

# Interaction

ISSUE-4

VOLUME-15

MC-1326

Rs.150/-

NOVEMBER 2021

171

ABC CERTIFIED



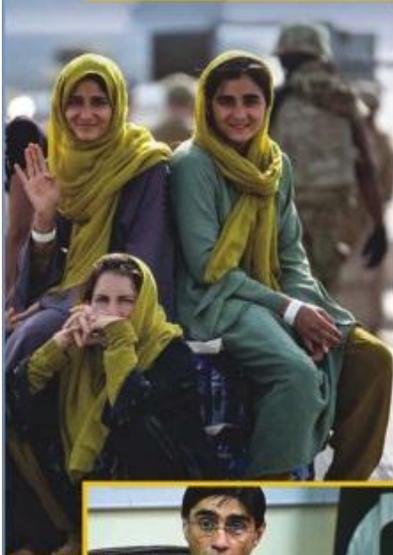
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**China conducted two hypersonic weapons tests this summer**



**The whirl of terrorism and RSS's agenda based politics**



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Printed by :  
Nusrat Mirza

Form Ibn-e-Hasan Printing Press,  
Hockey Club of Pakistan. & Published from  
78/C, 1<sup>st</sup> Commercial Street  
Phase-II, DHA Karachi.

**One Copy Rs. 150/-**  
**One Year Rs. 1700/-**

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## EDITORIAL

### **Humanitarian Crisis - World should help Afghanistan**

**By Mirza Kashif Baig**

Afghanistan has remained a battleground for over two decades thanks to America and its allies. The western world has committed countless human rights violations in Afghanistan and has left the country in a deplorable state. It won't be wrong to state that Afghanistan is a victim of the worst form of terrorism witnessed in the 21st century, because in this case, the terrorists weren't non-state actors or a militia but instead this role was perfected by the western powers. America and its allies have proven to be the worst kinds of terrorists to have existed in the 21st century. The victory of the Afghan Taliban against western terrorism is glorious in every aspect as represents the victory of the righteous against evil and it serves as a ray of hope for everyone that despite the military strength and technological superiority of America and its allies, they are not invincible.

Zalmay Khalilzad has well accepted the defeat of USA by saying that America was losing the war so USA negotiated. Bearing this in view, Afghanistan should take this moment and demand compensation for the damage caused and other global and regional powers should provide their support to Afghanistan in this matter. In a recent meeting in Moscow on October 20, 2021 ten regional powers namely, Russia, China, Pakistan, India, Iran, and formerly Soviet Central Asian states Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan joined the Taliban in calling for the UN to convene such a conference as soon as possible to help rebuild the country. This demand is the need of the hour as Afghanistan is in severe crisis.

According to a report published by UNCHR, 14 million people in Afghanistan are facing acute food insecurity and an estimated 3.2 million children under the age of five are expected to suffer from acute malnutrition by the end of the year. Risks are there that at least 1 million of these children may be dying due to severe acute malnutrition without immediate treatment. According to the World Food Program (WFP), one-third of Afghanistan's population of 38 million is facing food insecurity, including two million children who are already malnourished. Their survey suggests that 95% of households are unable to consume enough food. Adults are forced to buy less and skip meals enabling their children to eat more.

As food insecurity grips the nation, UNICEF and partners are striving hard to arrange life-saving assistance to families caught in the deepening crisis. In July alone, the number of internally displaced people (IDPs) in Afghanistan nearly doubled as compared to the previous month as 206,967 more people were displaced, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The number of displaced people is now more than 570,000. Around 80% of them are women and children. In addition to this, the law and order situation in Afghanistan is deteriorating evident from the recent surge in terrorist attacks being conducted by the US & UK-backed DAESH. 46 killed & 140+ wounded in Kunduz mosque on Friday 8th October, 2021. 62 killed & 70+ winded in Shiite mosque in Afghanistan's Kandahar. Further Russian President has rightly said that Freedom and democracy cannot but be linked with the culture and traditions of a certain people. The United States intruded into Afghanistan in defiance of the traditions, culture and history of the Afghan people.

The result was tragic," It was because US ignored Afghanistan's history and culture. It seems America, the UK, and other western allies have forsaken all values and have openly shown their true face of terrorism. Their thirst for blood is still not satisfied and they are using all means available to them to further worsen the situation in Afghanistan. This includes not just the use of DAESH but has also taken measures like freezing of \$10 billion of the country's central bank assets and the stoppage of flow of aid to Afghanistan. Measures need to be taken to stop America and its allies and pressurize them to compensate Afghanistan.

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## **SUMMARIZED NEWS & ARTICLES**

### **Father of Pakistan's nuclear programme' Abdul Qadeer Khan dies**

(10 Oct, 2021) Pakistani atomic scientist died after being transferred to the hospital with lung problems. Abdul Qadeer Khan, revered as the father of Pakistan's nuclear programme, has died at 85.

Dr. Qadeer did a science degree at Karachi University in 1960, then went on to study metallurgical engineering in Berlin before completing advanced studies in the Netherlands and Belgium.

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After learning of India's nuclear test in 1974, he had joined the nation's clandestine efforts to develop nuclear power. He had founded the Khan Research Laboratories in 1976 and was its chief scientist and director for many years, according to Radio Pakistan.

Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan became a national hero overnight, not only in Pakistan but in the Islamic world as well, when in May 1998 Pakistan gave a befitting response to India by conducting its nuclear tests.

Following the tests, Pakistan became the sole nuclear power in the Muslim world and the seventh country to possess nuclear weapons. Pakistan's nuclear weapons have kept Indian aggression in check.

Nuclear scientist Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan given state funeral, laid to rest in Islamabad

He was given a state funeral at Faisal Mosque before being laid to rest at the H-8 graveyard - Islamabad.

He was awarded the Nishan-i-Imtiaz for his services to the country. (SOURCE: AL JAZEERA AND NEWS AGENCIES)

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### **PM sets precedent in DG ISI appointment**

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan on Tuesday 26 October 2021, finally notified the appointment of Corps Commander Karachi Lt Gen Nadeem Ahmed Anjum as the new director general of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), bringing an end to not just the uncertainty surrounding the sensitive matter but also the apparent civil-military deadlock.

It was for the first time that a premier had interviewed potential candidates sent to him by the ministry of defence before the appointment of the new ISI chief.

Since 2000, it was only in 2012 when the announcement of the new DG ISI came from the PM's office and even that too was a terse statement making no mention of either interviews or consultations with the army chief.

On all other occasions, the announcement of the new spymaster was made by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR).

In fact, the last two appointments during the current government also came from the military's media wing.

However, this time the prime minister objected to the past practice and insisted that he would make the final call triggering an unprecedented standoff between the civil and military leadership, which previously claimed to be on the same page.

A notification issued by the PM's Office on Tuesday read: "The Prime Minister has seen and approved the appointment of Lt Gen Nadeem Ahmed Anjum, HI (M) as Director General Inter-Services Intelligence, with effect from November 20, 2021."

The notification added that the incumbent spymaster, Lt Gen Faiz Hameed "shall continue to hold charge as the Director General Inter-Services Intelligence till November 19, 2021". (Source: Express Tribune)

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### **Pakistan no longer 'up for sale': NSA**

(APP) October 14, 2021

ISLAMABAD: National Security Adviser (NSA) Dr Moeed Yusuf has said that Prime Minister Imran Khan has set a new paradigm whereby the country will no longer be 'up for sale', rather, it would orient its policies around safeguarding and standing up for its interests.

"Pakistan is going to stand for what its interests are, not emotively but very pragmatically," he said in an interview with journalist Dr Moeed Pirzada, for Global Space Village.

"This has invited much criticism, with many deeming it a mistake, but it is true Pakistan no longer will host bases," he said, with regard to not allowing the airbases to any other country in future.

Dr Yusuf said for the past 20 years, there was an unwinnable war that "some wanted Pakistan to win for them, which was simply an unrealistic goal".

He mentioned that in the past, decisions had been taken without the public on board, which ultimately "backfired".

"This is a paradigm that this prime minister has set with every country and not just the United States," he said, adding that "If there is a condition which Pakistan does not feel to be in its interest, we will not go for it". APP

**Regional powers back aid for Afghanistan as Russia hosts Taliban**

Afghanistan's new Taliban rulers won backing from 10 regional powers at talks in Moscow for the idea of a United Nations donor conference to help the country stave off economic collapse and a humanitarian catastrophe.

On Wed. 20th October, 2021) Russia, China, Pakistan, India, Iran and formerly Soviet Central Asian states Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan joined the Taliban in calling for the UN to convene such a conference as soon as possible to help rebuild the country.

They said it should take place "with the understanding, of course, that the main burden ... should be borne by the forces whose military contingents have been present in this country over the past 20 years".

That was a pointed reference to the United States and its allies, who invaded Afghanistan after the September 11, 2001 attacks and whose abrupt withdrawal paved the way for the Taliban to seize back control of the country in August. Washington chose not to attend the talks, citing technical reasons, but has said it may join future rounds. Russia has led the calls for international aid, conscious that any spillover of conflict from Afghanistan could threaten regional stability. The Taliban's resurgence has stirred international fears of a return to their hardline rule in the 1990s, when they hosted Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda movement and carried out egregious human rights violations, including public stonings and the marginalisation of women at work and in schools.

Since returning to power, the Taliban have said they have moved as quickly as possible on opening up their government and guaranteeing rights to women, and that they do not represent a threat to any other country.

"Afghanistan will never allow its soil to be used as a base for anyone to threaten the security of another country," Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi said.

Abdul Salam Hanafi, the deputy prime minister who led the delegation, said: "Isolating Afghanistan is in no one's interests."

He said the meeting was "very important for the stability of the entire region".

While governments around the world, including Russia, have declined to give official recognition to the Taliban government, the communique recognised the "new reality" of their ascent to power.

