?

And, why would the Taliban or their backers in Rawalpindi care about Khalilzad's efforts when Trump is talking withdrawal? Whether or not the American Tweet State and Deep State agree on Afghanistan, it should be clear to all that Afghanistan needs a new way forward and I contend Chabahar and Indian investment there is central to this new future.

Contemporary Afghanistan is not the Afghanistan of 2001. Today, Afghanistan is connected to railheads with Iran, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. These rail heads are key to helping Afghanistan get its valuable resources out of the ground and to the markets.

Afghanistan was once dependent on Pakistan, it no longer is. Between 2012 and 2016, Afghan imports from Iran totalled \$1.3 billion against \$1.2 billion from Pakistan and \$1.1 billion from China. During the period, Pakistan was the largest destination for Afghan exports with \$283 million of goods, India was right behind with \$230 million, a figure that is expected to rise as Chabahar comes online.

Over the last year, India has shipped about 110,000 metric tons of wheat and 2,000 tons of pulses to Afghanistan through Chabahar. If Afghanistan can improve political and trade ties with its neighbours, it can cut down dependence on Pakistan. Once independent of its murderous neighbour, Afghanistan will be in a greater position to extract political concessions.

This does not mean that Afghanistan will be peaceful. Far from it. Pakistan will work assiduously to undermine these efforts. But it does allow Afghanistan to move forward, while strategically isolating Pakistan that is not terribly dissimilar from the decisions that India has made.

New Delhi has understood that Pakistan will continue to kill Indians. However, every Indian leader since the 1999 Kargil war has known that the country has much to gain by avoiding a war with Pakistan. The strategic restraint has paid off: India's economic growth has enabled it to invest in defence modernisation, to diminish the immiseration of its masses, and diversify its portfolio of strategic alliances.

This has not been cost free: every year, Pakistan's proxies murder dozens of Indians. In contrast, three Indians die every 10 minutes in road accidents. In 2017 alone, 147,913 persons died, many times more than the lives lost in all of India's wars with Pakistan, including Pakistan-sponsored terrorism in Kashmir.

Even in Afghanistan, a war zone, 5,000 civilians were killed in road accidents in 2017 against 3,438 left dead by anti-government forces or in friendly fire. My intention is not to trivialise either kind of death rather to put them into perspective and to argue that progress can continue on some fronts even though Pakistan remains committed to murdering citizens of both countries.

The writer has authored the books *Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army's Way of War* and *In Their Own Words: Understanding Lashkar-e-Tayyaba*.

Pakistan becomes pivotal to Afghan peace

By M. K. Bhadrakumar

The marathon talks between the US officials and the Taliban representatives at Doha through a 16-day period ending yesterday can be seen as a defining moment in the endgame in Afghanistan. Both the US special representative Zalmay Khalilzad and the Taliban have signalled that progress has been achieved in the negotiations.

Khalilzad has tweeted: “The conditions for peace have improved. It's clear all sides want to end the war. Despite ups and downs, we kept things on track and made real strides. Peace requires agreement on four issues: counter-terrorism assurances, troop withdrawal, intra-Afghan dialogue, and a comprehensive ceasefire. In January talks, we “agreed in principle” on these four elements. We're now “agreed in draft” on the first two.”

“When the agreement in draft about a withdrawal timeline and effective counterterrorism measures is finalized, the Taliban and other Afghans, including the government, will begin intra-Afghan negotiations on a political settlement and comprehensive ceasefire. My next step is discussions in Washington and consultations with other partners. We will meet again soon, and there is no final agreement until everything is agreed.”

The Taliban has broadly confirmed Khalilzad's account in a statement yesterday: “This round of talks (in Doha) saw extensive and detailed discussions taking place regarding two issues that were agreed upon during January talks. Those two issues were the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Afghanistan and preventing anyone from harming others from Afghan soil; how and when will all foreign forces exit Afghanistan and through what method? Similarly, how will the United States and her allies be given assurances about future Afghanistan?”

“Progress was achieved regarding both these issues. For now, both sides will deliberate over the achieved progress, share it with their respective leaderships and prepare for the upcoming meeting, the date of which shall be set by both negotiation teams.” Taliban had earlier clarified that issues relating to ceasefire and talks with the Kabul administration were not part of the current agenda. The remark yesterday by FM Shah Mehmood Qureshi that Pakistan wants a “responsible” withdrawal of western troops from Afghanistan says it all.

The Western powers and NATO must be particularly pleased that Pakistan has persuaded the Taliban to agree to a reduced US military presence for the near term. The unannounced visits by the German foreign minister Heiko Maas and the British defence secretary Stephen Lovegrove on successive days this week to Islamabad are a timely recognition by the US' key western allies of Pakistan's cooperation that made such remarkable progress possible in the Afghan peace process and the pivotal role of Pakistan in regional security in the weeks and months ahead as the Afghan settlement gets implemented.

Looking ahead, intra-Afghan talks leading to power-sharing and a ceasefire will need to be addressed shortly. But here, Russia is working in tandem with Pakistan to create a platform of intra-Afghan dialogue where Afghan government could also participate, thereby sidestepping the Taliban's extreme aversion to recognising President Ashraf Ghani's set-up in Kabul as its interlocutor. Ghani and his associates have huffed and puffed about their demotion as one of several Afghan groups, but are gradually coming to terms with the reality.

However, Taliban remains obdurate that Ghani is only an American creation and cannot even be regarded as an ethnic Afghan. In a scathing attack on Ghani, Taliban said on Tuesday that "even though Ashraf Ghani is an Afghan national, he can distinctly be considered an American due to his character, ideology, loyalty, working past and political commitments especially in these times as the special forces (butchers) under his leadership continue to ruthlessly murder Afghans in night raids, raze their homes, loot their valuables, desecrate their sacrosanct and as civilian tragedies keep piling up... It seems that this individual has no roots and ties with the Afghan nation... Afghan nation demands that Ashraf Ghani disclose his past and current ties with America."

Nonetheless, it is unlikely that Pakistan will allow the Taliban to turn its back on intra-Afghan dialogue due to the participation by Ghani's people. From present indications, Moscow is raring to host the second meeting of the intra-Afghan dialogue once it gets the green signal from Islamabad.

The Russian role works splendidly for Pakistan. On the one hand, Russia creates space for Pakistan pushes back at the US and ensure that any settlement will not lead to American hegemony over Afghanistan and Central Asia. On the other hand, the back-to-back dealings with Moscow and Washington would enable Islamabad to optimally negotiate and secure its own interests in a settlement. Then, there is the bonus that the Pakistan-Russia bilateral relations also get a swagger, which of course has profound implications for Pakistan's troubled relations with India.

The hidden charm of the great game is that there are periods when rival protagonists suspend mutual animosities temporarily for pursuing a common interest in the immediate terms. We are witnessing one such interlude at the moment. The US feels that Russia has barged in uninvited to have a say in the Afghan peace process, but having said that, the latter's participation can also be useful to navigate the endgame through the tricky phase ahead as the intra-Afghan dialogue gets under way.

Of course, this only means that the great game is in hibernation briefly but will resume sooner rather than later. Nothing is forgotten or forgiven in the great game. No doubt, the lateral entry of the British defence secretary into the matrix at the present juncture underscores that any expansion of Russian

influence in the Hindu Kush (or anywhere on the planet) will be severely contested. London enjoys leverage over Imran Khan and Washington regards it as a strategic asset in the Afghan peace process.

By the way, wasn't it a vehement prioritisation of the British regional policy in Afghanistan that the defence secretary found himself in Islamabad on such a crucial day for British politics when PM Theresa May was battling desperately for the survival of her government in the House of Commons at the Westminster?

On the whole, Pakistan has done brilliantly well, as the hurried trips by the German and UK ministers to Islamabad this week would testify. The big question is about the new trajectory of US-Pakistan relations. Pakistan is seeking a revival of the full-bodied relationship with the US, which it used to have historically up until 2011 when all hell broke loose. Qureshi had forecast on Sunday: "Our relations with the US are going to take a new turn. US-Taliban peace dialogues are underway in Doha and positive results are expected."

The US-Pakistani dalliance, in all probability, will commence with the visit by PM Imran Khan to Washington, which could be in the making. Indeed, the phone conversation on Monday between the US National Security Advisor John Bolton and Qureshi would even have touched on the scheduling of Imran Khan's visit.

AMERICA

United States seeks to guard Afghan peace talks from Kashmir crisis

The United States is trying to prevent simmering tensions between India and Pakistan from impacting a third country, Afghanistan, where a fragile peace push is underway to try to end more than 17 years of war with Taliban insurgents.

U.S. President Donald Trump's administration has been publicly focused on lowering tensions between the nuclear-armed rivals since a February 14 suicide car bomb in an Indian-controlled area of Kashmir triggered the first Indian air strikes inside of Pakistan since a 1971 war.

Senior U.S. officials told Reuters that as the United States spoke with senior Pakistani officials, emphasizing the need to lower the risk of conflict with India, Islamabad privately offered warnings on Afghanistan. Pakistani officials said their ability to support Afghan peace talks could be in jeopardy in the event of a full-blown crisis, U.S. officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"They'll stop being a facilitator; they will stop the pressure they are applying" on the Taliban, one U.S. official said, recounting Pakistani warnings conveyed to Washington. Pakistan has publicly denied any role in the suicide bombing. But the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) militant group, which India has long accused Islamabad of supporting, claimed responsibility for the attack.

The United States has likewise accused Pakistan of ties to Taliban militants who are fighting in neighboring Afghanistan against American and U.S.-backed Afghan government forces. Reuters has previously reported, however, that U.S. officials have recently seen a positive shift in Pakistan's behavior.

Pakistan, long at odds with the United States over the war in Afghanistan, has played a behind-the-scenes role in supporting U.S. peace talks with the Afghan Taliban, including facilitating travel to negotiations. Current and former U.S. officials caution that Islamabad could again choose to act as a spoiler.

"I don't believe that Pakistan has the capability to straight out make peace happen in Afghanistan, but they definitely have the capability to make peace not (happen)," said Laurel Miller, a former senior State Department official.

Movement of troops

In recent days, India and Pakistan have appeared to dial down hostilities that brought the arch enemies to the brink of another war. But it's unclear whether the calm will hold. A Pakistani official in Washington, speaking on the condition of anonymity, cautioned that unless the tensions were reduced, there was a "very strong likelihood" that Pakistani troops would be moved from the border with Afghanistan to reinforce positions near India.

Pakistan's U.N. ambassador, Maleeha Lodhi, told Reuters that Islamabad's focus could completely shift to its eastern border with India. "If the crisis with India continues, Pakistan will be obliged to keep our entire focus on our Eastern border. That may affect our efforts on our Western front," Lodhi said. The Pakistani official in Washington said Pakistan had not been focused on Afghanistan since tensions with India increased last month, and it would have implications for peace talks.

Some current and former U.S. officials say Islamabad may be overstating the risks of fallout on Afghan peace talks, which resumed over the weekend in Doha. Speaking on condition of anonymity, they noted that Islamabad has its own self-interests in mind as it seeks to influence the peace process in neighboring Afghanistan.

But other U.S. officials acknowledge a major crisis involving India would be all-consuming for Islamabad, and say it's another reason why lowering tensions is so important. In Afghanistan, which fears its country is being used as a proxy for tension between India and Pakistan, the Foreign Ministry summoned Pakistan's envoy to Kabul after he made similar warnings.

Veteran diplomats say that if the United States pushes Pakistan too hard on combating militants, Islamabad could diminish its support for the peace process. Dan Feldman, a former U.S. special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, said many of the Pakistani officials who dealt with India were also responsible for Afghanistan, and that tensions could impact peace talks.

He said a lack of U.S. focus on South Asia was problematic. "We need much more focus and strategic thinking from the Trump Administration on this region, and an effective way of implementing that strategy," Feldman said.

US military eyes mini nuclear reactors to reduce convoy casualties

By James Conca

Military history buffs remember how the lack of oil and fuel for planes and tanks lead to losses in major battles and ultimately a war. Japan and Germany during WWII are the classic examples. Transport of liquid fuels and other supply-line needs, whether on land or sea, provide major vulnerabilities to any deployed force. Obviously, our military leaders understand this better than most. Liquid fuel and water comprise the majority of the mass transported to deployed military forces. Resupply of fuel and drinking water for troops in-theater costs lives, about 4 lives for every 100 convoys.

Multiple studies identify that air and ground delivery of liquid fuel comes at a significant cost in terms of lives and dollars. Approximately 18,700 casualties, or 52% of the approximately 36,000 total U.S. casualties over a nine-year period during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom occurred from hostile attacks during land transport missions, mainly associated with re-supplying fuel and water.

This alone is motivation enough to evaluate and deploy alternatives to petroleum-based fuel systems. Yet both fuel and water - and potentially other supplies including munitions and spare parts - could be produced close to where they are needed if the necessary technologies were powered by nuclear energy, whose resupply is once every several years at most.

This is the plan of the U.S. Department of Defense. Their Defense Science Board's reports on energy systems from 2016 and other reports from 2018 outlined these troubling sources of future vulnerability for our military forces. The modern battlefield has amplified the need for electrical power as well as the demand for fuel to provide mobility in the air and on the ground. Recent operations in the Middle East have brought the demand for fuel to record high levels and created productive targets for our adversaries, both from cyber-attacks and conventional attacks.

The efficiency of fuel delivery and management has increased over time as the military standardized fuel quality requirements, improved engines, and began utilizing larger fuel tanks and bladders. America's new abundance of oil and gas from fracking and other drilling and extraction improvements means there will be no shortages in the foreseeable future.

But the fuel still needs to be transported to the field and this has always been a profound source of vulnerability and limitation of force movement. The logistics supply chain and any storage facilities for fuel increase the footprint and tactical signature of our facilities, contributing to the vulnerability of sites

and personnel stationed there. As General James Mattis declared during the drive to Bagdad in 2003, “Unleash us from the tether of fuel!”

And that is just what the Army intends to do. As the Board discusses, energy is a cross-cutting enabler of military power and nuclear fuel provides the densest form of energy able to generate the electrical power necessary at forward and remote locations without the need for continuous fuel resupply.

Key points of the Army vision include high-intensity conflict where the Army must be ready to conduct major large-scale combat operations against near-peer competitors. Mobile nuclear reactors support strategic and operational deployment and can meet the anticipated power demands in both highly developed mature theaters, such as Europe, and the immature theaters of lesser developed areas globally.

Although energy sources such as wind, solar and other alternatives can play a role in powering domestic bases and small overseas systems like monitoring and weather stations, the study found that they are unlikely to meet current or future energy demands for forward operating bases, remote operating bases, and expeditionary forces. Instead, the Board concluded that very small modular nuclear reactors (vSMRs) would be optimal for projecting power abroad. Many new small modular, and even micro-reactors, have been designed and are being built and tested.