No recognition 'for now'

The talks come after Moscow said that Russia, China and Pakistan are willing to provide aid to Afghanistan, which is now facing a looming humanitarian and economic crisis (SOURCE: NEWS AGENCIES)

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**Assailants kill several people in Bangladesh's Rohingya camp ARSA blamed for killing and chaos**

(23-10-2021) The security has been tightened in Cox's Bazar to protect the refugee camp from further violence.

Armed assailants targetted an Islamic seminary in a Rohingya refugee camp in Bangladesh, killing seven people and injuring 20 others.

The attackers went berserk, shooting haphazardly at refugees and stabbing many of them in knife attacks at the Balukhali refugee complex in Cox's Bazar, according to the Bangladeshi police.

This is yet another brutal attack marked in a Rohingya camp after the recent killing of Rohingya leader, Mohibullah. Bangladesh's Home Ministry said had beefed up the security at Rohingya refugee camps after Mohibullah's assassination.

An on-duty official from the Armed Police Battalion, who declined to give his name because he is not authorised to speak to the media, confirmed the number of deaths and the use of firearms during the attack but did not explain the reasons.

However, Reuters quoted its sources in the camp saying unidentified men attacked an Islamic seminary at Block H-52 of Camp No 18 before daybreak. Local law enforcers have so far arrested a man on suspicion of involvement in the attack.

Md Hasanuzzaman, Cox's Bazar district police chief, described the incident as an "armed clash" and said the police has already begun operations to detain the perpetrators.

"Situation at the refugee camps is under control now," the police official said, adding that the death toll might rise.

ARSA blamed for killing and chaos

Some groups in Cox's Bazar, which houses about 1.2 million Rohingya refugees who fled Myanmar's Rakhine state after a deadly military crackdown in August 2017, have been involved in shooting incidents in the past, which law enforcement officials blamed on "Rohingya robbers" or "smugglers."

Ansar Ali, a Rohingya community leader in the camps, alleged that the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) is to blame for the killings and chaos.

"ARSA men have been trying to control the refugee camps," he told Anadolu Agency, "and they often conduct secret killing operations if anyone tries to protest them."

Earlier, police arrested five suspected ARSA members for their alleged involvement in the murder of Mohibullah. Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said on Thursday that the government had held talks with all concerned parties and stakeholders to maintain law and order and overall security in Cox's Bazar and the Bhasan Char island, where 20,000 Rohingya have been relocated this year.(Source:AA)

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46 killed in suicide bombing at Kunduz mosque

(Fri. 8 Oct 2021) The state-run Bakhtar News Agency said at least 46 people were killed, while more than 140 were wounded inside the mosque in the Khan Abad area of Kunduz city.

Al Jazeera's Hashem Ahelbarra reporting from the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif said people in Kunduz have described "horrifying" scenes.

The Islamic State in Khorasan Province, ISKP (ISIS-K) claimed responsibility for the attack through its Telegram channels on Friday. In a statement released on Telegram, the group said an ISIS-K suicide bomber "detonated an explosive vest amid a crowd" of Shia worshippers who had gathered inside the mosque. Video footage showed bodies surrounded by debris inside the Gozar-e-Sayed Abad Mosque that is used by people from the minority Shia Muslim community.

"I assure our Shia brothers that the Taliban are prepared to ensure their safety," Obaida said, adding that an investigation was under way. (Source: Al Jazeera News Agency)

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### **62 killed in bomb blast at Shiite mosque in Afghanistan's Kandahar**

(Friday. 15 Oct. 2021) At least 62 people were killed and 70 others injured in a suicide bomb attack that hit a packed Shiite mosque in southern Afghanistan, according to Kabul-based news agency Bakhtar.

The Imam Barga mosque in Kandahar was full of worshippers attending weekly Friday prayers.

The attack comes a week after a bombing, claimed by a local Daesh affiliate, killed 46 people at a Shiite mosque in Kunduz.

Murtaza, an eyewitness who like many Afghans goes by one name, said four suicide bombers attacked the mosque. Two detonated their explosives at a security gate, allowing the other two to run inside and strike the congregation of worshippers.

Daesh has claimed a number of deadly bombings across the country since the Taliban seized power in August amid the withdrawal of U.S. forces. The group has also targeted Taliban fighters in smaller attacks. Taliban spokesman Bilal Karimi confirmed the explosion and said an investigation was underway, without providing further details.

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### **US Was Losing War So It Negotiated: Khalilzad**

Khalilzad said Afghan elites made terrible mistakes, misused elections, democracy and did not treat their security forces properly. The former US special representative for Afghanistan reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad said the US was losing the war to the Taliban so it chose peace negotiations as an alternative.

Talking to CBS News, Khalilzad said the US military tried many times to strengthen its position on the battleground, but it failed. "The negotiation was a result of--based on the judgment that we weren't winning the war and therefore time was not on our side and better to make a deal sooner than later."

Khalilzad blamed the then-president Ashraf Ghani for the disintegration of Afghanistan's security sector, saying his escape triggered the chaos in the Afghan capital. He said the Taliban was in discussions with him about forming a power-sharing government and including some officials of the Ghani administration in the next government. All these things did not happen because Ghani did not stay, he said.

Khalilzad said Ghani did not want to let go of power, and discredited Ghani's remarks about fleeing Kabul to avoid bloodshed, saying they were not true. "So, the question is, why did President Ghani do what he did? If he was willing to step aside for the sake of peace, imagine if he had offered that a year ago, six months ago -- that somebody that's mutually acceptable could have led the government. But he did not," he said.

According to Khalilzad, the US has largely succeeded in suppressing Al Qaeda- the reason it went to Afghanistan-- but has failed in building a democratic Afghanistan. He said the two decades of US involvement has transformed Afghanistan and now "the Taliban are going to have a hard time putting them back in the box the way they had put people in the 1990s."

Khalilzad said the US wanted a different outcome for the Afghan peace talks, preferably a power-sharing government with the Taliban instead of what happened on August 15.

Khalilzad said the Taliban has lived up to its promise of cutting ties with terrorist groups and not allowing Afghanistan to be used for staging attacks against the US and its allies. "They are not allowing plotting and planning operations by Al-Qaeda against the United States," he said.

According to Khalilzad, if the Islamic Emirate does not form an inclusive government and does not respect the rights of Afghans, the relationship between Afghanistan and the US will not become normal.

Khalilzad also warned of a possible civil war if the Afghan economy collapses. He said if the "Taliban don't move toward more inclusiveness, respecting the rights of the Afghan people, and then honoring their commitment to us on terrorism; there will be no move towards normalcy and there shouldn't be. There should be no release of funds. So their economy could collapse and in that collapse a new civil war could start."

Khalilzad said Afghanistan has many problems, and the US should help it come to an agreement on a formula that is acceptable by urban and rural Afghans, and by secular and religious Afghans, to end troubles in the country.

(Source: CBC News)

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### **US ignored Afghanistan's history and culture, which led to tragedy: 'Russian President'**

MOSCOW, October 13. /TASS/. The United States ignored the history and culture of the Afghan people, which entailed a tragic result, Russian President Vladimir Putin said at the plenary meeting of the Russian Energy Week forum on Wednesday.

"Freedom and democracy cannot but be linked with the culture and traditions of a certain people. The United States intruded into Afghanistan in defiance of the traditions, culture and history of the Afghan people. The result was tragic," he said.

Putin stressed that US interference in Afghanistan had brought about a colossal upsurge of terrorism in the region and around the world.

The Taliban movement (outlawed in Russia) launched a massive operation for establishing control of Afghanistan after the United States last spring declared the intention to pull out its troops. On August 15, President Ashraf Ghani stepped down and left the country, while the Taliban entered Kabul without encountering resistance. The Western countries by August 31 had completed the evacuation of their citizens and Afghans who had worked for them.

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### **Eight Orphan Children Found Dead From Starvation In Kabul**

October 24, 2021

An ethnic Hazara political leader and former member of Afghanistan's parliament says the bodies of eight orphan children who starved to death have been found on the west side of Kabul.

In a statement posted to Facebook on October 24, Mohammad Mohaqiq said the children died in a neighborhood in Kabul's 13th district about three weeks ago. He said they were buried by a local mullah and by residents of the neighborhood where they were found.

A local mullah named Mohammad Ali Bamiani provided details about the deaths of the children, saying the eldest was about eight years old and the youngest was an 18-month-old infant.

"They had no one," Bamiani said. "Their parents were both dead and they had no close relatives."

Bamiani said he went into the house where the bodies of the children had been discovered.

He said "they were so hungry that they couldn't even stretch their legs."

Afghanistan's Taliban-led government has not yet commented on the deaths.

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### **China conducted two hypersonic weapons tests this summer**

Nuclear-capable 'glide vehicle' raises US fears that Beijing is developing new generation of arms

The Chinese military conducted two hypersonic weapons tests over the summer, raising US concerns that Beijing is gaining ground in the race to develop a new generation of arms.

On July 27 the Chinese military launched a rocket that used a "fractional orbital bombardment" system to propel a nuclear-capable "hypersonic glide vehicle" around the earth for the first time, according to four people familiar with US intelligence assessments.

The Financial Times reported that the first test was in August, rather than at the end of July. China subsequently conducted a second hypersonic test on August 13, according to two people familiar with the matter.

Three people familiar with the first test in July said it stunned the Pentagon and US intelligence because China managed to demonstrate a brand new weapons capability, although they declined to elaborate on the details. One person said government scientists were struggling to understand the capability, which the US does not currently possess, adding that China's achievement appeared "to defy the laws of physics".

Space and missile experts have been debating the Chinese test since the FT revealed the event at the weekend. Jeffrey Lewis, a nuclear weapons expert at Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, said China appeared to have developed a new innovation, but stressed the need to maintain a degree of skepticism. "We should be open to the reality that China is also capable of technological innovation," he said.

"But I would be careful about exaggerated characterisations that may help excuse a mundane intelligence failure. If we say some innovation is impossible to imagine, then no one is really responsible for missing it." Global Insight Kathrin Hille

China's bellicose behavior is the driver of tensions in Asian waters

President Joe Biden expressed concern about hypersonic weapons. Asked as he departed Washington for Pennsylvania whether he was worried about the development of the high-speed maneuverable weapons, he responded, "yes".

The Chinese foreign ministry denied the FT story, saying it had only launched a space plane, but that test was conducted on July 16. The Chinese embassy in Washington declined to comment on October 20, 2021.

Speaking to the US military newspaper Stars and Stripes in Germany, Admiral Charles Richard, the head of Strategic Command who oversees US nuclear forces, said he was "not surprised" by the FT report. He added he also would not be surprised if more reports emerge next month.

Ned Price, state department spokesperson, this week said the Biden administration was very concerned about the rapid expansion of China's nuclear forces, including its development of "novel delivery systems".

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### **First joint naval patrol by China, Russia in West Pacific**

(By GT staff reporters)

Chinese and Russian naval forces have carried out their first joint sea patrol in waters in the West Pacific between October 17 to 23, Chinese Ministry of Defense said, which experts said is of vital significance in sending a clear signal and practicing real world drills.

A China-Russia joint naval ships formation which included a total of 10 warships and six carrier-based helicopters carried out the joint maritime patrol in the Sea of Japan, the West Pacific and the East China Sea, during which they organized exercises over joint sailing and joint maneuver. The joint maritime patrol is aimed at further developing the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for the new era, elevating the joint action capabilities of both nations and jointly maintaining international and regional strategic stability. It's a part of the annual cooperation plan between the two nations and is not targeted at any third parties, the Chinese Ministry of Defense stated.

The patrol was held right after China and Russia wrapped up a joint naval exercise in the Sea of Japan from October 14 to 17.

Immediate exercises including crossing, joint mobility and live fire after the joint naval drill is closer to the situation of actual combat and able to test and improve the forces' capacity of continuous operation and capacity to remain combat ready in open seas. It could also improve Chinese and Russian navies' capacity to deal with maritime security threats, Zhang Junshe, a senior research fellow at the Naval Research Academy of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), told the Global Times on Saturday.

He noted that the first China-Russia joint sea patrol in waters in the West Pacific is of vital significance in sending a clear signal and practicing real world drills.

Military expert Song Zhongping told the Global Times that the latest joint sea patrol showed high degree of actual combat. Immediately transformation from drill to patrol is a mechanism transforming from peacetime to wartime status. "The formation of such mechanism indicates that the capacity of China and Russia to make quick reaction in military cooperation is improving fast," Song noted.

In the future, joint air patrol and joint naval patrol between China and Russia will become increasingly common, Song said. Air-sea joint patrol would also follow, which demonstrate deeper China-Russia friendship and improved China-Russia joint operation capacity, as well as stronger actual combat capacity.

"The formation of China-Russia joint combat capacity would bring about attacking measures at multiple layers and improve the forces' abilities to perform military tasks. It will provide more options to deal with regional conflicts such as terrorist attacks," Song said. The joint maritime patrol is aimed at further developing the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for the new era, elevating the joint action capabilities of both nations and jointly maintaining international and regional strategic stability. It's a part of the annual cooperation plan between the two nations and is not targeted at any third parties, the Chinese Ministry of Defense stated. (Courtesy : Global Times)

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### **Chinese, Russian warships circle around Japan; base of US provocations within reach**

By Liu Xuanzun | Oct 22, 2021

The Chinese-Russian joint naval flotilla that transited the Tsugaru Strait days ago has since sailed along the east side of Japan's main island to its south, almost making a circle around the island country, in a move Chinese experts said on Friday can bring balance to regional stability at a time when the US, Japan and other Western forces have been colluding to destabilize the Asia-Pacific region.

From the east of Japan, China and Russia could reach the US Navy base in Yokosuka, headquarters of the US Seventh Fleet, from which the US and its allies have been making many provocative moves in places like the Taiwan Straits and the South China Sea, observers said.

After the joint flotilla consisting of 10 warships from China and Russia transited the Tsugaru Strait on Monday, the vessels turned southeast, and were then seen heading south along the east of Japan on Wednesday and sailing to the west through islands to the south of Japan's main island on Thursday, Japan's Ministry of Defense Joint Staff said in a press release on Friday.

The warships involved included the Type 055 guided missile destroyer Nanchang, the Type 052D guided missile destroyer Kunming, the Type 054A guided missile frigates Binzhou and Liuzhou and the Type 903A comprehensive supply ship Dongpinghu from China, and the large anti-submarine ships Admiral Panteleev and Admiral Tributs, the instrumentation ship Marshal Krylov, and the corvettes of the project 20380 Hero of the Russian Federation Aldar Tsydenzhapov and Gromkiy from Russia.

Ka-28 and Ka-27 vessel-based anti-submarine warfare helicopters from Chinese and Russian warships conducted operations in the process, according to the press release.

If the vessels enter the East China Sea through the Miyako Strait or Osumi Strait, it would mean that they have encircled Japan, observers said. (Source: Global Times)

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### **China Says its AI-Controlled Hypersonic Missiles Can Hit Targets With 10 Times More Accuracy China military researchers pinpoint AI for hypersonic weapons accuracy**

Stephen Chen in Beijing - (14 Oct, 2021)

Their paper, published last week in the peer-reviewed journal Systems Engineering and Electronics, proposes using artificial intelligence to write the weapon's software "on the fly" through a unique flight control algorithm as it travels at hypervelocity.

Professor Xian Yong and Li Bangjie, from Rocket Force Engineering University's college of war support, said more decision-making power would be handed to the smart weapon giving its human controllers no idea how it would behave after the launch button was pressed but overall positioning accuracy "would increase by one to two orders of magnitude".

Conventional missiles are equipped with positioning software which is installed and fine-tuned on the factory floor. But if the software was written by AI, with a different algorithm for each weapon, the researchers found they could address the challenges of controlling flight at five times the speed of sound or beyond.

Whether a hypersonic weapon can hit its target after travelling hundreds or thousands of kilometres depends heavily on how precisely it can determine its own position while making complex manoeuvres during flight.

At hypervelocity, parts of an aircraft can get hotter than the sun's surface, breaking air molecules into electrically charged ions which form a plasma coating. This reduces the craft's radar signature but can also make it blind and deaf unable to pick up GPS signals or use other references, such as the Earth's magnetic field, for guidance.

These extreme conditions over long distances have forced a reliance on built-in inertial sensors such as quartz accelerometers and laser gyroscopes which can only estimate a hypersonic weapon's location. This is despite sophisticated control software and painstaking on-the-ground testing.

The researchers said physical disturbances to the sensors were inevitable during their assembly, transport and routine maintenance. And each time the weapon is powered up, it affects the hardware, causing further deviations from the factory settings.

Xian and Li's team believe factory settings could eventually be scrapped for good with the application of AI. It would require considerable computing power but was feasible with current technology, the researchers said.

Their study showed an AI-based system could keep a hypersonic weapon on course with an accuracy of about 10 metres (32 feet).

Using their method, the AI would start work immediately after launch, before the weapon reached hypervelocity, to calculate its position using the signal from the GPS or BeiDou China's navigational positioning system and compare it with the results generated by the on-board sensors to evaluate the actual condition of the hardware.

Based on this fresh information, the AI would create a unique positioning algorithm for the weapon's flight control programme before it entered the cruising stage of hypersonic flight.

In one simulated flight, the AI-generated algorithm underwent thousands of rounds of evolution during the initial stage of flight on a 10-year-old Intel Xeon CPU. The final version was obtained in about 20 seconds.

The speed of processors used in China's hypersonic weapons programme remains classified, but their performance has been increasing steadily, according to the researchers.

Chinese scientists have used artificial intelligence to address other aspects of hypersonic flight, including engine control and communication. While China has fielded various types of hypersonic weapons, civilian applications of the technology remain challenging.

In May, Chinese space authorities announced plans to build a small passenger plane, capable of reaching anywhere on Earth in an hour, by 2035. This would require it to reach a speed of Mach 15. (South China Morning Post)

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### **President Xi calls for new progress in military equipment, weapons**

October 26, 2021 | Reuters

BEIJING: China's President Xi Jinping called for efforts to "break new ground" in military equipment and weapons development for the People's Liberation Army, China's armed forces, according to a report from the official Xinhua media.

Xi, who is also chair of China's Central Military Commission (CMC), made the comments at a conference in Beijing, according to the report.

China's strategic capabilities had been enhanced by "leapfrog development" in military equipment and weapons, said Xi.

Zhang Youxia, vice chairman of the CMC, also said that China should pursue self-reliance in technology and make an "all-out" push to accelerate modernisation and build a "world-class" army, according to the report.

Earlier this month, the Financial Times citing unnamed sources reported that China tested a nuclear-capable hypersonic missile in August, showing a capability that caught US intelligence by surprise. The report said the Chinese military launched a rocket carrying a hypersonic glide vehicle that flew through low-orbit space, circling the globe before cruising towards its target, which it missed by about two dozen miles.

"The test showed that China had made astounding progress on hypersonic weapons and was far more advanced than US officials realised," the report said, citing people briefed on the intelligence.

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### **U.S. and Israel to form team to solve consulate dispute (Barak Ravid, author of from Tel Aviv)**

The U.S. and Israel are planning to form a joint team to hold discreet negotiations on the reopening of the U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem, Israeli officials say.

Why it matters: The consulate handled relations with the Palestinians for 25 years before being shut down by then President Donald Trump in 2019. Senior officials in Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's government see the consulate issue as a political hot potato that could destabilize their unwieldy coalition.

Biden told Bennett during their White House meeting in August that he will not abandon his plan to reopen the consulate in Jerusalem, setting up a major point of contention between the administrations.

Driving the news: Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid discussed the consulate issue during their meeting in Washington last Wednesday.