A small nuclear reactor offers a transformative technology, delivering one to ten MW or so of electrical power for years without refueling, in a size small enough to be transported by the existing defense infrastructure that means trucks and planes. The reactor will be fully autonomous, load-following, cooled passively by the environment and meltdown-proof. These reactors are safer to the troops and civilians than the fossil fuels they will replace. These reactors would also be used for Humanitarian Assistance Disaster Relief (HADR) missions. They would have been wonderful in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria.

Some of these reactors are being designed for industry and some for NASA for use on the Moon and Mars, including NuScale, IMSRs, and even small fusion plants like CTFusion is building. But the Holos reactor has been designed for years for the military (see figure) and specifically to be mobile for the needs of DoD. Full power testing will begin within a few years with feasibility successfully tested via subscale prototype in 2018.

This reactor will use a form of low-enriched uranium known as High-Assay Low Enriched Uranium (HALEU), which is neither weapons-grade nor useful for radioactive dirty bombs. It satisfies all nuclear non-proliferation goals. It's not like we haven't tried this before. Rod Adams has an excellent review of Army reactors at Atomic Insights. And it's not like we haven't already done this with our Navy.

The Nuclear Navy has been using small modular reactors for 50 years. There have never been any real problems. And they have made our Navy the most powerful, and the most mobile, in history. Mobile land reactors will certainly do the same for the Army.

Dr. James Conca is an expert on energy, nuclear and dirty bombs, a planetary geologist, and a professional speaker.

Is the United States about to lose control of its secretive Diego Garcia military base?

By Jenni Marsh

The secretive Diego Garcia military base may be 1,000 miles from the nearest continent, but it has all the trappings of a modern American town. The troops here can dine on burgers at Jake's Place, enjoy a nine-hole golf course, go bowling or sink a cold beer at one of several bars. The local command has nicknamed the base the "Footprint of Freedom." But while cars here drive on the right side of the road, this is not American soil: It is, in fact, a remote remnant of the British Empire.

That is because in 1965, in the middle of the Cold War, the United States signed a controversial, secret agreement with the British government to lease one of the 60 or so Indian Ocean atolls that make up the Chagos Islands to construct a military base. That deal was secret because the UK was in the process of decolonizing Mauritius, of which the Chagos archipelago was a dependency.

The Chagos Islands never got its independence day. Instead, it was cleaved from Mauritius and renamed the British Indian Ocean Territory, a move that the United Nations' highest court in 2019 ruled was illegal under international law. Britain has now been instructed to properly finish the process of decolonization, and return the Chagos Islands, located half way between Africa and Indonesia, to Mauritius.

The ruling, though non-binding, potentially creates a huge problem for the United States. Today, Diego Garcia is one of America's most important -- and secretive -- overseas assets. Home to over 1,000 US troops and staff, it has been used by the US Navy, the US Air Force and even NASA -- the island's enormous runway was a designated emergency landing site for the space shuttle. Diego Garcia has helped to launch two invasions of Iraq, served as a vital landing spot for bombers that fly missions across Asia, including over the South China Sea, and has been linked to US rendition efforts.

Many in Britain, including Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the country's opposition Labour Party, are now calling for the UK to return the islands to Mauritius. Should that happen experts believe the ownership of Diego Garcia could be up for negotiation -- a move that would make Mauritius a much more important country geopolitically.

A UK Foreign Office spokesperson said that the government would look at the judgment "carefully." "The defense facilities on the British Indian Ocean Territory help to protect people here in Britain and around the world from terrorist threats, organized crime and piracy," the spokesperson added.

Corrected - US freezes out top Afghan official in peace talks feud

This March 18 story has been refilled to correct 8th paragraph to say Pentagon adviser is embedded, not that the State Department provides funding

By Jonathan Landay

In fallout from a feud over U.S.-Taliban peace talks, a senior U.S. diplomat has told Afghan President Ashraf Ghani that U.S. officials will no longer deal with his national security adviser, four knowledgeable sources said on Monday. The decision to end U.S. contacts with Hamdullah Mohib will almost certainly raise tensions between the allies over Kabul's exclusion from negotiations that have mainly focused on a U.S. troop pullout and how the Taliban would stop militant groups from using Afghanistan as a springboard for attacks.

Mohib had launched a blistering public attack last Thursday on the chief U.S. negotiator, Special Representative Zalmay Khalilzad. The following day, U.S. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs David Hale told Ghani by phone that Mohib would no longer be received in Washington and U.S. civilian and military officials would not do business with him, the sources said.

"Hale called Ghani and told him that Mohib is no longer welcome in D.C. The U.S. will not deal with him in Kabul or in D.C. any more," said a former senior Afghan official, who like the other sources requested anonymity because of the issue's sensitivity. Kabul fears that Washington is intent on finalising a U.S. troop pullout to fulfill a vow by President Donald Trump, undermining its ability to reach a political pact with the Taliban that preserves gains, such as women's education, won since the 2001 U.S. invasion ended the militants' harsh version of Islamic rule.

The former Afghan official said he saw the move as an effort to compel Ghani to "oust" Mohib, who became the president's national security adviser after serving as his envoy to Washington. A second source, a congressional aide, agreed that pressuring Ghani to end contacts with Mohib was "one way of looking at this" because a Pentagon adviser is embedded with the Afghan president's national Security Council staff.

The State Department declined to comment. The Afghan embassy did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Simmering tensions over the Afghan government's exclusion from the U.S.-Taliban talks in Doha, Qatar, erupted with Mohib's attack on Khalilzad, an Afghan-born U.S. diplomat, at a news conference in Washington.

He accused Khalilzad of giving the Taliban legitimacy while "delegitimizing the Afghan government." He added that Khalilzad perhaps was trying to create "a caretaker government of which he would then become viceroy." Viceroy was the title of the colonial administrator of British-ruled India. The State Department responded with a strong statement quoting Hale as telling Mohib later Thursday that his comments "only serve to hinder the bilateral relationship and the peace process."

The latest round of peace talks ended on March 11 after 16 days. The sides reported progress, but no accord on a withdrawal of U.S.-led international forces and the Taliban's counter-extremist assurances. U.S. negotiators also are pressing the insurgents to accept a ceasefire and talks with Afghan society representatives, including government officials. The Taliban have refused to talk to Ghani's government, which they deride as a U.S. puppet.

In an interview on Monday with Reuters, Afghanistan's ambassador to Qatar, Faizullah Kakar, said that another country should not be negotiating on the use of Afghan territory by militants. "It is the government that should be deciding, whoever the government is, that the territory is used or not used against another country," he said.

Reporting by Jonathan Landay; additional reporting by Erich Knecht in Doha; editing by Alistair Bell.

Undertaking genuine denuclearization

President Trump still holds the key to the denuclearization of North Korea

By Sanghyun Yoon

President Donald Trump rejected the offer of leader Kim Jong-un of North Korea to lift virtually all the international sanctions in exchange for a partial denuclearization that will leave the throne of the nuclear state on Mr. Kim's head. Mr. Trump showed his strength by delivering his message directly to Mr. Kim that he has to give up the nuclear program in exchange for the prosperity of North Korea. Now Mr. Kim is back home empty-handed but with a mind full of next moves that he has to take. The negotiation ultimately will go on and, I am sure that Mr. Trump still has the key to North Korean denuclearization.

In a sense, the breakup of the summit was of no surprise because Mr. Kim already made it clear in his New Year's Statement that he will not give up the nuclear program by revealing his position that him "will not build more, test, or proliferate nuclear weapons." Further still, U.S. intelligence found that, even at the time of serious negotiations with the United States, Mr. Kim was continuing to expand his nuclear arsenal. All this indicates that North Korea has failed to earn trust from the international community.

Therefore, until Mr. Kim proves he has made any significant change of positions, Mr. Trump should tighten sanctions so that Mr. Kim realizes denuclearization is the only choice. At the same time, Mr. Trump should exercise extreme caution in interpreting Mr. Kim's revised offers that will be coming to strike a deal. It is particularly critical to understand the danger hidden in Mr. Kim's scheming pledge of "nonproliferation." Sure, it can be tempting in that it would be easier to deal with if we can contain his nuclear program within North Korea.

However, given the fact that it is practically impossible to seal off North Korean proliferation activities with 100 percent certainty, Mr. Kim will try to use the threat of proliferation as negotiating leverage whenever he needs to in the future. We also have to be reminded that North Korea has already stockpiled enough nuclear weapons to threaten neighboring countries such as the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and Japan. The Continental United States also cannot be free from such a threat from North Korea. If, however, Mr. Trump overlooks Mr. Kim's attempt to negotiate as a "nuclear state" and accepts a compromised "arms reduction" deal that falls short of a Final, Fully Verified Denuclearization (FFVD), it will inevitably force South Korea to develop its own nuclear program to deter for itself the North Korean nuclear threat, which is within arm's reach from Seoul. There is a possibility that Japan and Taiwan will follow suit triggering a domino process of nuclearization in North East Asia and beyond, which will eventually end up destabilizing U.S. security as well.

The bottom line should be complete dismantlement of all nuclear capabilities of North Korea including not only further development and non-proliferation "in the future" but also all "existing" nuclear threats. The first steps should be to make sure that North Korea agrees to a specified and verifiable dismantlement road map with a clear timetable including the final end point. In return, we can consider supporting North Korea to join the road to prosperity. Lifting the international sanctions on North Korea can also be considered to encourage its denuclearization.

Even at this juncture, any laxity cannot be allowed because it will easily lead us to play into Kim Jong-un's game plan to remove sanctions while hiding nuclear weapons. That is, we have to make sure to sustain enough pressure on North Korea until it comes to terms with the international community, not the other way around. Any small loopholes in U.N. sanctions on North Korea can undermine the tower of international efforts to denuclearize North Korea and allow it to "muddle through" as a nuclear power.

Mr. Kim is reportedly requesting, as part of compensation for North Korean partial denuclearization, the declaration of the end of the Korean War. In itself it can give a wrong signal that the United States is recognizing North Korea, not as a rogue regime which it actually is, but as a normal nuclear state which it actually is not. There is a further possibility that Mr. Kim will demand, as follow up to the declaration, the dissolution of the United Nations Command (UNC) and the withdrawal of the U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) which, joined by pro-North Korean socialists in South Korea, will unleash domestic instability in South Korea.

For the past year or so, Kim Jong-un has been running a disguised denuclearization show, rather than undertaking genuine denuclearization. Trump has the key to change Kim Jong-un's decision. And he must beware that the security of both South Korea and the United States is at stake.

Rep. Sanghyun Yoon is chairman of the Foreign Affairs and Unification Committee of the Korean National Assembly.

CHINA

A highly strategic corridor

During the 1962 war, China's Air Force was not in a flying condition because of lack of fuel. It possibly got some from Tajikistan, where it is building its new base. We must keep a watch

By Claude Arpi

A couple of weeks ago, The Washington Post published an article titled, 'In Central Asia's forbidding highlands, a quiet newcomer: Chinese troops'. It reported: "Two miles above sea level in the inhospitable highlands of Central Asia, there's a new power watching over an old passage into Afghanistan: China." According to interviews, satellite images, photographs and first-hand observations by a Washington Post journalist, it was found that Chinese troops have settled in one of the most strategic areas of central Asia, termed "a choke point in Tajikistan."

The US newspaper said, "Tajikistan awash with Chinese investment joins the list of Chinese military sites that includes Djibouti in the strategic Horn of Africa and man-made islands in the South China Sea, in the heart of Southeast Asia", adding "the modest facility in Tajikistan which offers a springboard into Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor a few miles away has not been publicly acknowledged by any Government.

But its presence is rich in significance and symbolism." The region has been (and is) still highly strategic. Last year, a publication, 'The 1959 Tibetan Uprising Documents: The Chinese Army Documents' was released on Kindle. It was a collection of top secret documents of the military intelligence of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), dating from the end of the 1950s till the 1962 war with China.

At that crucial time, China had a serious problem it did not have an Air Force in a position to take on the Indian Air Force. The compiler of the above mentioned paper noted: "Disadvantage of the Chinese Air Force is still a major problem in case of a conflict with India. Indian jets can start at a low altitude with a full load of bombs and plenty of fuel. Also, India has many airports only about a 100 kilometres from the highest peaks of the Himalayas.

Short distance and higher bomb load mean each Indian jet is at least twice if not three times more effective than a Chinese aircraft." Apart from the fact that many airplanes had been sent to the Korean front and that the Soviet Union had stopped supplying spare parts for the MiG fighter planes, the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) had a major hurdle: No fuel for its few planes.

The amount of gasoline reaching the plateau from China via the Qinghai - Tibet or the Sichuan-Tibet highways was not enough to maintain a large occupation force on the Tibetan plateau (read the Indian borders) and at the same time, provide the necessary fuel for the PLAAF. One of the published documents mentioned secret statistics for "border trade" and the import of fuel, gasoline and other commodities between 1953 and 1967.

What do the statistics show? In 1958, gasoline of 380 tonnes was imported into Tibet; in 1959, nothing; in 1960, 2,220 tonnes, in 1961, 96 tonnes and in 1962, 30 tonnes. This means that in 1960, there was a huge surge in fuel import. But import from where? There was no possibility of any gallon passing unnoticed through Nathu-la or Jelep-la the two main passes between Sikkim and Chumbi Valley (Tibet) ditto for the passes in Uttarakhand or North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) (Arunachal Pradesh today) or even Demchok in Ladakh, which had been closed for trade by the Chinese.

The author of the publication presumed that “corrupt” Indian officials had let the fuel be smuggled in. That, too, was not possible. First, the officers of the Indian Frontier Administrative Service, posted in these areas, were the most upright people, and in any case, considering that a mule could only carry 40 kg per trip, it would have meant thousands and thousands of mules, which did not exist on the plateau ...and they would have to have been transparent.

After pondering over the issue, my conclusion was that this amount of gasoline could not have crossed any Indian or Nepalese border post into Tibet. It left few other possibilities. One was the Soviet Union. Though it had just split with China, relations between Beijing and Moscow had reached a breaking point by 1959.

The only possibility was some under-the-table purchases through corrupt officials in Tajikistan or Kyrgyzstan. I got convinced that the gasoline had come from the same area in Tajikistan where China is today building a new base, at the edge of the Wakhan corridor and Xinjiang. An interesting lead: Tursun Uljabayev, the party secretary of Tajikistan in 1960, was sacked and imprisoned for serious corruption a year later. In all probability, gasoline from Tajikistan was transported to Kashgar (or Tashgurgan) in Xinjiang and then taken over the Aksai Chin to be used in western Tibet.

It could have been done at night via the road cutting across Indian territory, which was the best protected artery in China in the 1950s and early 1960s as only the PLA was allowed to use it; the traffic could have gone unnoticed for several months. It was probably why Uljabayev was caught and the import of gasoline into Tibet drastically fell in 1961 ...and by 1962 China had no fuel for its aircraft.

The above findings have two important corollaries. One, it confirms that the Chinese had no Air Force in flying condition at the time of the 1962 conflict with India, having no spares and no fuel. This was recently confirmed to this writer by Wing Commander 'Jaggi' Nath, who extensively flew over Tibet in secret missions between 1960 and 1962. He was awarded his first Maha Vir Chakra medal for this (he got his second in 1965 for mapping the Pakistani defences).

The second upshot is that the area, where the Chinese are today building their new base, is highly strategic, being a relatively easy link between the oil-rich Central Asia, Afghanistan (through the Wakhan corridor), the restive Xinjiang (the hub of Xi Jinping's Road and Belt Initiative) and Tibet.

This raises another issue: Why did the Indian Government, which had all the information about the situation in Tibet, the deployments of the PLA on the plateau and the lack of Chinese Air Force ('Jaggi' Nath was never attacked or even followed during his regular sorties over Tibet), not use its jets to pound the PLA concentration near the Thagla ridge in the Tawang sector in Walong area of eastern NEFA or in

Rezang-la in Ladakh? The only answer is a woeful lack of leadership. Let us hope that the present bosses watch what is happening in this area.

The writer is an expert on India-China relations.

Commander of US central command (CENTCOM) “concerned” about China's “Belt & Road” (BRI)

Is taking S-CPEC + real seriously

By Andrew Korybko

The Commander of US Central Command (CENTCOM) told the House Armed Services Committee just how “concerned” he is about China projecting its Silk Road influence from Gwadar to Africa through S-CPEC+ and consequently establishing a permanent naval presence in the western end of the Afro-Asian Ocean.

CPEC is increasingly being appreciated as the game-changing geo-strategic mega project that it is after the Commander of US Central Command (CENTCOM) told the House Armed Services Committee just how “concerned” he is about its terminal port of Gwadar being used as China's launching pad for expanding its Silk Road influence into Africa and consequently establishing a permanent naval presence along the routes connecting several Sea Lines Of Communication (SLOC) between them.

This outlook isn't a unique one and was most recently elaborated upon by the author last week in his piece about how “Pakistan's Indian Sub Interception Proves The Importance Of The Country's Navy”, but it appears to be the first time that a high-level American military official publicly confirmed the likelihood of this scenario unfolding and expressed “concern” about it. According to reports, Joseph Votel told the Committee that:

“As they develop that land route what they are attempting to do and then we expect then be looking for ports they can connect that to ports in southern Pakistan leading to ports in AFRICOM (US Africa Command), and for us it's going to lead to a permanent presence of Chinese maritime military maritime activity in the region that we will need to be concerned with.” This brief statement is loaded with a lot of strategic significance. Firstly, it implies that the joint Indian-American Hybrid War on CPEC has failed and that the Chinese-built mega project is proceeding apace in turning Pakistan into the global pivot state for facilitating transcontinental multipolar integration.

Secondly, it draws attention to the southern branch of CPEC's logical expansion that the author earlier coined S-CPEC+. Thirdly, Votel is convinced that this will also take on military dimensions as China is compelled to defend its SLOCs all along this route, possibly through the clinching of LEMOA-like deals with Pakistan and coastal African countries. And finally, the fourth main point that can be drawn from the CENTCOM Commander's statement is that China's CPEC-assisted expansion of influence into the

western Afro-Asian Ocean poses a multidimensional cross-theater challenge to American hegemony in the Eastern Hemisphere.

What's Mike Pence talking about? The US and China are already in a cold war!

What's less clear, however, is how the US intends to counter this after the failure of the Indian-American Hybrid War on CPEC. Resorting to similar measures against the Horn of Africa and East African states might backfire for several reasons, not least of which is that the interests of the US' partners overlap with China's own in this space and would therefore be adversely affected by regional destabilization.

It's possible that the US might weaponize comparatively low-level chaos dynamics such as those embodied by al Shabaab but this could inadvertently create opportunities for Russia to export its "Democratic Security" model from the Central African Republic to the African coast land and actually safeguard the long-term strategic viability of S-CPEC+, hence why non-kinetic methods will probably be relied upon at this point in time.

It's very likely that the US will intensify its infowar against China's Belt & Road Initiative (BRI), with specific focus being given to the narrative that Beijing is more interested in extracting resources through so-called "debt trap diplomacy" than in sincerely developing its partners' economies. There might also be more underhanded efforts to incite mob violence against Chinese citizens in order to bait the People's Republic into costly "mission creep" that it's both militarily unprepared for and which could exacerbate some of the angry locals' negative perceptions about it.

In addition, the US could use economic pressure to dissuade African governments from signing LEMOA - like deals with China and entice them into embracing "Trumpism" instead of Silk Road-led Globalism. Fearmongering about China's speculative military motives, the US might use this as the pretext for launching Indian-led multilateral "freedom of navigation" patrols.

The most likely outcome that the US hopes to achieve is to encourage "friendly competition" between BRI and the nascent Indo-Japanese "Asia-Africa Growth Corridor" while manipulatively working behind the scenes to influence the "rules of the game" in such a way as to favor its proxies and their French and Emirati partners prior to using their multilateral economic platform as the basis for the creation of a new African-centric security bloc for more comprehensively "containing" China.

Accordingly, it would be to the benefit of the emerging Multipolar World Order if China partnered with Pakistan, Turkey, and Russia to preemptively thwart this scenario, with the first protecting S-CPEC+'s SLOCS, the second sharing its widespread soft power in sub-Saharan Africa, and the last using its "Democratic Security" model to safeguard everything in the most ideal win-win arrangement between them all.

INDIA

The violent toll of Hindu Nationalism in India

A populist Prime Minister has legitimized India's more militant groups, and targeted attacks against religious minorities are on the rise

By Eliza Griswold

Irshad Khan, a slight twenty-six-year-old with glossy black hair and the faint shadow of a beard and mustache, helped his eighteen-year-old brother, Arif, and their father, Pehlu, load two cows into the bed of their white Mahindra pickup truck. The Khans were heading from a cattle market in Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan, to their village of Jaishingpur, a four-hour drive away.

Muslims and lower-caste Hindus, or Dalits, live side by side in the village, harvesting mustard from fields of yellow flowers. The village, home to six hundred people, is relatively well-off, and has grown more prosperous, as Delhi has mushroomed into a megacity of twenty-seven million and the price of land surrounding the city has skyrocketed. Some Muslim families in the village, including the Khans, are wealthy traders who transport goods like sand and vegetables to the cities around Delhi.

That afternoon, Irshad climbed into the truck alongside his father and brother. Cows are sacred to Hindus but Irshad had made this trip dozens of times since he was a boy. He'd heard rumors of potential trouble for Muslims at roadside checkpoints, where members of a militant Hindu youth group called the Bajrang Dal were intimidating Muslim traders in the name of protecting cows. Still, Irshad wasn't nervous. "We had no fear at all," he told me recently. "We were coming from a government-organized fair, and buying and selling cows is a legal business."

The militant Hindu nationalism that the group espouses is not new. Nathuram Godse, who assassinated Gandhi, on January 30, 1948, was a member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, or R.S.S., a violent right-wing organization that promotes Hindu supremacy. Members of the Bajrang Dal are the movement's foot soldiers, deployed in instances of mob violence or for targeted attacks against Muslims and other religious minorities.

Founded in 1984, the group was part of a movement to destroy the Babri Masjid, a sixteenth-century mosque located in Ayodhya, India, which was built by the emperor Babur. (The mosque was ultimately demolished during a violent R.S.S. rally in 1992.) Since its early days, the group has formed some twenty-five-hundred cells across the country.

I first reported on these cells, called akhadas, in 2005, in Dharavi, Mumbai, Asia's largest slum, where, in the name of protecting cows, the militants recruited impoverished Hindu boys to their violent cause. Paul Richard Brass, a professor emeritus of political science at the University of Washington, has called the Bajrang Dal "a somewhat pathetic but nevertheless dangerous version of the Nazi S.A." or the Brownshirts, the Nazi Party's first paramilitary organization.

For much of the past thirty years, the Bajrang Dal has either been banned or has lurked at the margins of Indian society. But in 2014 Narendra Modi, the leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party, or the B.J.P., a

right-wing political party that was an offshoot of the R.S.S., was elected Prime Minister. Since then, the militant group has been legitimized and grown exponentially more powerful.

In the past seven years, according to Factchecker.in, an organization that tracks hate crimes, there have been a hundred and sixty-eight attacks by Hindu extremists, in the name of protecting cows, against Muslims and other religious minorities. The attacks left forty-six people dead. "It's really a very, very bad moment for Muslims in India," Salman Khurshid, India's former foreign minister and the author of a forthcoming book, "Invisible Citizens," on the systematic oppression of Muslims in the country, told me. He laid out several setbacks for Muslims in Indian history.

"First, in 1857, the failure of the war of independence," he said, citing the brutal British repression of a popular uprising, in which Muslim and Hindu soldiers rose up together against the colonialists. Then partition, when British India divided into two independent states, predominantly Hindu India and predominantly Muslim Pakistan, and more than a million people died in sectarian violence.

Khurshid cited the destruction of Babri Mosque as a third example. And then told me, "the next big setback is the rise of this government." Under Modi, incidents of communal violence rose twenty-eight per cent between 2014 and 2017. When Irshad and his family got stuck in traffic in Alwar, about halfway home from the cow market a gang of eight men surrounded the Khans' truck and demanded to know what was in the back.

"Cows," Pehlu said, and handed one of the men the official papers to prove that the cows were legal. "We're Bajrang Dal, and we don't care about these papers," the man replied, tearing them up and throwing them on the road. Then the men pulled the Khans from the truck and passed them around, angrily asking questions. The Khans had driven by a police station about half a mile back, and they were still almost within sight of it.

Irshad thought that if they could just hang on for a few minutes and keep the militants talking, the police would arrive to help them. But the minutes passed, and the police didn't come. Instead, dozens more men pressed in around them and began beating them; Irshad felt a stinging cuff to his ear, and then the blows became heavier and more regular, drawing blood. Arif fell to the ground and curled into the fetal position. Pehlu, who was dressed in all white and had a small beard, a sign of religious devotion, was beaten unconscious.

Eventually, the police broke up the crowd and carried the Khans to a local hospital. An angry mob of villagers followed and surrounded the building. A kindly doctor locked Irshad and his brother in a room for their protection, and the boys recalled listening to the sound of feet as the villagers clambered onto the hospital's roof. "We could hear them shouting they wanted to kill all three of us," Irshad told me.

Over the next two days the boys began to recover, but, on April 3rd, Pehlu died of his injuries. When the news of his death spread, the boys said that the mob returned and demanded his body so that they could desecrate it. The doctor hid the corpse in the hospital basement, and a police unit moved the boys to another hospital for their safety. When the brothers were in stable enough condition to go back to Jaishingpur, hundreds of people arrived from their village and neighboring ones to escort them home.

This spring, Modi is up for reelection, and campaign season in India has sometimes sparked violence between Hindu nationalists and Muslims in the past. The B.J.P. is especially anxious this year, because of a series of unexpected losses in recent state elections. In Rajasthan, India's first Minister of Cows, who presided over a sanctuary for the animals, was soundly defeated. These electoral losses have little to do with a backlash against right-wing Hindu nationalism.

Instead, they reveal growing dissatisfaction with the failure of Modi and the B.J.P. to deliver on the economic development that they promised five years ago. In 2014, most Indians voted for Modi in the hopes that he would lift their economic status. In fact, India's economy is the fastest growing in the world, and more than two-hundred and seventy-million people have risen out of poverty over the last fifteen years.

Yet, under Modi, growth is lower than promised and India is facing its highest rate of unemployment in forty-five years. Over the past several weeks, Modi has announced a new round of economic measures designed to placate frustrated voters, including delivering cash handouts to struggling farmers.

Some analysts worry that he will try to distract voters from the slowing economy by doubling down on nationalist rhetoric. "With little to show in terms of economy or development, Modi's only remaining platform is nationalism," Tanweer Alam, a political analyst, told me. Many critics argue that the rhetoric espoused by Modi and the B.J.P. has also intensified tensions in Kashmir, where the Indian government is struggling to quell a year-long spike in violence.

In February, forty Indian soldiers were killed by a suicide bomber, who blew himself up by driving into a paramilitary convoy. The bomber claimed to be a local man named Aadil Ahmad Dar, who, in the past year, had left home to join the militant group Jaish-e-Muhammad, which is based in Pakistan. It was the most lethal attack in the region in decades, and Modi responded by threatening "a befitting reply," and then launched air strikes against northern Pakistan. Pakistan subsequently shot down at least one Indian jet, further heightening tensions.

The B.J.P.-controlled national government has passed several laws in recent years that have made life more difficult for religious minorities. In several states, local governments have also passed "anti-conversion" laws that make it illegal to forcibly convert people to a new religion. The ostensible purpose of the measures is to shield Hindus from aggressive Christian proselytizing, or to protect them from Islam. But conversion has historically also provided members of lower castes a way out of the caste system's repressive strictures.

The Bajrang Dal also cited the statutes as a justification for attacks against Muslims and Christians. In 2016, in Uttar Pradesh, the Bajrang Dal falsely accused a pastor of forcibly converting Hindus to Christianity, shaved his head, and paraded him through town on a donkey. The United States has generally remained silent regarding the repression of minorities in Modi's India.

In 2015, when Modi was selected as one of Time magazine's hundred most influential people in the world, President Obama wrote a glowing tribute and said nothing of the militant nationalism that helped bring Modi to power. Despite President Trump's public support of religious freedom, he has not

criticized the oppression of religious minorities in India. Modi has made several high-profile visits to the U.S., including a state visit in 2017.

For the international community, the dominant narrative of India under Modi has been a story of economic success, not an account of religious violence and repression. “Do you really think that American businessmen care what is happening here?” Amitabh Kundu, one of India's leading economists, asked me, in his office in Delhi. “It will take moderate Hindus to push back against this rabid Hindutva.” Kundu is the author of a study, published in 2014, that documents the socioeconomic status of India's Muslims, who make up roughly fifteen per cent of the population.

Kundu has documented that, although caste-based discrimination has fallen considerably in the last few decades, discrimination against Muslims is on the rise. Despite an influx of people into urban centers across India, the rate of Muslim migration to large cities is decreasing, because they are largely shut out of the labor market. Their names are also frequently removed from voter rolls. In 2018, Hindu nationalist groups called for a ban on public prayer by Muslims in parks in Gurgaon, which led to vicious mob attacks in the name of enforcement.