Lapid pushed back on the U.S. position, saying, "I don't know how to hold this coalition together if you reopen the consulate," according to Israeli officials.

Blinken said he understood the sensitive political situation and wants to start a dialogue to work toward a solution, the officials say.

What's next: Blinken proposed the formation of a small team including Lapid and himself along with one or two aides from each side to discuss the issue with maximum discretion. Lapid agreed but said he wants to hold off on such a dialogue until after the Israeli government passes a budget in the first week of November.

Between the lines: The issue is so politically charged because the U.S. would once again have separate missions for the Israelis and the Palestinians in Jerusalem. The Israelis believe that would infringe on their sovereignty in the city. For the Palestinians, it could strengthen their claim to part of Jerusalem.

Asked after Lapid's visit about the possibility of the U.S. instead opening a consulate in the West Bank, a senior Israeli official responded favorably but said he couldn't say whether that was under consideration.

What they're saying: A spokesperson for Lapid said no team was formed yet, and he reiterated that Lapid had made his opposition to the reopening of the consulate clear in all of his meetings in Washington.

A State Department spokesperson said, "We have nothing new for you on this issue at this time."

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### **Outcry as Israel labels Palestinian rights groups 'terrorists'**

(22 Oct 2021) Israel has issued a military order designating six prominent Palestinian human rights groups as "terrorist organisations", in a move swiftly condemned by the Palestinian Authority and rights groups. The Israeli Ministry of Defence claimed that the groups were linked to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a left-wing movement with a political party as well as an armed wing that has carried out deadly attacks against Israelis.

The ministry said the humanitarian groups "constitute a network of organisations active undercover on the international front on behalf of the Popular Front." They are "controlled by senior leaders" of the PFLP and employ its members, including some who had "participated in terror activity", it said.

It also accused the groups of serving as a "central source" of financing for the PFLP and of having received "large sums of money from European countries and international organisations," without elaborating. The designated groups include Al-Haq, a human rights group founded in 1979, the Addameer rights group, Defence for Children International-Palestine, the Bisan Center for Research and Development, the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees and the Union of Agricultural Work Committees.

The PA condemned what it said was an "unhinged assault" on Palestinian civil society.

"This fallacious and libellous slander is a strategic assault on Palestinian civil society and the Palestinian people's fundamental right to oppose Israel's illegal occupation and expose its continuing crimes," it said.

In a joint statement, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch noted that the military order "effectively outlaws" the activities of the six groups.

As a consequence, Israeli security forces are authorised to close the groups' offices, seize their assets and arrest and jail their staff members. Funding or even publicly expressing support for their activities is also prohibited.

"This appalling and unjust decision is an attack by the Israeli government on the international human rights movement," Amnesty and HRW said. (SOURCE: ALJAZEERA AND NEWS AGENCIES)

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### **'No change' in US policy on Taiwan, White House says after Biden vows to defend it against China**

(22 Oct, 2021) The White House has toned down its rhetoric on Taiwan a day after US President Joe Biden vowed to militarily support the island nation against Beijing, angering China.

"The president was not announcing any change in our policy and there is no change in our policy," a White House spokesman told journalists on Friday, commenting on Biden's earlier statements. The US president raised eyebrows on Thursday when he said Washington would support Taiwan if China attacked it.

Speaking at a CNN forum, Biden claimed Washington had a "commitment" to defend Taipei under the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), which governs relations between the two. The document, however, does not contain any actual mutual defense treaty.

This fact apparently did not stop the US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin from doubling down on Biden's statement after a NATO defense ministers' meeting in Brussels. Austin said the US would continue to help the island nation with "resources and capabilities."

He added, however, that he would not "engage in any hypotheticals," concerning exactly how the US would respond if China attacked the island nation which Beijing regards as an inalienable part of its territory.

The defense secretary also reiterated Washington's commitment to the 'One China' policy at the same time. Under this policy, the US recognizes the People's Republic of China as the legal government of China, while also maintaining unofficial diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

Biden's statement sparked an angry reaction from China. The Chinese Foreign Ministry called the Taiwan issue a purely "internal affair" for Beijing, adding that no external interference is permitted and saying it would not compromise on its "core" interests.

Austin, meanwhile, also vowed to "collectively work" with European partners to ensure that the Indo-Pacific region remains "free and open." Europe's increased engagement in the area also drew criticism from China as Beijing condemned a EU Parliament decision, in which the MEPs overwhelmingly supported increasing ties with Taiwan. (Source : 'RT' Russian News)

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### **Rocket failure mars U.S. hypersonic weapon test as others succeed**

By Mike Stone and Idrees Ali

WASHINGTON, Oct 20 (Reuters) - The Pentagon's hypersonic weapon programs suffered a setback on Thursday when a booster rocket carrying a hypersonic weapon failed, people briefed on the test result said. The test was intended to validate aspects of one of the Pentagon's hypersonic glide vehicles in development, two of the people said.

Hypersonic glide vehicles are launched from a rocket in the upper atmosphere before gliding to a target at speeds of more than five times the speed of sound, or about 3,853 miles (6,200 kilometers) per hour. In a separate series of tests conducted on Wednesday 20th October, the U.S. Navy and Army tested hypersonic weapon component prototypes. That test successfully "demonstrated advanced hypersonic technologies, capabilities, and prototype systems in a realistic operating environment," the Pentagon said in a statement.

The United States and its global rivals have quickened their pace to build hypersonic weapons - the next generation of arms that rob adversaries of reaction time and traditional defeat mechanisms.

U.S. President Joe Biden expressed concern about Chinese hypersonic missiles, days after a media report that Beijing had tested a nuclear-capable hypersonic glide weapon.

Glide bodies are different from their air-breathing hypersonic weapon cousins which use scramjet engine technology and the vehicle's high speed to forcibly compress incoming air before combustion to enable sustained flight at hypersonic speeds. An air-breathing hypersonic weapon was successfully tested in September.

Companies such as Lockheed Martin (LMT.N) and Raytheon Technologies (RTX.N) are working to develop the hypersonic weapon capability for the United States.

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### **U.S. expels 55 Russian diplomats**

Saturday, October 30, 2021 | The United States is expelling 55 Russian diplomats, said Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova.

According to her, Washington continues to insist on bringing to parity the number of diplomats in the two countries, including the Russians working in the UN permanent mission in New York in the total count.

"If we compare embassies and consular offices, the picture is completely different. The Americans now have about 130 people working in Russia, while in our mission in Washington and two consulates general in New York and Houston there are less than 200," Zakharova said.

"Given Washington's demands that 55 more of our diplomats and administrative and technical staff must leave the U.S. in the coming months, the situation on the diplomatic 'front' will only get worse," she warned.

According to Zakharova, every hostile action of the United States will be followed by a "prompt and proportionate, but not necessarily symmetrical" response.

Russian Permanent Representative to the UN Vasily Nebenzia told RIA Novosti that dozens of Russian diplomats did not have their visas extended. As a result, they cannot leave the United States because they will not be allowed back.

The mother of one of the diplomats died and he was unable to attend the funeral "because if he had left, he would not have received the visa to come back," Nebenzia lamented.

In April, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree to create a list of "unfriendly countries", which would have a limited ability to hire Russian citizens to work in their embassies. The U.S. was included in the list. Because of this Washington was forced to reduce the number of embassy staff fourfold and stopped issuing non-immigrant visas to Russians.

In October, the U.S. Department of State put Russians applying for American visas in "homeless nationalities" category along with Venezuela, Yemen, Iran, Cuba, Libya, Syria, Somalia, South Sudan and Eritrea. Russia has about 400 diplomats in the United States, but most of them are employees of the UN mission. In September, a group of American senators called on Joe Biden administration to expel 300 Russians to eliminate diplomatic disparity. The Russian Foreign Ministry threatened Washington with retaliatory measures up to the complete closure of American foreign missions in Russia.

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### **The US Navy has figured out what a nuclear-powered attack submarine ran into in the South China Sea: Report**

By : Ryan Pickrell

The Seawolf-class attack submarine USS Connecticut

The Seawolf-class attack submarine USS Connecticut has been battling bedbugs.

US Navy

The US Navy has completed its investigation into a submarine incident in the South China Sea.

The USS Connecticut ran aground on an uncharted seamount, USNI News first reported.

The investigation has been sent to the fleet commander, who will consider accountability actions.

US Navy investigators have determined what a nuclear-powered attack submarine hit in the South China Sea last month, USNI News reported, citing defense officials familiar with the investigation and a legislative official.

The Seawolf-class nuclear-powered attack submarine USS Connecticut collided with an unidentified object on October 2, the Navy said five days after the incident. Investigators have determined the submarine ran aground on an undersea mountain, the location of which was previously unknown, USNI News said.

The 7th Fleet confirmed the USNI News report to Insider, with its spokesperson Cdr. Haley Sims saying: "The investigation determined USS Connecticut grounded on an uncharted seamount while operating in international waters in the Indo-Pacific region."

The earlier Navy statement on the incident left a lot to the imagination. It said the submarine struck something while operating in international waters, there were no life-threatening injuries, the submarine was in stable condition, and the nuclear-propulsion systems were not damaged. The sea service did not say where the incident occurred, though Navy officials speaking on the condition of anonymity told some reporters it happened in the South China Sea after the release of the statement.

As of, the US Navy was not quite sure what the submarine hit, though defense officials told USNI News that early indications suggested that the Connecticut crashed into a seamount, an undersea mountain that rises from the ocean's depth. Those can also pose a risk to ships on the surface, depending on how close its summit is to the surface.

China, often at odds with the US in the South China Sea, has capitalized on the limited information provided by the Navy about the incident, with Chinese officials accusing the US of a cover-up and calling it "cagey" and "irresponsible."

The US military denied it was trying to cover up the incident. After a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson first made the allegations, Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said, "It's an odd way of covering something up when you put a press release out about it."

But Beijing, both the foreign ministry and the defense ministry, has continued to criticize the US for a "lack of transparency," while repeatedly calling the US "the biggest force for militarization of the South China Sea," an accusation typically directed at China.

The conclusion of the command investigation into the Connecticut incident takes some of the mystery out of things. The investigation has been passed up to the 7th Fleet commander, who will make decisions about accountability actions, a fleet spokesperson said.

As the investigation into the incident has not yet been publicly released, information is still limited on how the submarine ran into a seamount and to what degree members of the crew and command were responsible.

The submarine, one of only three in the powerful Seawolf class, is in Guam, where it is undergoing repairs, likely initial work before more extensive repairs can be completed elsewhere.

There are concerns that if the Connecticut had to be taken back to a public shipyard for additional repairs, it could throw a wrench into a submarine-maintenance backlog that has long been problematic.

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### **Turkey's Erdogan orders expulsion of 10 Western ambassadors**

Envoys of the US, Germany, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden called for release of businessman and philanthropist Osman Kavala.

(23 Oct 2021) Seven of the ambassadors represent Turkey's NATO allies and the expulsions, if carried out, would open the deepest rift with the West in Erdogan's 19 years in power.

"I have ordered our foreign minister to declare these 10 ambassadors as persona non grata as soon as possible," Erdogan said on Saturday, referring to a term used in diplomacy that signifies the first step before expulsion. He did not set a firm date.

Philanthropist Osman Kavala has been in prison since late 2017, charged with financing nationwide protests in 2013 and with involvement in a 2016 failed coup. He denies the charges.

"They must know and understand Turkey," Erdogan added, accusing the envoys of "indecentry".

"They must leave here the day they no longer know Turkey," Erdogan said.

The envoys had issued a highly unusual joint statement on Monday saying the continued detention of Parisian-born activist Osman Kavala "cast a shadow" over Turkey.

The US, Germany, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden called for a "just and speedy resolution to [Kavala's] case".

Jailed since 2017

Kavala has become a symbol of the sweeping crackdown Erdogan unleashed after surviving the coup attempt.

Speaking to the AFP news agency from his jail cell last week, Kavala said he felt like a tool in Erdogan's attempts to blame a foreign plot for domestic opposition to his nearly two-decade rule. (Source: Al Jazeera News Agency)

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#### **44 Indian soldier killed in occupied Kashmir in October**

October turned out to be the deadliest month for Jammu and Kashmir this year with 44 killings, which included 19 militants, 13 civilians and 12 armed forces personnel.

The violence increased on multiple fronts despite the reiteration of ceasefire along the Line of Control since February and reports of only two successful infiltrations. At least six grenade attacks, recovery of four IEDs, hurling of two petrol bombs and a string of targeted attacks against 11 civilians including five non-local labourers and three members of the minority communities added to the 'deteriorating situation'.

One civilian was killed for allegedly jumping a CRPF security check post and another was killed near a CRPF camp after he was allegedly caught in the crossfire. Two more non-local labourers were found dead in mysterious circumstances this month.

The killings triggered migration of non-locals from the Valley, with around 10,000 of them leaving within the first two weeks of killings. Over 350 migrant families left Kashmir urgently in the same period.

In the wake of civilian killings, armed forces launched a massive crackdown across the Valley, killing 19 militants in 14 encounters. They also launched a massive crackdown against the alleged sympathisers of militants, summoning, arresting and detaining hundreds of youths.

"Attacks by militants have increased in October and there have been at least 10 incidents of violence initiated by militants in Srinagar. There has been a sudden paradigm shift on the ground situation," a senior official told ET.

"This has been the most violent month after August 5, 2019, considering the numbers, impact and expanse of the incidents," another official said.

The National Investigation Agency also pitched in to control the deteriorating situation in Kashmir and registered a case on October 10 against those involved in conspiracies. They raided over 40 locations across J&K in October and formally arrested 25 persons in the militant-conspiracy cases. The J&K Police also arrested several youngsters for their alleged involvement in the cases. The administration shifted at least 48 prisoners slapped with the Public Safety Act to high security prison in Agra last month.

In the last week of October, the police also registered two cases against students of two medical colleges in Srinagar for allegedly celebrating Pakistan cricket team's win over the Indian team in the ongoing T20 world cup.

Meanwhile, the operation in the forests of the Rajouri-Poonch range of Jammu entered the 20th day. Till now, nine army men including two junior commissioned officers have been killed in the operation. Two armed forces personnel were killed on Saturday in Rajouri near LOC due to a landmine blast while they were on patrol.

J&K Police chief Dilbag Singh on Sunday said the situation is returning to normalcy after a spike in the last few weeks. "People want to move towards peace and development and they are against violence. There were a few violent incidents. Now, the situation is better," Singh said. (Source: The Economic Times, India)

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## **India successfully test-fires N-capable Agni-V Ballistic Missile with 5,000 km range**

By: SNEHESH ALEX PHILIP | 27 October, 2021

New Delhi: India Wednesday successfully test-fired the recently inducted Agni-V, the nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), amid rising tensions with China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

The successful launch of the surface-to-surface ballistic missile, which has a range of over 5,000 km, was done at approximately 7:50 pm from the APJ Abdul Kalam Island in Odisha.

This is the first user launch of the missile, which was last tested in 2018, before it got inducted into the Strategic Forces Command that looks after India's nuclear arsenal.

In a statement, the Defence Ministry said the successful test of Agni-V "is in line with India's stated policy to have credible minimum deterrence that underpins the commitment to 'No First Use'".

The missile, which uses a three-stage solid-fuelled engine, is capable of striking targets at ranges up to 5,000 kilometres with a very high degree of accuracy, the ministry said.

However, defence sources said the range is much more than the officially stated figure of 5,000 km.

India joins club of countries with ICBMs

Agni-V has the capability to reach almost every part of China, sources had said in 2018, when the missile was tested last by its developer, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

Interestingly, the DRDO is also working on a longer-range version of the Agni series of missiles.

The launch Wednesday comes just months after India also test-fired the Agni Prime, the next generation nuclear-capable ballistic missile in the nuclear arsenal.

While the Agni Prime and the rest of the Agni series is focussed primarily on Pakistan, the Agni-V is a much larger strategic weapon, capable of striking at much longer ranges.

With Agni-V, India has joined an exclusive club of countries, with the others being China, US, Russia, Britain and France, to have ICBMs.

A DRDO official had in 2018 said that Agni-V is programmed in a way that after reaching the peak of its trajectory, it will turn towards Earth to continue its journey towards the intended target with increased speed due to the attraction of the Earth's gravitational pull. (Edited by Poulomi Banerjee)

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## **Middle Eastern countries boycott Indian products**

'India kills Muslims' has been trending in Arab countries after videos of brutality against Indian Muslims went viral APP | October 14, 2021

People across countries in the Middle East have started a social media campaign to boycott Indian products to protest the Assam police's brutality against Muslims during an eviction drive earlier in September.

The incident drew wide condemnation after a video of Indian police shooting a Muslim man went viral.

The widely circulated video also showed an Assam government photographer repeatedly stomping on a body during the eviction drive. The horrific video has triggered a backlash in the Gulf countries.

Boycott of Indian products on social media in the Arab world is currently underway.

The hashtag 'India kills Muslims' has been trending in Arab countries and India is being accused of genocide. Under the hashtag, many people expressed their support for displaced families and condemned the treatment meted out to them by Indian authorities.

On September 30, The Middle East Monitor, a publication focused on reporting from the region, revealed that members of Kuwait's National Assembly had condemned "the atrocities committed by the Indian authorities and Hindu extremist groups against the Muslim community".

Kuwait's National Assembly members also issued a joint statement against the attacks on Muslims in India.

"The lawmakers said in a joint statement that in the wake of the wave of violence and discrimination committed against Indian Muslims, including killing, displacement and burning, the lawmakers stand in solidarity with Muslims in India."

"They called on international, humanitarian, human rights and Islamic organisations to immediately work towards stopping the Indian authorities' actions and restore security to Indian Muslims," The Middle East Monitor reported.

Kuwaiti member of Parliament Shuaib Al-Muwaizri called for a boycott of Indian goods.

According to Kuwaiti news outlet Sabr News on September 29, Al-Muwaizri said, "The Islamic World Organization, the leaders of Islamic countries, the leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the United Nations, where are you

about the heinous crimes committed by the Indian government against Muslims, men, women and children? Boycotting India and its products is a legal duty.”

Oman's Grand Mufti Sheikh Ahmed Al Khalili, one of the most influential clerics in the country, tweeted on September 28, about violence against Muslims in India.

He claimed the violence in India was “a blatant aggression against Muslim citizens at the hands of extremist groupssupported by official bodiesit hurts everyone with a conscience”.

“I appealin the name of humanityto all peace-loving countries to intervene to stop this aggression, and I also appeal to the Ummah as a whole to stand united in this matter,” Sheikh Ahmed Al Khalili said.

Khaled Beydoun, the author of the book 'Islamophobia', described it as “state-sponsored Islamophobia” and “Hindutva violence”.

Former director of Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (IESCO), A. Altwaijri, tweeted that Narendra Modi's “Hindu government” was abusing and persecuting Muslims “within the framework of a systematic policy and in light of international silence and Islamic inaction”.

Abdul Rahman Al-Nassar, who has over 3,18,000 followers on Twitter, tweeted the viral video of violence at Darrang and said, “There are more than three million Hindus in the Gulf, they bring tens of billions of dollars to India, and we treat them with respect, so why are our brothers in India being killed just because they are Muslims?”

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### **Ethiopia's strategic town of Dessie 'captured' by rebel forces**

(30 Oct 2021) Tigrayan forces said they captured the strategic town of Dessie in Amhara region that borders Tigray, according to a rebel spokesman and residents. An Ethiopia government spokesperson, however, denied Tigrayan fighters seized Dessie, saying the town was still under government control. Residents told AFP news agency that government troops retreated on Saturday following heavy fighting and power outages in parts of the town.