After speaking with Kundu, I visited Sarim Naved, a young Muslim lawyer, in his windowless, basement office in a law firm in south Delhi. Naved works on human-rights cases involving mob killings, and police brutality, against Muslims. He had left a job at a high-profile bank and committed himself to advocacy in part because he had grown up in an era of rising Islamophobia in India.

“If you're a Muslim, you're born political,” he said. He was a child in 1992, when the Babri Mosque was demolished, and images of its destruction have stayed with him. “People say that there was once a political left in India, but my generation has never seen it,” he said. “We've only seen Hindu nationalism.”

On a recent afternoon, I visited Irshad and Arif, the brothers who survived the mob attack, in their home village with local human rights activists. They still live in their father's large compound, which is set in a warren of muddy roads lined with neem trees. In an open courtyard, a buffalo grazed on a tether; a goat and three kids pressed their heads against a wall, trying to warm themselves in the winter sun. Irshad dragged his bed into the sunshine so that we could sit down.

Irshad and Arif told me that the attack had ruined their lives, not only because they had grown up wealthy and were now facing poverty but also because of the shame associated with being attacked by a mob. “People look at us with contempt,” he said. Some people had tried to help.

Behind him, a green and yellow John Deere tractor, which had been a gift from supporters, sat in the center of the courtyard beyond a patch of spinach. Irshad said he was grateful for the tractor, but the mustard harvest was seasonal, and couldn't support the family year-round. They had lost their cows in the attack, and their father's dairy business was now closed. Irshad had abandoned working as a trader. The roads were too dangerous, he said, regardless of what he was transporting. Cows, or a rumor of cows, are now enough to get him killed. He left the village only for work as a driver, when he could find it, earning around seventy-five dollars a month.

Last July, the pattern of killings of Muslims grew so dire in 2018, there were thirteen fatal cow-related lynchings that the Indian Supreme Court demanded that the legislature formulate laws against the practice, which it has yet to do. Last month, Human Rights Watch released a hundred-and-four-page report documenting the violence, and the inaction and abuses of the government officials charged with investigating the crimes.

“Lynching has become a nationalist project,” Mohammad Ali, a prominent Indian journalist who is currently working on a book about the phenomenon, told me. He said few perpetrators are punished, which has created a culture of impunity. Killers are lauded in some quarters as heroes for defending the faith and eradicating Muslims.

The Khans' case was rare in that Pehlu, who briefly regained consciousness before dying, was able to identify several of his attackers by name, none of whom were charged. Instead, nine other men were indicted for Pehlu's murder. Although Irshad knew it was dangerous, he decided to return to Alwar to testify at the trial. As he approached the town, he said a car pulled up behind him and masked men inside started firing at his vehicle.

They missed, and he escaped, fleeing back to Jaishingpur. He never made it to court, and all nine of the men accused of killing his father were let go on bail. This impunity is especially troubling given the evidence. A video of the attack, recorded by one of the perpetrators, was posted on a YouTube channel related to the Bajrang Dal. It quickly accumulated more than six hundred thousand views.

At the Khans' house, Shabnam, Irshad's wife, walked into the courtyard carrying their third child, an infant son, who screamed at the presence of strangers. She told me that their life had grown more chaotic with Pehlu gone; they missed his income, yes, but also the quiet order that he instilled in the family. “There's no one to bind the family together now,” she told me. She had first heard of the attack a few hours after it happened. A police officer called from a nearby village to inform her and, soon after, someone sent her the YouTube video.

I asked her if it was still online; she nodded, and one of the local human-rights activists pulled out his phone and brought up the YouTube channel. We scrolled through it, looking for the attack. There were dozens of similar videos showing killings of Muslims, which were deeply disturbing both for their violence and for the obvious pride that the attackers took in being Internet stars.

In one, a man wearing white pants and a bright pink sweater beat a Muslim man to death with a stick and sets him on fire, accusing him of committing “love jihad”: falling in love with a Hindu woman. After recording the murder, the attacker turns to the camera and says, “I am appealing to all Hindu sisters that don't get into the trap of these jihadis.

These people will win your heart and satisfy their lust.” In the another, a Bajrang Dal member leans into a truck's open window. “What is your name?” he shouts, slapping the driver. “Mubarak,” the driver replies. The cameraman slaps him again. “Say 'Mubarak Muslim,' ” he demands. Finally, we found the video of Pehlu's murder. It begins with Pehlu sitting on a curb, his palm upturned as he pleads with

someone off camera. Then one of the attackers knocks him backward, and he disappears from the frame.

Eliza Griswold, a contributing writer covering religion, politics, and the environment, has been writing for The New Yorker since 2003. She is the author of, most recently, "Amity and Prosperity: One Family and the Fracturing of America."

Four reasons India has little cause to cheer the Balakot Airstrike and its aftermath

Its war-fighting capabilities pivoted on air power have been blunted without a fight

By Pravin Sawhney

The Modi government might still win the war of perception within India, but India's conventional deterrence has been compromised. Its war-fighting capabilities pivoted on air power have been blunted without a fight. This will have implications for the on-going proxy war by Pakistan. Meanwhile, Pakistan maintained credibility of both its first combined civil-military government and its air power.

While India's political leadership failed, its military, this time the Indian Air Force (IAF), saved the day through the courage, skill and resolve of its pilots. Moreover, as respect for the seven-decades old MiG-21 fighter was restored, all Russian aircraft might now be assessed with added deference by India.

By using air power for political and electoral gains, the Modi government appears to have scored in the perception war. Three main arguments being bandied around in its favour are:

- (a) It demonstrated extraordinary courage by ordering the IAF to strike beyond Pakistan Occupied Kashmir inside Pakistan;
- (b) The government's pressure compelled Pakistan to return the captured pilot, wing commander Abhinandan Varthaman post-haste, and
- (c) International opinion favoured India's strike for self-defence against Pakistan's unending terrorism. Being a strong leader, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has created the new normal by use of air power, which done repeatedly like the 2016 (army-led) surgical strikes, would force Pakistan to stop terrorism across the Line of Control. More on this later.

To recapitulate the events, on February 26, the world was informed that the IAF had struck at Balakot (Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa) in the early hours, around 3.30am. Following its 'intelligence-led, non-military strike avoiding civilian casualties', the IAF killed 'a large number of terrorists, their handlers and supporters' and returned safely. With official obfuscation done, it was left to the 'reliable' journalists to spin the unending yarn of uncorroborated news and theories.

The entire operation, people were informed, was known to only seven people the Prime Minister, National Security Advisor, three services' chiefs, and heads of India's external and internal intelligence agencies (RAW and IB). The defence minister, we are told, was not kept in the loop.

RAW identified the target, a Jaish-e-Mohammed seminary and training camp. The IAF then planned and executed the operation keeping two things in mind: no aircraft should be lost or intercepted, and the aircraft should return fast after releasing their payload.

Balakot well chosen

It was evident that the operation was meant for publicity. A case in point, unsubstantiated media reports claimed that 300 to 350 Jaish terrorists in Balakot were eliminated by IAF strikes, a claim that has since been questioned by the international media, which was allowed by Pakistan to visit the target site. Subsequently, other media reports have emerged claiming that the IAF fighters did not actually cross the Line of Control. Instead, Balakot was attacked using stand-off weapons. Hence, deliberate confusion continues.

Balakot was a well-chosen target since it is a hilly, foliated area away from habitation; it had the least air defence cover of the Pakistan Air Force (PAF). The nearest civilian airfield is 40km away at Muzaffarabad, while the nearest PAF station is over 100km south in Islamabad. Bahawalpur is a known Jaish stronghold, but since it has four PAF stations in the vicinity, it was not considered for the strike.

Since the war was neither on, nor imminent, it would have taken any professional air force (PAF is no exception) minimum 10 minutes from detection to reaction and interception. Moreover, the PAF did not have its airborne early warning aircraft in the air (AWACS cannot stay more than 24 hours in air), and the time was such that observers manning the Ground Based Air Defence System (GBADS) could not have been vigilant (it is not possible to remain on high alert 24×7 in peacetime).

Given this setting, the IAF's Mirage-2000 (four instead of the claimed 12) supported by other aircraft within Indian airspace, breached PoK airspace, and released precision guided payloads at stand-off range well before the PAF could scramble and intercept them. The IAF had surprised the PAF and shocked Pakistan.

Waking up to reality, Pakistan realised that India had breached PoK airspace and delivered bombs within its sovereign territory. This was a first. Use of land-based artillery firings had remained within PoK territory. The optics of India's action had demoralised Pakistanis revelling in the strength of their first civil-military government with defined division of work.

Pakistan was faced with the dilemma of how to avenge India's unprecedented action: to use or not to use the PAF. It was decided that the PAF too would breach Indian airspace while calling it a non-military strike. Unlike the IAF, the PAF strike would be done with menacing force in broad daylight ensuring that Indian military installations close to the Line of Control were not damaged enough to compel India to raise the ante.

The PAF package comprising 24 combat aircraft struck next morning on February 27 with a few breaching Indian airspace. They were challenged, a dogfight ensued, which resulted in the downing of one Pakistani fighter and the capture of an Indian pilot (who had to eject from his MiG-21 inside PoK) by Pakistan.

Briefing the media on February 27 evening, the Indian military delegation said that Pakistan had committed military aggression by seeking to hit military installations. They admitted that it was an act of war. When asked how India would respond, the reply was that India was prepared for all contingencies. Left unsaid was that unless PAF provoked further, the matter was over.

Here are four observations on what happened during the two fateful days.

India has not drawn any new red lines

First, the expensive Israeli SPICE (Smart Precise Impact and Cost Effective) guidance kit converts dumb/unguided bombs into smart guided air-to-surface munitions dropped from 60km stand-off ranges with accuracy of less than three meters. These SPICE kits were fitted on 2,000 pounds (about 900kg) bombs and dropped by Mirage aircraft.

Since the distance from the LC (it was breached in Muzaffarabad sector) to Balakot was 90km, the Mirage, given the 60km stand-off ammunition range, would have done shallow breaches (maximum 30km) and delivered the payload. The air raid would have been over in less than five minutes. While the Mirage remained in POK airspace, the bombs hit Pakistani territory. Moreover, SPICE-bombs, given their accuracy, require Designated Mean point of Impact (DMI); in this case, it would have been given an area target to avoid collateral damage.

Since the purpose of such use of air power was raising the profile of the government, no new 'red-lines', as expostulated by analysts, were created. It would be nigh impossible for the IAF to do another such strike without a war. All talks of a 'new normal' in counter-terrorism operations crafted by the Modi government are baloney.

Compromising India's air power-based conventional deterrence

Second, against India's non-military strike, the PAF responded with military aggression in daytime, which India said was an act of war. Why did India not respond to Pakistan's act of war with offensive counter-strikes? Because the political leadership and the IAF were not prepared for an escalation which could have easily led to a full-blown war, whose dynamics are uncontrollable. Pakistan, given its aggression, was ready for an escalation.

The Indian leadership is unprepared for war because it does not understand the dynamics of war-fighting, including transition of conventional war to use of nuclear weapons. The Modi government was worried by a powerful message from Pakistan on the day the IAF struck. On February 26, Pakistan held a meeting of its National Command Authority (NCA), the highest civil-military leaders' body chaired by the Prime Minister which purportedly decides on nuclear issues.

In reality, the purpose of the NCA is limited to signalling, since all aspects of Pakistan's nuclear weapons are controlled by the Pakistan Army. Pakistan has declared full-spectrum capability: nuclear weapons capability for all three strategic, operational/war-fighting, and battles/ tactical levels of war.

The IAF (and other services) do not have adequate capacity and capability for war escalation; the equipment and ammunition shortages are well-documented and are not hidden from Pakistan. In the 1999 Kargil conflict, where the army chief, General V.P. Malik said 'we will fight with whatever we have', India was lucky since Musharraf had kept his leadership in the dark. In 2001-2002, India lost nearly 1,084 soldiers (to shifting land-mines) without firing a shot and blinked first; in the 2008 Mumbai attacks, India was once again caught unawares; and in 2016, India bluffed with its fake surgical strikes.

Moreover, since war would be a joint-services effort, it is not even clear whether the army or the air force would be the lead service in the land war. Worse, the army, unwilling to give up counter-terrorism operations, has failed to focus on its primary task of war-fighting. The Indian military lacks reforms, and the indigenous defence - industrial complex is pathetic to say the least.

Given the abysmal state of military preparedness, the question is: why did the Modi government order air strikes when the IAF lacks escalation-fighting capabilities, not to speak of escalation dominance? Pakistan's belligerent reaction to the IAF's strike has compromised India's conventional deterrence predicated on air power.

Pakistan has maintained the credibility of its airpower

Third, the PAF strikes were meant to maintain the credibility of its air power and to disallow shrinking of conventional warfighting space. In technology-driven modern war, the air force, and not the army would have primacy for a desirable war outcome. The core competencies of air power comprising its enormous reach, unmatched flexibility, information superiority, precision engagements and air and space superiority are not available to the land forces.

India army's former director general military operations, Lt Gen. Vinod Bhatia, noted on Twitter that Pakistan's strikes were for "domestic compulsions and optics": "Pak air force employed on targets within their artillery range. You never employ air assets where ground-based weapons are effective." The fact is that if Pakistan had responded to India's airstrike with land-based artillery systems, its air power credibility would have eroded. This would in turn have signalled that Pakistan would be willing to use its nukes early in a war.

Despite its declared full-spectrum capability, Pakistan's military, given its elongated geography and too many high-profile assets close to the border, would desist from early use of nuclear weapons in war. Nukes are not central to Pakistan's war-fighting. To maintain this posture, Pakistan has to ensure parity at the operational (or war-fighting) level of conventional war.

Thus, it does not matter whether the PAF undertook shallow breach of the LC in the February 27 strikes. What mattered is that it responded with air power and that too in daylight. What appeared a tit-for-tat

equal and proportionate response helped maintain conventional warfighting space, and strengthened the Pakistani people's confidence in the Imran Khan government.

Outside powers are back in the game

Fourth, once the above objectives were achieved, Pakistan took the high-moral ground and returned the captured Indian pilot for regional peace. Pakistan's strategy was supported and influenced by China. The US, Saudi Arabia and UAE do not have much influence on Pakistan to goad it to review its national security strategy. Pakistani foreign minister Mahmood Qureshi twice spoke with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, which resulted in China's criticism of India's Balakot strike. The Chinese foreign ministry statement released on February 28 said that sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations should be respected.

China's finger-pointing was on Balakot; Indian bombs had severed Pakistan's sovereignty. Beijing had seemingly given a go-ahead to Pakistan to undertake PAF strikes, following which, Pakistan was asked to comply with the regional peace agenda. China not only wants peace between India and Pakistan, it also wants India to get on the Belt and Road Initiative.

Reading between the lines, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval was in constant touch with his American counterpart John Bolton. Before the Indian strike in Balakot, Bolton, reacting to the Pulwama tragedy in Kashmir, had spoken about India's right to self-defence. After the Pakistani strikes, it was US President Donald Trump who had mentioned about the end of the crisis between India and Pakistan.

The Indian action of involving the US in crisis with Pakistan to avert war is not new. The former US secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice wrote in her book: No Higher Honour that the national security advisor in the Vajpayee government, Brajesh Mishra, called her to help avert a war between India and Pakistan in May 2002 during Operation Parakram. Like the then Vajpayee government, the Modi government too sought refuge in the US administration to end the crisis it created solely for effect and image management.

Pravin Sawhney is editor FORCE newsmagazine.

Armchair generals are marching India into trouble

By Pankaj Mishra

Peace appears to have been given a chance in South Asia. Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, striving to play the statesman, has not only released a captured Indian pilot but also detained several alleged Pakistani militants. Still, there's good reason to worry that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi might once again ratchet up tensions against a nuclear-armed neighbor as he approaches the most crucial election of his political life.

And Modi's militant nationalism, loudly amplified by Indian television anchors, isn't the only flammable element in a volatile situation. India's burgeoning military-intellectual complex also deserves the world's close and skeptical scrutiny. One wing of this community consists of superannuated and clearly bored generals, titillating hyper-patriotic television anchors and themselves with visions of do-or-die wars and glorious victories. Their jingoism far exceeds the capacity of the Indian military, which, an internal report recently revealed, is encumbered with "vintage" equipment.

Perhaps more worrying, though, are the credentialed members of what a recent report by Brookings India identified as India's "strategic community." Though much more sober than the fire-breathing talking heads on cable TV, they seem equally attracted to the "temptation," as U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower put it in his classic warning against the military-industrial complex, of "some spectacular and costly" military action.

Perched in privately funded think tanks, many of these connoisseurs of "surgical strikes" did not seem in the least shocked or disturbed that an Indian leader who has, as the Economist put it last week, "made a career of playing with fire" was now playing with Armageddon by launching airstrikes into Pakistan. Rather, they echoed the Hindu nationalist consensus that India was now finally dictating the terms of engagement with its rival a triumphalism shattered the very next day when Pakistan raised its own threshold for conflict with India by striking within Indian territory and bringing down an Indian warplane.

Eisenhower's fear in 1961 of vested interests acquiring "unwarranted influence" is freshly pertinent in today's New Delhi. With hopes rising that India would soon be a superpower closely allied to the U.S., as well as a strategic counter-weight to China, much Indian and foreign money has gone into creating a luxurious ecosystem for strategic experts and foreign-policy analysts.

There's ample reason to fear that such an often murkily funded and influential security establishment outside government won't serve the cause of democracy and peace in the Indian subcontinent. In the U.S., a series of reports by the New York Times in 2016 alleged that on all kinds of issues, including military sales to foreign countries, think tanks were "pushing agendas important to corporate donors, at times blurring the line between researchers and lobbyists." If intellectual dishonesty mars analysis in Washington, D.C., it can be expected to be more pervasive in New Delhi, where the line between paid service for corporate donors and research work is even fuzzier.

It may seem melodramatic to fear that a few well-connected intellectual racketeers might endanger democracy and social stability. But, America under President Donald Trump confirms that Eisenhower was right to worry that an axis of government, corporations and intellectuals-on-hire might skew national priorities, or that, pathologically obsessed with an enemy, his country might degenerate into "a community of dreadful fear and hate."

Already by 1984, George F. Kennan, arguably America's finest diplomat, was lamenting that the "habit" of constantly preparing for "an imagined war" with the Soviet Union had "risen to the status of a vast addiction of American society." This habit, Kennan presciently warned, "would be difficult to eradicate in the future," long after the U.S.S.R. had disappeared.

In India, Hindu nationalist politicians and their sympathizers in the media have similarly turned an imagined punitive war on Pakistan into another vast addiction, and the military-intellectual complex increasingly aggravates this national habit. Focused on Islamabad's backing for the militant insurgency in Kashmir, they've successfully externalized a problem that is primarily domestic: the Modi government's resolve to suppress, rather than address, Kashmiri demands for democracy and civil liberties.

Ajai Shukla was one of the very few mainstream Indian writers on security issues to point out that “the wider story in a crisis with such potential devastation is that the Modi government has launched a nationwide anti-Muslim agenda that regards Muslims as unpatriotic, Pakistan as a cunning and implacable foe and Kashmiri separatists as its willing tools.” Thus, Shukla argues, Kashmiris protesting against Indian brutality have come to be widely seen as “Muslim traitors, rather than the manifestation of a political problem that has to be discussed and resolved, not militarily crushed.”

Zealously pushing a military solution to a political problem, India's political; media and security establishment suffered a debacle last month. They ought to “learn,” as Eisenhower exhorted, “how to compose differences not with arms, but with intellect and decent purpose” above all in Kashmir, which is the key, now more than ever, to the health of civil society in both India and Pakistan.

Ballots & Blood Why do Indian voters need to ink their ballot papers with the blood of Pakistanis?

By Fakir Syed Aijazuddin

Mrs. Indira Gandhi tried this ploy to secure a landslide victory in the 1970s, and succeeded. Mr. Narendra Modi has repeated the trick, and failed. Gradually, PM Modi's bellicosity has revealed the extent to which he will go to retain a majority in the Lok Sabha. He entered India's parliament first five years ago. He intends not to leave it until at least May 2024, if not beyond, whatever the cost to his country.

His latest ruse - a pre-emptive IAF attack on Balakot within Pakistan's territory may well be his Kargil. He has sought to erase this Himalayan miscalculation by declaring with imperial disdain that he and India are one, aping Mrs. Gandhi's slogan: India is Indira; Indira is India. Such hubris is costly.

A BJP led-coalition may return to power but deny Mr. Modi entry into the PM's office. Ironically, he has assured Imran Khan a second term as Pakistan's prime minister, and an extension for General Qamar Javed Bajwa as its COAS. After May 2019, any Indian PM will have to deal with the growing sagacity of one buttressed by the iron tenacity of the other.

Napoleon once asked whether a particular marshal was lucky. PM Modi needs luck and success, and both are eluding him. While his government coerces India's plasticine press into improbable postures of patriotism, he is being hounded by the Opposition. Over twenty significant parties, led by Rahul / Sonia Gandhi's Indian National Congress, have challenged PM Modi, accusing him of 'blatant politicisation of

sacrifices of armed forces by the ruling party.' It is an unprecedented indictment, a parliamentary revolt during war-time.

Modi's government planned a diplomatic offensive by which Pakistan would be condemned for its sponsorship of terrorism at the recent OIC conference in Abu Dhabi. Its External Affairs minister Smt. Shushma Swaraj expected her maiden appearance at the OIC moot as its chief guest would yield fruit.

The harvest unexpected and bitter - came wrapped in an OIC resolution that condemned 'in the strongest possible terms recent wave of Indian terrorism in occupied Jammu and Kashmir'. India, which spent years manoeuvring to have Pakistan declared a terrorist state, suddenly found itself tarred.

It is these reverses that have made PM Modi look outside himself for a national hero. He has encouraged idle hands in India to fabricate a papier-mâché effigy out of the surviving IAF pilot whose MiG-21 was downed by his Pakistani opponent. Even that pilot will admit that he has as little claim to heroism as the infamous U-2 Gary Powers. Each lost a horrendously expensive aircraft.

Both swallowed maps instead of a suicide pill, and both were captured alive. Gary Powers served almost two years in a Soviet prison before being exchanged for a Russian spy in 1962. The Indian pilot was released by Pakistan after two days of dignified detention. A Jain organisation (it extols pacifism) has awarded him a 'Bhagwan Mahavir Ahimsa Puraskar'. Is it tempting other Indian pilots to jettison their aircraft for this unheard-of honour?

The Indian Air Force is silent at this irrational recognition of its pilot's failure. Its reticence is understandable. It cannot explain how two aircraft a MiG-21 and a Su-30 that carries two pilots could be lured into Pakistan territory and then downed in fair aerial combat. Or why, so the surviving pilot claims, he had our F-16 locked in sight yet neglected to destroy it?

His stricken MiG-21 fell on our side, the Su-30 on India's. The Indians have yet to concede that the Su-30 was destroyed on impact. One of the Su-30 pilots was believed injured, the other died. Yet neither casualty receives any acknowledgment by the IAF. Whoever they were, whatever their names, their fate has been shrouded by the IAF, buried deep by civilian propagandists.

The Indians blame their failure on obsolete Russian MiG aircraft, and on the malodorous Rafale deal (price-tagged at €7.87 billion / IRs 59,000 crore) concluded by Modi's government for 36 fighter aircraft. These are yet to be supplied by a joint venture between the Croesus-rich Anil Ambani's Reliance group and France's Dassault Aviation.

Conversely, Pakistan has chosen to honour its PAF heroes quietly, and with sobriety. Our ace pilots - particularly Squadron Leader Hassan Siddiqui and Wing Commander Noman Ali Khan - have demonstrated that they possess the same skill and mastery over the same formidable enemy which generations of PAF warriors have shown, especially since 1965.

Winston Churchill said it of his RAF during the Battle of Britain in 1940. His unforgettable phrase (laden heavy with gratitude) expresses the sentiments of our entire nation to our PAF heroes and to all our Armed Forces: 'Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few'.

'Courtesy DAWN News'.

After India loses dogfight to Pakistan, questions arise about its 'vintage' military

By Maria Abi-Habib

It was an inauspicious moment for a military the United States is banking on to help keep an expanding China in check. An Indian Air Force pilot found himself in a dogfight last week with a warplane from the Pakistani Air Force, and ended up a prisoner behind enemy lines for a brief time. The pilot made it home in one piece, however bruised and shaken, but the plane, an aging Soviet-era MiG-21, was less lucky.

The aerial clash, the first by the South Asian rivals in nearly five decades, was a rare test for the Indian military and it left observers a bit dumbfounded. While the challenges faced by the India's armed forces are no secret, its loss of a plane last week to a country whose military is about half the size and receives a quarter of the funding was still telling.

India's armed forces are in alarming shape

If intense warfare broke out tomorrow, India could supply its troops with only 10 days of ammunition, according to government estimates. And 68 percent of the army's equipment is so old, it is officially considered "vintage." "Our troops lack modern equipment, but they have to conduct 21st-century military operations," said Gaurav Gogoi, a lawmaker and member of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defense.

American officials tasked with strengthening the alliance talk about their mission with frustration: a swollen bureaucracy makes arms sales and joint training exercises cumbersome; Indian forces are vastly underfunded; and the country's navy, army and air force tend to compete rather than work together. Whatever the problems, the United States is determined to make the country a key ally in the coming years to hedge against China's growing regional ambition.

Last year, when Defense Secretary Jim Mattis announced that the Pentagon was renaming its Pacific Command to Indo-Pacific he emphasized India's importance in a shifting world order. "It is our primary combatant command," said Mr. Mattis, who left the Pentagon at the end of the year. "It's standing watch and intimately engaged with over half of the earth's surface and its diverse populations, from Hollywood to Bollywood."

The American military began prioritizing its alliance with India as its close relationship with Pakistan soured over the last two decades. United States officials are concerned that Pakistan is not doing enough to fight terrorism, a charge the country denies. In just a decade, United States arms sales to India have gone from nearly zero to \$15 billion. But Pakistan can still draw on a powerful American-supplied arsenal.

Indian officials say Pakistan used one of its F-16 fighter jets to down its MiG-21 last week. Islamabad rejected the claim, but on Sunday the American Embassy in Islamabad said the United States was looking into the report. The offensive use of an F-16 warplane against its neighbor might have been a violation of the sales agreement. "We are aware of these reports and are seeking more information," the embassy said in a statement. "We take all allegations of misuse of defense articles very seriously."

However troubled its military, India holds an obvious strategic appeal to the United States by virtue of both its location and its size. Indian Air Force officials displaying the remains of an air-to-air missile they say a Pakistan fighter jet fired during a strike over Kashmir last week. Indian Air Force officials displaying the remains of an air-to-air missile they say a Pakistan fighter jet fired during a strike over Kashmir last week.

India will soon become the world's most populous country, on track to surpass China by 2024. It shares a long border with southern and western China and controls important territorial waters Beijing needs for its maritime trade routes.

All that can help the United States try to box in its rival

"India's sheer demographics, its long-term military potential, its geographic expanse it makes India worth waiting for," said Jeff Smith, a research fellow for South Asia at the Heritage Foundation in Washington and the author of "Cold Peace: China-India Rivalry in the 21st Century." "As China rises and the United States fights to keep its dominance, it will need a swing state to tip the balance of power in the 21st century," Mr. Smith said. "And that swing state is India. The United States knows this and is willing to be patient."

For India's military, funding remains the biggest challenge

In 2018, India announced a military budget of some \$45 billion. By comparison, China's military budget that year was \$175 billion. Last month, Delhi announced another \$45 billion budget. It is not just a question of how much India spends on its military, but how it spends it. The majority of the money goes to salaries for its 1.2 million active duty troops, as well as pensions. Only \$14 billion will be used to buy new hardware.

"At a time when modern armies are investing hugely on upgrading their intelligence and technical capabilities, we need to be doing the same," said Mr. Gogoi, the Parliament member. Unlike China, where an authoritarian government is free to set military policy as it wishes, India is a democracy, with all the messiness that can entail.

Cutting troop levels so that the military can spend the money on buying modern equipment is not so simple. India's military has long been a source of jobs for a country struggling with chronic underemployment. That is likely to be a big issue in elections scheduled for later this spring.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India

Prime Minister Narendra Modi won elections in 2014 promising to reform the economy and provide the one million jobs needed each month to satisfy its growing work force. But with elections around the corner, Mr. Modi has shelved promises of economic reform and embraced the usual populist measures.

“The thrust of this government is to focus more on economic development, which has to precede military strength,” said Amit Cowshish, a former defense ministry financial adviser for military acquisitions. “That was what China did they focused on developing their economy and then focused on acquiring their current military stature. The difference is that China started 20 or 30 years ahead of us in terms of economic liberalization.”

Government officials in New Delhi say they are struggling to improve the lives of their citizens in the most basic of ways dealing with high illiteracy rates and poor sanitation infrastructure, as just two examples making it hard to funnel more money toward the military at a time when China is making incursions into India's backyard by land and sea. China has significantly outpaced its rival, creating a robust and taxable middle class. China's economic boom has allowed it to invest aggressively in buying top military hardware and producing it at home.