“At around 2am [23:00 GMT] Friday, Ethiopian soldiers began retreating from the area,” Amir, a Dessie resident who declined to give his second name, said. Another resident said Tigrayan rebels “entered the city with ENDF [Ethiopian National Defense Force] soldiers not seen” anywhere in the city.

Getachew Reda, spokesperson for the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), told Reuters news agency by satellite phone from an undisclosed location that Tigrayan fighters pushed government forces from Dessie and were headed towards the town of Kombolcha. He added the fighters captured numerous Ethiopian soldiers.

The TPLF's account of developments could not be independently verified and phone lines in Dessie appeared to be down as of Saturday afternoon. Much of northern Ethiopia is under a communications blackout and access for journalists is restricted, making battlefield claims difficult to corroborate.

'Fabricated propaganda'

Legesse Tulu, the government spokesperson, said in a text message the town was still under the control of the Ethiopian government, adding claims by Tigrayan forces were “fabricated propaganda”.

The capture of Dessie would be a strategic gain for Tigrayan fighters against central government forces trying to dislodge them from the Amhara region. Tens of thousands of ethnic Amharas have also sought refuge there from an escalation in fighting.

The large town is 385km (240 miles) from the capital, Addis Ababa, and is the furthest south in Amhara that the TPLF has reached since pushing into the region in July. Samuel Getachew, an independent journalist based in Sodo, Ethiopia, said the capture of Dessie would mark a significant gain for rebel forces in the Amhara region.

“It's an important city and people are really under siege, they're just waiting for what's going to happen to them,” Getachew told Al Jazeera. “There was a warning from the leadership of the TPLF that they were coming to Dessie and here they are.”

International censure

The United States called on Tigrayan rebels to withdraw from the Amhara and Afar regions with a statement from the State Department urging the TPLF to “halt its advances in and around the cities of Dessie and Kombolcha”.

(SOURCE: AL JAZEERA AND NEWS AGENCIES)

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### **Over 100 million people in Africa threatened by climate change**

(19 Oct 2021) A new report by the United Nations has warned that more than 100 million “extremely poor” people across Africa are threatened by accelerating climate change that could also melt away the continent's few glaciers within two decades.

The report released on Tuesday by the World Meteorological Organization presented a grim reminder that Africa's 1.3 billion people remain "extremely vulnerable" as the continent warms more and at a faster rate than the global average when the continent's 54 countries are responsible for less than 4 percent of greenhouse gas emissions worldwide.

"By 2030, it is estimated that up to 118 million extremely poor people will be exposed to drought, floods and extreme heat in Africa, if adequate response measures are not put in place," said Josefa Leonel Correia Sacko, commissioner for rural economy and agriculture at the African Union Commission.

The extremely poor were defined by the WMO as those who live on less than \$1.90 per day.

"In sub-Saharan Africa, climate change could further lower gross domestic product by up to 3 percent by 2050," Sacko said.

"Not only are physical conditions getting worse, but also the number of people being affected is increasing," she said in the report's foreword.

WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas said that last year temperatures continued to rise across Africa, "accelerating sea-level rise" as well as extreme weather events like floods, landslides and droughts all indicators of climate change. (SOURCE: NEWS AGENCIES)

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### **Nigerian gunmen attack jail, 575 detainees missing**

(Reuters)

ABUJA, Oct 23 (Reuters) - Gunmen attacked a jail in Nigeria's Oyo State late on Friday and freed over 800 inmates by force, the third such major attack this year, prison service said in a statement.

The prison service said the attackers were heavily armed and after an exchange of gunfire with prison officers, gained entry to the prison yard by blasting the walls with dynamite.

Some 575 inmates, who were all awaiting trial, were missing while 262 escapees had since been recaptured, it said, adding that the jail housed only 64 convicts, who did not escape.

"While all the awaiting trial detainees were forced out of custody, the cells housing the convicts and the female inmates were not vandalised," the prison service said.

Nigeria is struggling with security problems across its vast territory, including a spate of abductions of students for ransom by criminal gangs in the northwest and an Islamist insurgency in the northeast.

The jail attack in Oyo follows similar attacks in Imo state in April where more than 1,800 inmates were freed, while another 266 prisoners were forcibly released in Kogi state last month. read more Reporting by Camillus Eboh, (Source: Reuters)

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## **ARTICLE**

### **PAKISTAN**

#### **Lt Gen Nadeem Anjum ISI's unorthodox military general**

Lt. Gen Nadeem Anjum, the new DG ISI, is undoubtedly a man with profound sentiment and who has a flair for embracing the bitter realities. According to Jan Achakzai, a geopolitical analyst, under Lt Gen Nadeem's leadership, the stature of ISI will be restored to new glory

By Jan Achakzai

ISI's new DG, Lt Gen Nadeem Anjum, is known in the Army for solving complicated situations in the simplest of ways and this can only be done by someone who has strategic clarity. He is undoubtedly a man who has a profound sentiment and takes into account the "strands of scenario" not through the lens of dull pragmatism but gets connected with the picture, through the string of sentiment. Whenever appropriate, he lets the feeling override the force and its application which is the magnet to connect with the hearts and minds of the populace.

"The sentiment" separates him from the stock of conventional senior commanders. A Think Tank himself, he brings in the vast experience of covert capabilities. In his previous job as a Corps Commander Sindh taking over, he did a sudden shuffling of senior officers post 2020 which manifested and illustrated an out of format approach of the Commander for any out of proportion setback. His focus on "cause" and "negation" of the element of Ego, institutional or individual, exhibited that he collected the team of his choice and led from the front in sync with his legacy and medals of battlefield exposure.

Being a General, having seen and curbed significantly the insurgency in Balochistan, ongoing undercurrents of recent incidents, appears to have procured his attention. The ripples across the intelligence apparatus ensconced in the province of Sindh were visible from the focus that he was according to them through an all-inclusive strategy of conflict resolution, fighting hybrid warfare fanning out in Karachi.

His flair for embracing the bitter realities, irritating truths, and dovetailing the intelligence input into the mosaic of his comprehension was the true defining features of his approach towards lasting and meaningful constructive changes to the existing picture of the plight of the province. If the past commanders were highly competent, he stood out as a highly experienced commander moved by the string of sentiment, a sentiment of the heart. If you were to look for five attributes in a person: conceptual lense, strategic thinking, management ability, communication skill, and patience to listen, he is your man.

#### **Lt Gen Nadeem Anjum: ISI to see glory filled days**

In concrete terms, he put in place mechanisms to check sponsors of mayhem, mafias, and pro wars. Karachi was a battleground for expanded proxy warfare launched from across the borders: India, Afghanistan, and Iran. This is where he stood out and made a difference on the ground. Going forward, with Afghanistan as the main occupation of Pakistani policymaking, he will be closely observing challenges on the Eastern border.

As on the Eastern front, India has another challenge to offer, he is likely to be a peacemaker yet a tough general to give the likes of RAW a run for their money. The US policy has been in flux since the fall of Afghanistan. He will be flying over the Atlantic to fix things for the government with his counterpart in Langley. Domestically he will be trying his best to stay ISI out of the political crossfire and refocus on foreign threats to the country.

He is a thought leader who has also headed the prestigious military institution of the country i.e. the Quetta Command and Staff College. He is an athlete basketball player and is known for his popularity amongst the soldiers and junior ranks as he has never shown any inhibition while rubbing his shoulders with young soldiers in games. No doubt the stature of ISI will be restored to new glory.

Jan Achakzai is a geopolitical analyst, a politician from Balochistan, and an ex-adviser to the Balochistan Government on media and strategic communication. He remained associated with BBC World Service. He is also Chairman of the Institute of New Horizons (INH) & Balochistan. The views expressed in the article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the editorial policy of Global Village Space.

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#### **Dr. AQ Khan A unanimously beloved personality of the nation**

By Tahir Mehmood Awan

Mohsin-e-Pakistan, Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan has passed away many days ago but people continue to visit his grave, including from ordinary citizens to his office-mates and security forces officers to civil society members. Undoubtedly, Dr. Sahib was one of the few undisputed personalities in national history whom every Pakistani loves dearly.

He was an innocent man who fell in love with the country and the nation, who kept his promise to the state on the issue of nuclear secrets till his last breath, although it is no longer a secret that the confession made to him was also a matter of national security. An acquaintance has told me the whole story about it, but here we will not talk because the secret that Dr. Sahib himself guarded till his last age, it does not befit us to talk about it, but it is also a fact that the nation has never acknowledged the stain on his feet.

After Pervez Musharraf's government in 2009, he went to the Islamabad High Court against the sanctions imposed on him. The government, after negotiating with Dr. Sahib on a court order, allowed him to be partially mobilized under an agreement, but he was obliged not to talk about nuclear matters or related confessions at all.

Later, the then Islamabad High Court was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, but Dr. Sahib stood by the agreement till his last breath while the government backtracked. According to sources close to him, he now intended to challenge the agreement, but life did not work out. A case related to his detention and sanctions is still pending in the Supreme Court. What a pity that a person who left no stone unturned in making the freedom and sovereignty of his beloved homeland invincible, spent the last 22 years of his life fighting for his basic rights and freedom.

We could not even bid him farewell in a dignified manner, Funeral prayer and burial were held in a hurry, not even waiting for the rain to stop. The Chairman Senate attended the funeral prayer in the capacity of Acting President but the Prime Minister and the Army Chief did not attend. When Abdul Sattar Edhi passed away in 2016, his

funeral prayer was offered at the National Stadium. Apart from the President, the three Chiefs of the Armed Forces were also present. Didn't Mohsin-e-Pakistan deserve the same respect as Abdul Sattar Edhi?