As the world's conflicts are increasingly fought with state-of-the-art weaponry rather than the large invading armies of the past, India is falling behind. Despite being the fifth-largest military spender, only about a quarter of its military budget this year will purchase new equipment. Although the purchase of military hardware is a slow-moving process in most countries, in India it moves even more sluggishly amid a swollen bureaucracy.

There are also concerns about corruption

Mr. Modi is currently being grilled by the opposition over a murky \$8.9 billion deal to buy 36 Rafale fighter planes from France. His political opponents have cast the agreement as corrupt in an effort to discredit him ahead of elections. The purchase will help India replace its aging fleet of MiG-21s and other jets. And on Saturday, the prime minister tried to turn the tables on the opposition, saying India would have fared better in its skirmish with Pakistan last week if it had had the Rafale jets. “The country has felt the shortage of Rafale,” Mr. Modi said.

Shouting hollow slogans will not improve India's strength

By Li Qingqing

As India's general election will take place from April 11 to May 19, Indian opposition leader Rahul Gandhi used China to attack Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "Not a word comes out of his mouth when China acts against India," Gandhi said. However, attacking China should not be Indian politicians' way to solicit votes for a general election.

What is the major problem that India is facing at the moment? The country lacks economic dynamics and makes slow progress with reform. India's tax system is also too complicated and India's manufacturing industry is still underdeveloped. The "Make in India" initiative launched by Modi also faces challenges because of problems including low productivity, corruption and inconvenient transportation.

What is hampering India is not any external force, but the force inside the country itself that has been hindering India's reform. This is the No.1 question that any candidate has to answer. New Delhi should understand this: Diverting Indian people's attention to China will only make its internal problems more serious.

Some Indian analysts have been appealing for a boycott of Made-in-China products. Especially after India's latest bid to list Masood Azhar as a global terrorist in the UN was suspended by China, the hashtag "Boycott Chinese Products" became popular on Twitter. But why has the boycott failed for so many years? This is because India cannot produce the products by itself.

A tweet serves as a good example: "Very curious how many people tweeting Boycott Chinese Products are using phones from China - Xiaomi, Vivo, Oppo, Huawei, Gionee." The situation seems awkward for a part of the Indian people: Like it or not, they still have to use Chinese-made products because India still lacks the ability to produce on a large scale.

India should be aware that China is not its enemy. The relations between the two countries have improved since Chinese President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Modi held an informal summit in 2018 in Wuhan, Central China's Hubei Province. Beijing and New Delhi have reached an important consensus which should be further implemented.

Although there is still a trade deficit problem between China and India, it should be resolved through negotiation and consultation, not to mention that China has tried to increase its agricultural imports from India to ease the two countries' trade imbalance. China's attitude is also consistent in China-India border talks.

As a powerful neighbor of India, China has been trying to promote their relations. And it would be dangerous if candidates in the general election use the "China threat theory" to hype nationalism and gain popularity. Sensationalizing China affairs may help Indian politicians' political careers, but it will not help improve India's economy, manufacturing or people's livelihoods. If India only shouts hollow slogans on Twitter and fails to improve its real strength, the country will not be able to find its way out.

What the IAF-PAF dogfight reveals

The February 27 aerial duel shows India's military capability doesn't match its ambitions. Blame the nation's tardy defence acquisition process for this.

By: Shekhar Gupta (Source: Hindustan Times)

Whether the Rafale deal is a scam or the best thing for India's defence is for more eminent people to debate. Let me, meanwhile, list four facts emerging from the February 26-27 air skirmishes to bring the story of what should be called the real Rafale scandal.

*In the Rajouri-Mendhar sector air skirmish a day after the Indian Air Forces' (IAF) successful Balakot strikes, the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) was able to create surprise and local superiority technological and numerical in a chosen battlefield. It struck in daylight when least expected, and perfectly timed to attack the changeover of IAF AWAC patrols. The outnumbered IAF pilots (12 aircraft of three vastly different types), scrambled from various bases, and showed the presence of mind not to walk into the ambush set for them, but they failed to deliver a deterrent punishment on PAF.

* Four Sukhoi-30s, the IAF's most powerful air-superiority aircraft, were involved in the melee at beyond visual range (BVR). They were surprised by the PAF F-16s firing their American AMRAAM missiles from so far that their own radar/computer/missiles were not able to give them a "firing solution". Translated: India's best fighter, which constitutes half of the IAF's combat force, was outranged and outgunned.

* Fortunately, two of the upgraded Mirage-2000s were on patrol. These have new French missiles (MICA, or Missile d'Interception, de combat d'autodéfense), which are the exact peers of the F-16/AMRAAM. They were able to lock on to some of the PAF planes, which panicked into dropping their South African origin, stand-off weapons (SOWs) in a hurry, mostly missing the targets. Nevertheless, one fell in the middle of the Nowshera brigade headquarters compound. It was a closer call than we think.

* Surprised, and outnumbered, the IAF scrambled six MiG-21 Bisons from Srinagar and Awantipur. Since these climbed in the shadow of the Pir Panjal range, the PAF AWAC failed to detect them. Their sudden appearance at the battlefield upset the PAF plan. This was fortuitous.

It is only because of the IAF's good training, situational awareness, and some luck that this audacious PAF mission failed. No ground target was hit. Its larger objective of luring vastly outnumbered and outranged IAF jets into a pre-set "killing zone" was the bigger failure.

Which brings us to our central question: Should we have even been having this conversation today if we had the military capability to match our economy (eight times Pakistan's) and strategic ambition? February 27 reminded us that we don't.

If we had a functional defence acquisition system, by now we would have built such a gap that Pakistan wouldn't even dare to retaliate. Check out on a rarely-reported Mirage-2000 laser bomb raid to clear a Pakistani incursion across the LoC in Machil sector in 2002. Forget retaliation, the Pakistanis pretended nothing had happened. Indian air-to-air missiles then, on both Mirage-2000s and MiG-29s, had better range than the PAF, which ducked the challenge. Computers, radars and missiles decide the outcome in modern, mostly BVR, post-dogfight era air warfare.

How did India lose that edge?

This serial crime dates back to the Vajpayee government. In 2001, IAF projected the need of a new fighter to replace the MiGs. Its choice was more Mirage-2000s. Dassault was willing to shift its

production line to India, the IAF knew the plane and loved it. By this time, the IAF would have had 6-8 more squadrons of the upgraded, Made-in-India Mirages with new missiles. The Rafale would probably not even be needed so desperately. PAF wouldn't have dared to carry out the 27 February raid, and if it did, it would have been mauled. But then, George Fernandes, smarting under Cofingate and Tehelka, refused to go with a "single-vendor" deal. The full process for a new acquisition was launched.

We slept for a decade. The Pakistanis got their new F-16s and AMRAAM missiles from the US after 2010. Tactical balance in the air shifted. We, meanwhile, took until 2012 for a new fighter Rafale to be chosen. Except that defence minister AK Antony wouldn't take a decision. Three of his negotiation committee of 14 dissented, so he set a committee above them. And he set up another committee of three outside "monitors" to supervise this committee. Finally, all inputs in, the choice was cleared. Sure enough, Antony ducked again.

He said three things at different times: Within the MoD, he then said, call fresh bids. To the media, he said he didn't have headroom in the budget that year. And now, he told the media three weeks ago, that he put off the deal in the "national interest" since two eminent persons, Subramanian Swamy and Yashwant Sinha, had written letters pointing out problems in the deal and he had ordered an inquiry. He has since refused to talk about these letters even when chased by a reporter. The issue is too sensitive, he tells her. Chances are, his party knocked him on the head for nearly killing their Rafale story just to save his own neck. I will be pleasantly surprised if he talks about those letters again.

The earlier 126-aircraft MMRCA deal was dead by the time the NDA came in. The first wake-up call came early enough, with the Pathankot raid. As usual, the air forces were first off the blocks, and during aggressive patrolling, the IAF realised the PAF's range superiority. It's an unwritten story yet, but some MICA missiles were bought overnight, slung on Mirages which flew deliberately close enough for PAF to observe them. In the four years since, how many of our 40+ Mirages can even carry that missile? Don't ask me for the truth because, as Jack Nicholson's Marine Col. Nathan R. Jessep said in A Few Good Men, you can't face the truth. Be grateful that those two on patrol on the morning of February 27 could .

As I promised, I am telling you about the real Rafale scandal without mentioning the Rafale deal. The Vajpayee government wouldn't buy additional Mirages, scared of touching a single-vendor order. The MICA missile had first been sought by the IAF in 2001, the first only came in 2015 when Pathankot shocked the MoD to pull the file down from orbit. Existing Mirages then had to be upgraded. Two were upgraded by Dassault. HAL said it would do the rest. How many has it done yet? I warned you, you can't face the truth.

Then it gets even more scandalous.

How did Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman cross the LoC? He was in visual pursuit of a PAF fighter for sure. But his controller was warning him to return. He didn't. Because he couldn't hear. As

you'd expect in 2019, the battle zone had full radio-jamming. That's why modern fighters have secure data links. Why didn't that MiG have it? Ask the gallant bureaucrat of MoD who blocked the purchase for three years claiming that a defence PSU would make it. Don't ask me his name, find out. You might learn another truth you don't want to face.

That order has lately been placed. With Israel. Soon enough, all IAF fighters will have this secure data link. And you'd die of shame, when I tell you it is a purchase, worth a mere Rs 630 crore, less than half the price of one Rafale. We were lucky to lose just one MiG that day.

IRAN

Iran penetrates into US command center, picks up drones control

Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Aerospace Force Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh disclosed on Thursday that several US aircraft that were constantly flying over Syria and Iraq were under IRGC's control and their first-hand intelligence was being monitored and retrieved by his forces after penetrating into the US command center.

“Seven to eight drones that had constant flights over Syria and Iraq were brought under our control and their intel was monitored by us and we could gain their first-hand intel,” General Hajizadeh said in the Western Iranian city of Hamedan on Thursday.

The footage below shows IRGC's penetration into US Army's Command Center, one of the many proofs in support of General Hajizadeh's remarks. The footage shows a US flying drone starts malfunctioning and makes a rough landing in a desert area 10 kilometers away from its base.

The US troops avoid approaching the malfunctioning drone as they are not sure who is controlling the aircraft, and hence send a manned aircraft to bomb the drone. The footage that displays the IRGC's penetration into the US spy drone's intel has been recorded by an IRGC drone flying above the scene.

Iran is one of the pioneering countries in drone technology. The country has long been manufacturing drones since the Iraq-Iran war in the 1980s. But it took a long leap in drone technology nearly a decade ago.

The Iranian military first downed a US army RQ-170 Sentinel in Eastern Iran in 2011. Months later, Iran started production of its own RQ-170 stealth aircraft after reverse engineering the downed US aircraft. The Iranian RQ-170 conducted its official flight in November 2014.

The original US drone was a stealth aircraft manufactured for surveillance and spying operations, while the Iranian version of the RQ-170 drone has been equipped by the IRGC with bombing capability as well.

Lockheed Martin's Skunk Works advanced development arm is thought to have developed the RQ-170 by around 2005, and the US deployed the stealthy aircraft to Afghanistan by 2008. However, the US Air Force did not officially acknowledge the program until December 2009.

Back in October 2013, General Hajizadeh said Iran moved as much as 35 years ahead in building drone engines by reverse engineering of the US drone. Iran has downed a collection of US drones, including Scan Eagle, Raptor, M-Q9 surveillance.

The range of the various types of US Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) downed by Iran has now amounted to a dozen, and it has started reproducing them immediately after conducting reverse engineering. Several squadrons of these robotic warriors are already in mission.

Last Thursday, Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Baqeri underlined that Iran along with Russia and Turkey believe that the foreign forces which have been deployed in Syria without any coordination with Damascus should evacuate the war-torn state.

Iran, Russia and Turkey as the guarantor states have called for the withdrawal of forces who are present in certain parts of Syria without coordination with the legal government in Syria and have occupied some regions, General Baqeri said, alluding to the deployment of the American forces in Eastern Euphrates region in Syria.

The Iranian top commander made the remarks in a joint meeting with Russian and Turkish Defense Ministers General Sergey Shoigu and General Hulusi Akar in the resort city of Sochi in Russia on Thursday. He also added that the US officials' remarks on withdrawing forces from Syria are just claims.

Courtesy Fars news agency.

Construction of two new Iranian nuclear plants going well, atomic chief says

Ali Akbar Salehi, head of Islamic Republic's Atomic Energy Organization, says work on \$8.5-billion power station project 'moving ahead in an excellent manner'

By Toi Staff

Construction of two new nuclear plants in the southern Iranian city of Bushehr, home to the country's only current working nuclear power station, is on schedule and going to plan, the Islamic Republic's atomic chief said on Monday. Ali Akbar Salehi, head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, said on Monday that the latest additions to its nuclear portfolio were "moving ahead in an excellent manner," according to Iranian media reports.

“I was in Bushehr two or three days ago and the Bushehr 2 and Bushehr 3 power plants are being constructed,” Salehi reportedly said at a cabinet meeting in Tehran. The project, which will cost more than \$8.5 billion and is being built with Russian assistance, is expected to go online by 2026. Iran's sole operational nuclear reactor, also built with Russian assistance, currently produces 1,000 megawatts of electricity. The new plants will produce an additional 1,057 megawatts.

Western nations do not view the Bushehr plant as a proliferation risk because Russia supplies the fuel for the reactor and takes away spent fuel that could otherwise be used to make weapons-grade plutonium. Earlier this year, Salehi said that Iran had deceived nuclear inspectors by quietly purchasing replacement parts for its Arak nuclear reactor while it was conducting negotiations for an international agreement under which it knew it would be required to destroy the original components.

Salehi recalled that during talks for the so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the 2015 deal that lifted sanctions on Iran in return for it dismantling the weapons-capable parts of its nuclear program, Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei warned his country's negotiators that he expected Western parties to renege on the agreement.

“When our team was in the midst of the negotiations, we knew that [the Westerners] would ultimately renege on their promises,” Salehi said. “The leader Khamenei warned us that they were violators of agreements. We had to act wisely. Not only did we avoid destroying the bridges that we had built, but we also built new bridges that would enable us to go back faster if needed.”

US President Donald Trump pulled out of the nuclear deal in May last year but the other signatories Britain, France, Germany, Russia, China and Iran have all agreed to try to keep the pact alive on their own. Trump insists the original agreement did not go far enough in curbing Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions and wants to renegotiate the JCPOA with stricter terms. In the meantime Washington has imposed heavy sanctions on Iran that could weaken the ability of the remaining parties to maintain the deal.