An eyewitness sent me a picture of his grave showing that the bricks at the foot-side were old and dilapidated, although Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid himself was overseeing the whole affair. He intends to build a tomb on his grave now, but he may not know that the canopy over Dr. Sahib's grave has been removed on the fourth day of his death, even though a large number of people are still coming for the Fatiha. Cemetery staff said that the tent belonged to a tent service owner who took it off when the payment was uncertain.

Some people assume that Dr. Sahib's will was that he should be buried in the premises of Faisal Mosque which is wrong, he did not make any such will. A close friend of his said he wanted to be buried in Kahuta but had given up due to security concerns and family travel problems. He has great services for H8 cemetery anyway. Once he visited a friend's mother's funeral here, it was raining. The funeral home was under the open sky. The rain disrupted the whole arrangement of the funeral.

Dr. Sahib then built a wide, strong iron roof over the funeral home, at his own expense, which is still as strong today as it was three decades before. Dr. Sahib's last resting place is a short distance from that funeral home in H8 graveyard. Dr. Sahib was a simple-minded and innocent man, his name was used by many people for their purposes and worldly benefits, but he remained silent knowingly, many people built schools in his name, a "chain" that has even more than ninety branches across the country.

Another large school and college named after him have also been set up in Bahria Town, Rawalpindi, but Dr. Sahib never took anything from these institutions in terms of profit or royalty. On the contrary, he continues to give scholarships to deserving children out of his pocket. However, those who use his name have kept the fees in their educational institutions so high that the child of the poor cannot even be entered.

Nowadays, those who study modern science usually consider religion as an outdated practice, Dr. Sahib's case was completely different. He was a nuclear scientist and had a deep knowledge of the Qur'an and Sunnah as well. His columns testify to the fact that the man who did not seem to have a beard on his face was more knowledgeable than many religious scholars. Sometimes, seeing him reminded me of the medieval Muslim scientists who had access to science, medicine, geography as well as the Qur'an and Hadith, jurisprudence, and other religious sciences.

May Allah accept Dr. Sahib's efforts for this country and grant him a high position in Paradise, Amen.

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### **IMF seeks closure of public entities' accounts in banks**

Global lender wants government to roll out TSAII system this fiscal year

By Shahbaz Rana

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has placed a condition on Pakistan to close all the bank accounts maintained by public sector entities and the defence ministry in commercial banks. The money should be transferred to the central bank's account. The demand is aimed at bringing back hundreds of billions of rupees under the government's control that are currently placed with the commercial banks in violation of various instructions by the finance ministry.

Sources told The Express Tribune that one of the reasons behind a delay in reaching a staff-level agreement was the IMF's insistence to roll out the treasury single account II system within this fiscal year. The global lender also wanted that instead of promulgating a presidential ordinance, the government should introduce a finance bill in parliament to withdraw tax exemptions and slap more taxes.

The finance ministry sources said that there were roughly 50,000 bank accounts maintained by the defence ministry, the armed forces and public sector entities including the Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) and National Highway Authority (NHA) that have to be closed under the second phase of the financial management reforms. The IMF wants a framework to be put in place by December this year to close all the remaining commercial bank accounts that are funded through government money.

At present, the defence ministry, public entities and some autonomous corporations are still maintaining commercial bank accounts -- taking the money outside the federal government's purview. Pakistan wants one more year to close these accounts, but the IMF is not willing to extend the date. The global lender's leverage is that the \$6 billion loan will end by September, 2022. The sources said the government had offered to close these accounts by February next year.

Finance Adviser Shaukat Tarin did not reply to the question whether or not Pakistan had agreed to the February 2022 deadline. The finance ministry spokesman also did not respond until the filing of this story. The sources said under the first phase, the commercial bank accounts of the government ministries and attached departments had to be closed by May 2021.

However, only 4,500 of the 6,000 of these accounts could be closed and a balance of about Rs5 billion was transferred to the Federal Consolidated Fund. Even some major accounts maintained by the Motorway Police, Anti-Narcotics Force, the Customs Department and the Petroleum Division could not be closed by May this year. The finance ministry had also given relaxations to some security-related accounts and the those maintained by Rangers and Frontier Constabulary.

Under the IMF-World Bank conditions, the government first had to have the Public Finance Management Act passed from parliament to bring transparency in public cash management. Subsequently, in July 2020, the Cash Management and Treasury Single Account Rules 2020 were introduced. Then in March 2021, the federal government notified the Financial Management and Powers of Principal Accounting Officers Regulations, 2021 but excluded the Defense Division from its purview.

The IMF had added a structural benchmark in the \$6 billion programme to achieve a functional single treasury account (TSA-1) by May 2021. The government had given its commitment that it will “move swiftly to TSA-2 and improve, with EU assistance, their annual and multi-annual commitments control systems”, according to the IMF report. The sources said that till June last year, there were about Rs500 billion deposits in various accounts of the armed forces that had now grown close to Rs600 billion.

The IMF wants this money to be transferred to the Federal Consolidated Fund at the earliest. In addition to the armed forces, the civilian departments have remained reluctant to give up their accounts that have been funded by circumventing the rules and creating revenue streams that were not permitted by parliament. The IMF's move will help to bring better fiscal management, besides providing a cash base to the government. This cash base is currently unduly available to the commercial banks.

The State Bank of Pakistan is now required to host and maintain a treasury single account on behalf of the federal government. Under the rules, the SBP is required to “collect information from commercial banks and ensure provision of all information to the Finance Division to ensure implementation of the treasury single account system”. The central bank has not yet been able to close many accounts until the May deadline.

#### **IMF talks**

Pakistan has not been able to conclude the 6th review talks with the IMF that originally began in June this year. The third attempt to complete the 6th review and secure the \$1 billion tranche has so far remained unsuccessful that has also put at stake the next reviews. Under the revised schedule, the 7th review had to begin from September 3 and December 8 this year. The finance ministry's failure to timely complete these reviews has also delayed the completion of the next reviews, putting at stake \$4 billion.

The sources said that the IMF team also asked Pakistan to withdraw all those tax exemptions, which were given without its consent of during the past few months. The team also sought the withdrawal of income tax exemptions that were non-negotiable. Contrary to the understanding with the IMF, the government has reduced the 4.5% withholding tax being collected from distributors, dealers and sub-dealers of the steel sector to just 0.25%.

Similarly, the minimum income tax of 1.25% has also been reduced to 0.25% for the steel sector business chain. It has waived off the 1.25% minimum income tax being collected from those engaged in the local manufacturing of mobile phone devices. The Income tax exemption has again been given to the Pakistan Mortgage Refinance Company after taxing its income in February this year. The sources said all these exemptions had to be withdrawn in the new finance bill.

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#### **Living on loans**

By Azim M Mian

Pakistani officials who were on a long official trip to the US, which started in early October, for negotiating the revival of the \$6 billion loan IMF package kept promising 'good news' for Pakistan. In their press talks, they would confidently imply that the IMF could announce the next tranche for Pakistan as soon as the next day. On the other hand, IMF officials kept their silence all along.

Finally, Shaukat Tarin, the now adviser to the prime minister on finance, left the US for Saudi Arabia to join Prime Minister Imran Khan, while the deal with the IMF remained inconclusive. Pakistan Embassy officials didn't

comment on the issue, reportedly under instructions. Thanks to Pakistan's cricket team for its unique, historic and 'conclusive' victory against India that helped us all to ignore the precarious IMF situation.

Now the weekend of October 23 has passed without any announcement about these negotiations. This is how Pakistani leaders mislead the nation by covering up the truth. Talks with the IMF were inconclusive. So far, Pakistan has obtained 22 loan packages from the financial institution; never has it ever fulfilled its commitments with the IMF for similar concessions and endorsements. A Pakistani-American I recently met explained the situation quite well and added that Pakistan never made any serious effort to develop its economy and become self-sufficient and kept enjoying IMF loans and endorsements.

The IMF a global organisation of 190 member countries is objectively aimed at promotion of global monetary cooperation and expansion and balanced growth of international trade and providing resources to its member countries that are facing difficulties in their balance of payments. To promote its goals of stability of international monetary and financial systems, the IMF employs three main functions surveillance, financial assistance and technical assistance.

It shows that member countries which benefit from the loans released and the financial arrangements created by the IMF must act to stabilise their economies and balance of payments as soon as possible; economic self-sufficiency must be achieved, and external debt obligations should be fulfilled in compliance with the 'letter of intent' signed by representatives of borrowing countries.

This brings us to a serious question: in the case of Pakistan, how many times have we benefitted from these loan programmes? Did we take measures to reform our economic and fiscal policies to achieve our goals of self-sufficiency and, eventually, freedom from the IMF? Did we follow the financial institution's 'technical advice' to either correct or counter our fiscal and economic deficiencies?

Answers to these questions will reveal the facts how successive governments in Pakistan have been enjoying the IMF programme without much compliance of its terms. PML-N Leader Dr Musadik Malik has rightly remarked that IMF concessions are enjoyed mostly by the Pakistani elite, and when it comes to complying with the Fund's technical advice and conditions, ordinary citizens are inflicted with high taxes, price hikes, expensive gas, and misery.

There is no doubt that the IMF's decision-making process is now heavily politicised, and like the UN's, its mechanism is also used to favour the rich and members with a large voting share. But it is also true that the offer and conditions of the IMF are clear. The country can take it or leave it.

Last weekend, tired by the apparent inconclusive negotiations with the IMF in Washington, Shaukat Tarin made a choice to travel and join PM Imran Khan and watch the 'conclusive' and historic T20 cricket match against India.

The writer is a journalist based in the US.

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## **PM sets precedent in DG ISI appointment**

Premier notifies Lt Gen Nadeem as new spymaster but after interviews

By Kamran Yousaf

Prime Minister Imran Khan on Tuesday finally notified the appointment of Corps Commander Karachi Lt Gen Nadeem Ahmed Anjum as the new director general of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), bringing an end to not just the uncertainty surrounding the sensitive matter but also the apparent civil-military deadlock. Although the prime minister picked the same general, who was named as the new spymaster in October 6 press release of the military's media wing, he has set a precedent for the appointment of the DG ISI in the future.