Last month Salehi said Iran has begun “preliminary activities for designing” a modern process for 20-percent uranium enrichment. Restarting enrichment at that level would mean Iran had withdrawn from the 2015 nuclear deal. Tehran has in the past warned that if the remaining parties are not able to keep up the trade and financial benefits the deal provided, it will also pull out and restart controversial parts of its nuclear program.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

KASHMIR

'Solution to Kashmir problem is political, not military,' ex-Navy chief tells president

By Scroll Staff

Admiral Laxminarayan Ramdas said no amount of force as part of the avowedly 'muscular' Kashmir policy can quell the anger that Kashmiri youth are experiencing. Former Navy Chief Admiral Laxminarayan Ramdas has written to President Ram Nath Kovind in the aftermath of the suicide attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama district that killed at least 40 Indian security personnel. Pakistan-based extremist group Jaish-e-Mohammed claimed responsibility for the attack.

In a letter dated February 20, Ramdas said the guilty must be punished for the despicable act. He, however, questioned how such an attack took place on a strategic highway, "especially in view of some reports that speak of there having been some intelligence reports". Days after the attack, media reports suggested that an advisory was issued to the Central Reserve Police Force in the Valley, warning them of possible use of improvised explosive devices by militants.

Ramdas said the Kashmir problem must be resolved through dialogue between India, Pakistan and the people of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. "We must act now and sit across the table and have an honest dialogue with all parties concerned," he wrote. "It might already be too late." He also condemned the harassment and attacks on Kashmiris across states. "Soon this might spill over to Muslims across India. We cannot allow this to continue and spread with dire consequences which are hard to assess," he said.

He also urged that there should be a stop to the "terrible media war" being waged on innocent Kashmiris. He said urgent action must be taken to prevent aggravating the situation of fear and insecurity.

This is Admiral Ramdas - former Chief of the Naval Staff, writing to you yet again this time on the tragic deaths of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) Jawans in the IED attack on their convoy in Pulwama on Feb 14th 2019 and subsequent events. Over forty precious lives, belonging to the CRPF were lost in the service of the Nation on Feb 14, 2019. This was indeed a despicable act, and a tragic event, and those guilty must be punished.

While the event has understandably evoked strong and angry reactions from every corner of the country and all sections of the people, it is also clear that such an event should never have happened on such an important strategic highway, especially in view of some reports that speak of there having been some intelligence reports to this effect in possession of the police and Intelligence agencies.

It is reported that this attack was planned and executed by the Jaish e Mohammed [JEM]. There are questions as to how and why a lone vehicle packed with RDX was able to penetrate a convoy and wreak such havoc, these and many more questions will no doubt be the subject of internal inquiries both by the CRPF and other agencies of the State.

As a former head of the Navy and Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, and also someone who, after retirement in 1993 has devoted most of his time in the pursuit of peace with Pakistan by pushing for a people to people dialogue, my concerns, are listed below.

1. We must resolve the Kashmir problem through dialogue which must involve all three partners to the dispute namely, the people of J&K, India and Pakistan. This is a position I have advocated for several decades now after having studied the intractable nature of what is popularly called the K word, but which has continued to extract a heavy toll on both countries and above all on the suffering of the unfortunate people of Jammu and Kashmir. We continue to proclaim that they are an integral part of India. If indeed that is so, then they must be treated as such, as equal citizens - be they in Jammu, the Valley or in Ladakh. Had we done that we would have been less likely to see the levels of alienation, especially of young people?

2. If both countries are willing to engage each other on the Kartarpur corridor then why not on the LOC, and other core concerns around Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). The sooner we make it known that we are open to dialogue with all stakeholders and begin this process in all seriousness and sincerity, the more likely we are to make some headway with the people in J&K.

3. If a young Adil can blow himself up in the cause of freedom, Aazadi or the long promised autonomy for Kashmir, it is the strongest indicator yet of the levels of anger and alienation that the youth of the state are experiencing today. No amount of force as part of the avowedly "muscular" Kashmir policy can quell this. We must act now and sit across the table and have an honest dialogue with all parties concerned. It might already be too late.

4. The most serious fallout of this attack on our jawans in Awantipora has been the unprecedented outbreak of harassment, mob violence, attacks, insults and abuse levelled at many Kashmiris across the country. Soon this might spill over to Muslims across India. We CANNOT allow this to continue and spread with dire consequences which are hard to assess.

5. The only solution is political and not military. And a political solution must involve a genuine and continuous dialogue with the people of Kashmir including dissidents and separatists; the Govt of Pakistan and the Govt of India.

What can be done immediately?

In your capacity as the Head of State and our Supreme Commander, and the oath you have taken to uphold the Constitution, I urge you to take steps as outlined below, which is entirely within your command, and a part of your duty and responsibility:-

a. It is imperative that the situation should not be allowed to escalate into greater hostilities which it might not always be possible to contain. As the Supreme Commander, you must caution our own leaders about the very real dangers of the present standoff escalating into a war situation and quickly going beyond a conventional engagement given that both India and Pakistan are two nuclear armed countries.

b. The decisions on next steps must be taken with due diligence, and weighing all the options and their implications. We cannot allow the hysterical media anchors and social media anger to influence or pressurise decisions at the highest level. The atmosphere at present is by no means conducive to decisions being taken in a calm and considered manner with emotions and reactions being inflamed and incited in an often deliberate and irresponsible manner.

c. Let India take the high moral ground by declaring an unconditional Hold Fire pending detailed enquiries into the attack on the convoy in Pulwama. This way we will ensure that the facts are investigated, and the truth behind the attack be established without delay. I am sure that this will have a salutary effect and ensure seamless actions further ahead.

d. We must immediately put a halt to the terrible media war being waged on innocent Kashmiris who are going about their business quietly in towns and cities across the country. This message must come from the highest level and the Honorable Prime Minister must be advised that he can halt this current backlash in minutes if he so chooses, by issuing stern and clear warnings against any violence and threats and harassment against citizens be they Kashmiri or indeed Muslim citizens, through every channel, cadre and social media. To avoid aggravating the present situation of fear and insecurity and preventing further bloodshed, action on this must be taken with utmost speed.

e. Enable an impartial and independent Judicial Enquiry. This group should comprise serving judges of the Supreme Court.

The Nation as a whole seems to be going through a lot of uncertainties especially about the threats of retaliation. Such posturing, especially between two nuclear armed states, is highly risky. This time around we may not be able to contain this to the conventional type of warfare. The situation is even more delicate given the impending elections, communal disturbances and fears of breakdown of law and order.

We must not allow any of the above to happen. We have a lot of strategic and human interests in (J&K) and the country as a whole and we must protect both these. This can only happen by winning the hearts and minds of the people, especially of Jammu & Kashmir. Let us remember that Military Force can never erase an "IDEA". We need to do some serious reflection of our own policies and conduct these past 70 years.

MISCELLANEOUS

Russia & China offer the SCO platform for India-Pak de-escalation

By M. K. Bhadrakumar

Saudi Arabia is pushing forward as mediator between India and Pakistan with a messianic zeal that patently enjoys US backing. The Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel Al-Jubeir is arriving in

Delhi tomorrow. He was to have visited Islamabad on Friday but rescheduled his plan so that he can touch base with Modi first and thereafter meet the Pakistani leaders, including army chief Gen. Qamar Bajwa.

Modi and Bajwa will be Adel's key interlocutors. How far the Saudi waltz will advance remains to be seen. How Modi handles the piquant situation will bear watch. Certainly, the Saudi mediation makes India look rather immature and that becomes willy-nilly a reflection of Modi's foreign policy legacy.

The point is, no matter what Modi may boast about "new India", the geopolitical reality is that India's stature diminishes when it needs a small country like Saudi Arabia under an autocratic ruler to help out with what is arguably one of the most critical templates of its diplomacy. Saudi Arabia has no track record as a peacemaker. On the contrary, it has a notorious reputation the world over as a promoter of terrorist groups.

Meanwhile, India does not have to be beholden to the Saudis to ease its tensions with Pakistan. The indications are that Russia and China are jointly sponsoring an initiative in this regard. China is deputing a special envoy to visit India and Pakistan to discuss the crisis situation. The Pakistani FM Shah Mehmood Qureshi disclosed this in Islamabad.

To be sure, Russia and China, which actively coordinate on the foreign policy front, are in consultation each other on the India-Pakistan tensions. We may also factor in that the foreign ministers of Russia and China had an opportunity last Wednesday to meet EAM Sushma Swaraj at the RIC ministerial. Following that, Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi also briefed Qureshi in a phone conversation where the latter had expressed the hope that "the Chinese side will continue to play a constructive role in easing the current tension."

Equally, at the height of the India-Pakistan crisis, on February 27, Russian Foreign Ministry also had issued a statement expressing "grave concern over the escalating situation along the Line of Control and the surge in tensions" between India and Pakistan "which are Russia's friends." It took a neutral stance and called on both sides "to show restraint and redouble efforts to resolve existing problems by political and diplomatic means."

It is entirely conceivable that the Chinese special envoy's visit is a related development signifying a coordinated effort by Beijing and Moscow and in consultation with Islamabad and New Delhi. This is of course a major shift in the tectonic plates of Eurasian politics and it has an added significance insofar as it is taking place in the New Cold War conditions.

Indeed, it does not need much ingenuity to figure out that a US-sponsored Saudi mediation between India and Pakistan must be a worrisome development for both Russia and China, from the geopolitical perspective. At any rate, on Thursday, President Vladimir Putin telephoned Modi. According to the Kremlin readout, they discussed the "crisis in relations between India and Pakistan" and the Russian leader "expressed hope for a prompt settlement." The careful wording hinted that Putin offered to lend a helping hand, jointly with China, to ease the tension.

Curiously, the very next day, Russian Foreign Minister telephoned Qureshi in Islamabad presumably to follow up on the Putin-Modi conversation and offered help to “de-escalate” the tensions. The Russian Foreign Ministry readout, cited by state news agency TASS, says: “Moscow expressed its readiness to contribute to de-escalating tensions and that there is no alternative to settling all differences between Islamabad and New Delhi by political and diplomatic means.”

Importantly, Lavrov also outlined to Qureshi how the de-escalation process can be achieved via the mechanism of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). A Xinhua report since highlighted this aspect that Lavrov told Qureshi about the “possibility of using the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's Regional Anti-terrorist Structure for this purpose.”

Alongside, the Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova outlined in an important statement on Thursday Moscow's broad approach. Zakharova said: “We are worried about the escalation of tension in relations between India and Pakistan and dangerous manoeuvres of both states' armed forces along the Line of Control that are fraught with a direct military clash.”

“We are urging the sides to display maximum restraint. We continue to assume that contentious matters should be resolved by political-diplomatic methods on a bilateral basis in line with the provisions of the 1972 Simla Agreement and the 1999 Lahore Declaration.” “We reaffirm our readiness to provide all-out support to the Indian and Pakistani efforts in countering terrorism.”

From the Indian perspective, this adds up to an extremely positive outcome of EAM's consultations in Zhejiang with her Russian and Chinese counterparts. This must be EAM Swaraj's finest hour in international diplomacy, as the curtain begins descending shortly on her scintillating stint as India's foreign minister. No doubt, the urgency of “de-escalation” of the tensions with Pakistan is self-evident. The “de-escalation” is far from over with the return of the Indian pilot. In fact, the tensions on the Line of Control can spiral out of control anytime in the present surcharged atmosphere.

Without doubt, the international community read the US and NATO allies is closely watching. The Afghan endgame is at a most sensitive stage and any eruption of tensions between India and Pakistan will negatively impact the peace process. India should wholeheartedly welcome the Sino-Russian proposal, cast within an SCO framework as far more preferable to the dalliance with the Saudis and the Emiratis or, for that matter, any UN intervention.

The fact of the matter is that both Russia and China are stakeholders in India-Pakistan normalisation and neither has any hidden agenda in this regard. Of course, Russia and China are like-minded partners for India in the fight against terrorism. On the other hand, unlike in the Cold War era, Pakistan is keen on Eurasian integration, too.

Rohingya Refugees UN warns Bangladesh of 'new crisis' over Rohingya relocation plan

By Joshua Carroll

Island chosen to house 23,000 refugees may not be 'truly habitable', UN's special rapporteur on Myanmar warns. Bangladesh risks creating a "new crisis" for Rohingya refugees if it goes ahead next month with plans to relocate 23,000 refugees to an uninhabited island prone to cyclones, a United Nations human rights envoy has warned. Yanghee Lee, the UN special rapporteur on Myanmar who visited Bhasan Char recently, told the Human Rights Council in Geneva on Monday that she was unsure if the Bay of Bengal island was "truly habitable".

She also warned "ill-planned" relocations without the consent of refugees "have the potential to create a new crisis". Rohingya advocates say the refugees would effectively be trapped on Bhasan Char, a muddy, low-lying island that floods frequently during monsoon season and offers few livelihood opportunities. More than 730,000 Rohingya are confined to overcrowded camps in Bangladesh after fleeing a campaign of arson, murder and rape waged in Myanmar by the country's military since late 2017.

In Myanmar, 'pervasive hate speech and shrinking freedom'

Despite the objections, the Bangladeshi government hopes to eventually move 100,000 Rohingya to the island, arguing this would relieve pressure on the camps.

'Everyone will refuse'

Nay San Lwin, a Rohingya activist, said he believed the only way officials could get people to move to the island was by force. "Everyone in the camps will refuse for sure," he told Al Jazeera. "No one wants to be relocated to Bhasan Char." Lee's remarks came as she delivered the findings of a report based on visits she made to Thailand and Bangladesh in January. The Myanmar government, led by Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, denied her access to the country during her trip and did not respond to her written questions about the human rights situation in Myanmar.

In a December letter, the government told Lee her visits were "counterproductive", claiming her previous reports lacked "objectivity and impartiality".

Bangladesh tells UN it cannot take more Myanmar refugees

Lee said in the recently released report that the UN "must be allowed to conduct a full technical and humanitarian assessment" of Bhasan Char and that Rohingya should be given "go and see" visits to determine if they wished to move there. Bangladesh has enlisted British and Chinese engineers to help prepare the island for the planned arrivals. The involvement of British firm HR Wallingford in the project has sparked criticism from UK-based campaigners.

The advocacy group Burma Campaign UK in December named the firm on a "dirty list" of companies that it said were involved in projects related to human rights violations. The firm did not immediately respond to Al Jazeera's request for comment on Monday. A spokesperson has previously told The

Guardian the company has no business inside Myanmar and has been engaged in Bangladesh to design flood defences on Bhasan Char to internationally recognised standards.

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Understanding security vulnerabilities in space

By Mahvish Malik

The Common Heritage of Mankind Principle is a diverse concept in 21st century. It can be defined as certain global commons or elements regarded as beneficial to humanity as a whole should not be unilaterally exploited by individual states or their nationals, nor by corporations or other entities, but rather should be exploited under some sort of international arrangement or regime for the benefit of mankind as a whole. In this context, the space domain is also referred as the mankind heritage that allows the peaceful application of space technology for all. On contrary, the military application of dual-use space technology offers implications for space security in general.

Space security is threatened by the invention of the 'double edge sword' of technology. The debates about 'space superiority' being a destiny and 'space supremacy' as a future vision calls for an arms race in space. The dynamic nature of future wars has a potential of introducing the space based weapons, also known as the phenomena of space weaponization. Such technologies will include the operational capability of the Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) systems and Kinetic energy weapons, lasers, small satellites etc by adding revolutionary war-fighting scenarios.

It is obvious that the global military operations is the major driver behind understanding security vulnerabilities in space. Therefore, this scenario triggers the debate on enhancing the offensive defensive capability of a state when its national security is at stake. With the existing R&Ds on Anti-Satellite (ASAT) weapons, the future space wars will likely to happen unless the small spacecraft with distributive systems may be deployed by with enhanced capability in future.

Innovation of new technologies is having deep impact on almost all sectors. The political and economic cost of such technologies can be understood by assessing the security trilemma debate in future space war scenarios. Security trilemma offers the repercussions on third state's security that gets affected from the military developments of two rival states that fight against each other for protecting their respective state's security interests.

For instance, the potential threat of space weaponization by the U.S. offers security threat to Russia and China. The U.S. Missile Defense Review 2019 visions for acquiring counter-space capabilities. In this regard, the recent announcement of establishing the U.S. combatant command for space warfare aims to militarize the Earth's orbits. In Chinese case, their response against U.S. space offers threat perception to India, ending up in affecting Pakistan. India has tested its ASAT technology by using kinetic kill vehicle under Mission Shakti. India has exploited its space based dual-use technology into acquiring their potential BMD system; and aims further for an ASAT weaponry development in future.

Moreover, the strategic chain reaction started by U.S. will uncertainly end up in affecting strategic stability of highly fragile region i.e. South Asia. Presence of two nuclear weapon states already makes this region highly volatile and uncertain. Further, the increasing technological gap between highly and

less developed states is exploiting the political stalemate on existing lack of transparent measures against an arms race in space. In this context, Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS) is a classic example that is facing challenges in establishing legal measures against an arms race in space. The only beneficiaries from such situation are the states with the advanced military industrial complexes that advances political economy of Advanced States in return.

It is the high times when states need to join voices with other states which are vocal against space weaponization including Russia and China that are fully determined to work on establishing transparent measures against political, economic and military spiral effects of an arms race in space. In this regard, both states have called for multilateral arms control treaty by presenting an updated draft treaty at Conference on Disarmament (CD) on the PAROS, the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects. This draft treaty is facing political stalemate from many years and offers no end game to curb potential space weaponization.

In the world of realpolitik, there exists no space sovereignty and space wars are likely to be revived. Whereas, by endorsing certain norms for space normalization will help to sustain the strategic stability in different regions. Security vulnerabilities in space needs to be discouraged and let the common heritage of mankind not to be monopolized in future!

MIDDLE EAST

The ISIS Enigma

By General Mirza Aslam Beg

In today's New York Times, the leading article is captioned: "Caliphate is Gone, but ISIS is Not". The ISIS is the phenomenon which emerged fourteen hundred years ago, by the name of Khawarjis, when the two revered factions of early Islam, started fighting against each other. Similarly it emerged again under Abu Bakar Baghdadi, opposing the internecine war in Syria.

In 2014, the ISIS comprised three main groups the Syrian, Iraqi and the 3-4000 Saudis under Ahmad Khashgi. They now stand defeated in Syria, but will continue to threaten these two countries in particular, as well as other Muslim countries devastated by war during the last three decades. "There are 15,000-20,000 armed ISIS fighters in Iraq and Syria, accelerating faster than efforts to prevent it." (J.F.Jeffrey)

I wrote the article "The ISIL Enigma" some five years back, published in our English and Urdu dailies in September 2014. Describing the phenomenon of the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL), I said, it is not new to the Muslim World, but for others it is an enigma. ISIL has grown out of the deep frustration,

hate, disenchantment and injustices experienced by a group of people who now have risen in revolt, to correct the course, in their own puritan ways.

Such a phenomenon first occurred in 37 AH, by the name of Khawarjis, who fought the bloody battle of Niharwan against Caliph Hazrat Ali. They revolted because the battles of Jamal and Siffin, which Hazrat Ali fought against Hazrat Ayesha and Hazrat Muwawiah, so gravely disenchanted them in respect of these personalities, whom the followers of the Faith, so much revered and loved.

The 'shock and awe' brutalities committed by US and their allies, on Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, and sanctions on Iran, drew the Hate Line. Now, the Sunni-Shia divide in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and Palestine, was induced to create internal conflicts. Political Islam was rejected in favour of modernity, whereas the Muslims in general believe that:

“Human existence should be God-centered human order, whereas the proponents of modernity prefer an order that favours individual autonomy and marginalized God. Not God first but We first,” Even a country like Pakistan, where an exemplary Shia-Sunni harmony exists, all kinds of machinations have been devised, to break the harmony. The Khawarjis of early Islam revolted because of their disenchantment with their most respected personalities of the Faith. Similarly, the ISIL of the present times has revolted against the Shia-Sunni conflict and the collusion of their leaders with the enemies of Islam, creating deep hatred for their rulers. Shia & Sunni countries now are pitched against each other in Syria and Iraq a reminiscence of the battles of Jamal and Siffin.

As if that was not enough, under the leadership of United States of America, a new plan now has been worked-out, on 14th February 2019 at Warsaw, to accelerate the Shia-Sunni conflict, by assigning responsibility to Israel, to contain and curb Iran, while India has been tasked to deal with Pakistan, and bring Central Asia, South Asia and the Asia Pacific region under Indian hegemonic domination.

Trumps is oblivious of the reality because, he thinks that by using the military power they can “contain, degrade and destroy the ISIS.” He is wrong. The problem has gone much beyond the military capability to restore order. The Americans went all out to destroy Al-Qaida and claim to have killed Osama and his entire network, yet Al-Qaida is alive, splintered and spreading over several countries and more destructive than ever. How to deal with ISIS, is the primary concern.

With India and Israel, joining this nexus, it becomes much more ominous for the Muslims and the world at large. The Muslim World was able to contain and assimilate the Khawarjis into the Islamic order. That is the approach, the civilized world must follow. Of necessity, it requires of the Americans and their allies a cool heart and a perceptive mind, to develop a new strategy, a new plan and a new approach to deal with this problem.

But unfortunately, “they don't know what else to do. Use of military has become their 'Default Option.” The former President Obama is not oblivious of the reality, when he says: “Oh, it's a shame when you have a dissident professional President, with no foreign policy, other than “don't do stupid things”.

Yet Trump can't help doing things like “moving the American embassy to East Jerusalem”, and the “time for the United States to fully recognize Israel sovereignty over the Golden Heights.” Sure, he needs to develop a noble heart, like that of Jacinta Ardern, the Prime Minister of New Zealand, to correct the course.

RUSSIA

Moscow threatens to SINK foreign ships

Using Arctic sea route that links Atlantic to the Pacific unless it is given 45 days' notice of voyages and vessels take a Russian pilot on board

Russia threatened they would hit cargo ships unless they follow new rules Kremlin want advanced noticed and a Russian pilot to go aboard foreign ships The colossal shipping lane runs from the Atlantic to the Pacific north of Russia The news comes as fears of a new Cold War are rife throughout the West

By Will Stewart

Russia today threatened to sink foreign naval and cargo ships using the most northerly major sea route in the world unless they abide by strict new rules. The Kremlin is demanding 45 days advance notice of voyages and insisting foreign vessels take on board a Russian pilot as they sail through the Arctic. Even then, non-Russian ships may be refused access to the Northern Sea Route. Vessels disobeying the edict could be arrested or sunk, say reports.

The move comes amid Moscow's growing military presence in the Arctic which the Kremlin is also exploiting for oil and gas. The route covers Arctic waters north of the Russian mainland including the entire length of Siberia. It connects the Atlantic to the Pacific. Due to global warming, the route is far more accessible to shipping than a generation ago.

The new regime imposed by Moscow was revealed today by Izvestia newspaper. The rules were dressed up as Moscow keeping control of pristine Arctic waters. Yet they were needed due to 'increased activity of various states in Arctic military naval zone' as well as to keep control over environment and merchant shipping, said Izvestia.

US and other NATO countries have paid special attention to the Northern Sea Route, along which Vladimir Putin is massively boosting the presence of his military machine. It comes at a time when fears of a new Cold War have put diplomatic relations on a knife edge, as Russia continues expanding into the Crimea since a popular uprising in 2014. Furthermore, Vladimir Putin and President Donald Trump decided to quit a landmark Reagan-Gorbachev era nuclear missile pact to keep medium range missiles off the European continent last month.

The US accused Russia of developing and deploying a cruise missile that violates provisions of the pact that ban production, testing and deployment of land-based cruise and ballistic missiles with a range of 310 to 3,410 miles. Last year a French RONA naval support vessel passed along the Northern Sea Route without advance warning, say the Russians.

The commander of the ship later said that the purpose of the journey was to gather more knowledge about the region. Ships with cruise missiles on board passing along the route pose a serious threat to Russia as they keep virtually all key military and political centres at gunpoint, according to the report. 'The current international situation demands Russian control over the Northern Sea Route,' said Alexey Chepa, deputy chairman of the international affairs committee of the Russian parliament.

Military expert Vladislav Shurygin said that the new rules are overdue. 'NATO and the USA can try to create a hotbed of yet more tension next to our borders, and the passing of the French naval ship proves it.' Notice of foreign naval sailings must include a full description of a military vessel, as well as the military rank and identity of its captain, say Moscow. Vessels breaking the new code could be arrested or destroyed, the Russians are warning.

'Should the Russian side conclude that a vessel is old, its trim is not suitable to go through ice, or its crew is not properly trained, the ship might be banned from using the Northern Sea Route', said Professor Kamil Bekyashev, vice president of the Russian Maritime Law Association. Should a vessel proceed without a permit, Russia reserved the right to forcibly stop it or even destroy the ship, he said. 'International maritime and national legislation allows us to do this, since such a vessel carries a threat to navigation, the environment and human lives,' he claimed.

Western countries have argued that the route should be open to all countries. The latest statement of the kind was made by U.S. Coast Guard Commander Adm. Paul Zukunft in 2018. But Moscow insists the route is within its territorial waters or covered by rules on the protection of frozen seas. The new curbs follow an attempt by Moscow to encourage the use of the route for cargo shipping cutting many days off alternative journeys.

The Izvestia story reported: 'The new rules prescribe that foreign states send a notice regarding the planned travel of their ships along the Northern Sea Route 45 days in advance. 'The notice must indicate the names of military ships and vessels, their goals, routes, and duration of the voyage. 'It also must indicate main ship parameters, such as the displacement, the length, the width, the draft, and characteristics of the power unit.

'It is also necessary to report the military rank and name of the captain. The ships will be compelled to take Russian pilots aboard. 'Russian icebreakers will lead foreign ships through the ices if necessary.' The ships will also be compelled to prevent environmental pollution. In case of emergency or complicated ice conditions, the captains must send a report to the nearest Russian port or military base.

Russia says it's going to arm a submarine with 6 nuclear 'doomsday' devices

By Alex Lockie

Russia built an underwater nuclear torpedo with a massive warhead designed to cause tsunamis and devastate entire continents.

Russia said it will arm one of its most mysterious subs with up to six of these devices by 2020. The sub has also been linked to clandestine efforts to destroy vital undersea cables.

All nuclear weapons pose extreme danger, but Russia's planned sub and its devastating torpedoes are unprecedented.

Russia will deploy what's been described as the deadliest nuclear weapon ever aboard mysterious submarines by 2020, Russian state media said, citing a Russian defense-industry source. The "Poseidon" nuclear-powered torpedo reputed to carry a 100 megaton nuclear warhead and meant to erupt underwater for maximum effect will reportedly deploy aboard the Project 09852 sub Belgorod, which is a converted nuclear-powered cruise-missile sub expected to go on combat duty in 2020.

The Russian state news agency TASS said the new Belgorod subs could carry six of the Poseidon nuclear torpedoes, which are sometimes described as drones. But Russia will reportedly not operate the mysterious submarine alongside its regular armed forces or other nuclear-powered subs. The Main Directorate of Deep-Sea Research will run the ship, according to H.I. Sutton, who said the Belgorod would conduct covert missions with a smaller submarine in tow.

"Russia operates a small number of very small, nuclear-powered submarines that are capable of diving in excess of several thousand meters," Andrew Metrick, a research associate in the International Security Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said in 2016.

"It's probably the most shadowy part of the Russian undersea apparatus," he added. The new Belgorod submarine is "not operated by their navy. It's operated by a separate branch of their ministry of defense," Metrick said.

In addition to six Poseidon torpedoes that experts say could wipe out almost all life on earth, Metrick and Sutton speculated the Belgorod could carry a smaller sub that could dive deeper to cut undersea cables and dramatically disrupt international communications and national economies. Russian President Vladimir Putin initially announced the Poseidon in a March 1, 2018, speech, in which he said US defenses could not stop it. Of course, the US has no defenses against any full-scale Russian nuclear attack, but in the case of undersea defenses, the US appears not to have even explored this avenue.

In that speech, Putin confirmed the existence of the Poseidon, which has horrified experts since images of it first leaked in 2015. The US and other countries field nuclear-powered submarines capable of firing nuclear missiles, but the Poseidon represents a unique danger to life on earth. Most nuclear weapons

seek to minimize radioactive fallout and simply destroy military targets. Russia took the opposite approach with the Poseidon.

The weapon is said to use a warhead, perhaps the strongest ever, designed to come into direct contact with water, marine animals, and the ocean floor, kicking up a radioactive tsunami that could spread deadly radiation over hundreds of thousands of miles of land and sea, and render them uninhabitable for decades.

In short, while most nuclear weapons can end a city, Russia's Poseidon could end a continent. Russia has also repeatedly threatened the US and Europe with the weapon, which it said it could park off a coast and detonate at a time of its choosing.

Malcolm Davis, a senior analyst at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, previously told Business Insider that rather than a first- or second-strike weapon, he sees Russia's new torpedo as a "third-strike vengeance weapon" designed to shatter NATO.

While a nuclear exchange between the US and Russia would cause incredible death and destruction, and plunge much of the world into the dark ages, a stealthy submarine designed to launch six "doomsday" devices would be the most deadly weapon in human history and pose a direct threat to life on earth.

The inclusion of a mini-sub, which experts speculate could destroy vital undersea cables and is operated by a shadowy branch of Russia's military, suggests another clandestine purpose for this weapon.