It was for the first time that a premier had interviewed potential candidates sent to him by the ministry of defence before the appointment of the new ISI chief. Since 2000, it was only in 2012 when the announcement of the new DG ISI came from the PM's office and even that too was a terse statement making no mention of either interviews or consultations with the army chief. On all other occasions, the announcement of the new spymaster was made by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR).

In fact, the last two appointments during the current government also came from the military's media wing. However, this time the prime minister objected to the past practice and insisted that he would make the final call triggering an unprecedented standoff between the civil and military leadership, which previously claimed to be on the same page. The deadlock seemed to have broken after both sides reached a compromise.

While the prime minister agreed to stick with the army chief's nominee for the coveted slot, the latter conceded that the authority to appoint the DG ISI rested with the premier. PM Imran also managed to prevail upon the army chief as far as interviewing the candidates for the ISI chief slot was concerned. It had never happened before that serving generals were interviewed by the sitting prime minister for the DG ISI position.

Not just that, the prime minister also made it clear that he was the final authority to decide when the incumbent DG ISI would relinquish the office and the new one would take over. As per the October 6 official handout of the ISPR, the new DG ISI was supposed to take charge immediately. But the notification now issued by the PM's office stated that the incumbent one would continue as DG ISI till November 20.

A notification issued by the PM's Office on Tuesday read: "The Prime Minister has seen and approved the appointment of Lt Gen Nadeem Ahmed Anjum, HI (M) as Director General Inter-Services Intelligence, with effect from November 20, 2021." The notification added that the incumbent spymaster, Lt Gen Faiz Hameed "shall continue to hold charge as the Director General Inter-Services Intelligence till November 19, 2021". The development came after Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa called on PM Imran.

"The meeting was part of the ongoing consultation process between the prime minister and chief of army staff about the timing of change of command in [the] ISI and selection of the new DG," read the PM's office handout. During this process a list of officers was received from the defence ministry. The Prime Minister interviewed all the nominees. A final round of consultation was held between the premier and COAS on Tuesday. "After a detailed consultative process, the name of Lt Gen Nadeem Anjum was approved as the new DG ISI," the statement read, adding that he would assume charge of the office on November 20.

The incoming DG ISI, as per the ISPR, was commissioned in the Light Anti-Tank Battalion of Punjab Regiment. He has diversified experience of command, staff and instructional assignments. He's graduate of Combined Arms Centre UK; Staff College Quetta; Advance Staff Course UK; NDU Islamabad; APCSS USA; and Royal College of Defence Studies, UK. He holds a Master degree from King's College London and NDU Islamabad. "The general has vast experience of command in conventional as well as sub conventional threat environment," read the ISPR statement.

It further said he has been on command on both the western border and the Line of Control (LoC) besides a long service in Balochistan. He commanded an infantry brigade in South Waziristan Agency as well as one during Kurram Agency and Hangu during Operation Zarb-e-Azb. He was the IG FC Balochistan during Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad. He has been an instructor at the PMA, Staff College and NDU as well as a commandant of Staff College, Quetta. He has also remained the chief of staff of 5 Corps. His last assignment was Commander 5 Corps, Sindh.

"The general is a keen runner and enjoys playing basketball and cricket," the statement added. The ISI is the premier intelligence agency of Pakistan tasked to deal with internal and external threats. Theoretically, it reports to the prime minister. The incoming ISI chief will have his hands full in dealing with multiple challenges particularly the Afghanistan situation and tensions with India.

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## **AFGHANISTAN**

### **The war on terror was corrupt from the start**

The war in Afghanistan wasn't a failure

It was a massive success for those who made a fortune off it

By Farah Stockman

Consider the case of Hikmatullah Shadman, who was just a teenager when American Special Forces rolled into Kandahar on the heels of Sept. 11. They hired him as an interpreter, paying him up to \$1,500 a month 20 times the salary of a local police officer, according to a profile of him in The New Yorker. By his late 20s, he owned a trucking company that supplied U.S. military bases, earning him more than \$160 million.

If a small fry like Shadman could get so rich off the war on terror, imagine how much Gul Agha Sherzai, a big-time warlord-turned-governor, has raked in since he helped the C.I.A. run the Taliban out of town. His large extended family supplied everything from gravel to furniture to the military base in Kandahar. His brother controlled the airport. Nobody knows how much he is worth, but it is clearly hundreds of millions enough for him to talk about a \$40,000 shopping spree in Germany as if he were spending pocket change.

Look under the hood of the “good war,” and this is what you see. Afghanistan was supposed to be an honorable war to neutralize terrorists and rescue girls from the Taliban. It was supposed to be a war that we would a could a should a won, had it not been for the distraction of Iraq and the hopeless corruption of the Afghan government. But let's get real. Corruption wasn't a design flaw in the war. It was a design feature. We didn't topple the Taliban. We paid warlords bags of cash to do it.

As the nation-building project got underway, those warlords were transformed into governors, generals and members of Parliament, and the cash payments kept flowing. “Westerners often scratched their heads at the persistent lack of capacity in Afghan governing institutions,” Sarah Chayes, a former special assistant to U.S. military leaders in Kandahar, wrote recently in *Foreign Affairs*. “But the sophisticated networks controlling those institutions never intended to govern. Their objective was self-enrichment. And at that task, they proved spectacularly successful.”

Instead of a nation, what we really built were more than 500 military bases and the personal fortunes of the people who supplied them. That had always been the deal. In April 2002, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld dictated a top-secret memo ordering aides to come up with “a plan for how we are going to deal with each of these warlords who is going to get money from whom, on what basis, in exchange for what, what is the quid pro quo, etc.,” according to *The Washington Post*.

The war proved enormously lucrative for many Americans and Europeans, too. One 2008 study estimated that some 40 percent of the money allocated to Afghanistan went back to donor countries in corporate profits and consultant salaries. Only about 12 percent of U.S. reconstruction assistance given to Afghanistan between 2002 and 2021 actually went to the Afghan government. Much of the rest went to companies like the Louis Berger Group, a New Jersey-based construction firm that got a \$1.4 billion contract to build schools, clinics and roads. Even after it got caught bribing officials and systematically over billing taxpayers, the contracts kept coming.

“It's a bugbear of mine that Afghan corruption is so frequently cited as an explanation (as well as an excuse) for Western failure in Afghanistan,” Jonathan Good hand, a professor in conflict and development studies at SOAS University of London, wrote me in an email. Americans “point the finger at Afghans, whilst ignoring their role in both fueling and benefiting from the patronage pump.”

Who won the war on terror? American defense contractors, many of which were politically connected companies that had donated to George W. Bush's presidential campaign, according to the Center for Public Integrity, a nonprofit that has been tracking spending in a series of reports called the *Windfalls of War*. One firm hired to help advise Iraqi ministries had a single employee: the husband of a deputy assistant secretary of defense.

For Mr. Bush and his friends, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan achieved a great deal. He got a chance to play a tough guy on TV. He became a wartime president, which helped him win re-election. By the time people figured out that the war in Iraq had been waged on false pretenses and the war in Afghanistan had no honorable exit plan, it was too late. What stands out about the war in Afghanistan is the way that it became the Afghan economy. At least Iraq had oil. In Afghanistan, the war dwarfed every other economic activity, apart from the opium trade.

Over two decades, the U.S. government spent \$145 billion on reconstruction and aid and an additional \$837 billion on war fighting, in a country where the G.D.P. hovered between \$4 billion and \$20 billion per year. Economic growth has risen and fallen with the number of foreign troops in the country. It soared during President Barack Obama's surge in 2009, only to plummet with the draw down two years later.

Imagine what ordinary Afghans might have done if they had been able to use that money for long-term projects planned and executed at their own pace. But alas, policymakers in Washington rushed to push cash out the door, since money spent was one of the few metrics of success. The money was meant to buy security, bridges and power plants to win hearts and minds. But the surreal amounts of cash poisoned the country instead, embittering those who didn't have access to it and setting off rivalries among those who did.

“The money spent was far more than Afghanistan could absorb,” concluded the special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction's final report. “The basic assumption was that corruption was created by individual Afghans and that donor interventions were the solution. It would take years for the United States to realize that it was fueling corruption with its excessive spending and lack of oversight.”

The result was a fantasy economy that operated more like a casino or a Ponzi scheme than a country. Why build a factory or plant crops when you can get fabulously wealthy selling whatever the Americans want to buy? Why fight the Taliban when you could just pay them not to attack? The money fueled the revolving door of war, enriching the very militants that it was meant to fight, whose attacks then justified new rounds of spending.

A forensic accountant who served on a military task force that analyzed \$106 billion worth of Pentagon contracts estimated that 40 percent of the money ended up in the pockets of “insurgents, criminal syndicates or corrupt Afghan officials,” according to The Washington Post. Social scientists have a name for countries that are so reliant on unearned income from outsiders: rentier states. It is usually used for oil-producing countries, but Afghanistan now stands out as an extreme example.

A report by Kate Clark of the Afghanistan Analysts Network outlined how Afghanistan's rentier economy undermined efforts to build a democracy. Since money flowed from foreigners instead of taxes, leaders were responsive to donors rather than their own citizens. I knew the war in Afghanistan had gone off the rails the day I had lunch in Kabul with a European consultant who got paid a lot of money to write reports about Afghan corruption.

He'd just arrived, but he already had a lot of ideas about what needed to be done including ridding the Afghan civil service of pay scales based on seniority. I suspect that he never could have gotten an idea like that passed in his own country. But in Kabul, he had a shot at getting his ideas adopted. To him, Afghanistan wasn't a failure, but a place to shine.

None of this is to say that the Afghan people don't deserve support, even now. They do. But far more can be achieved by spending far less in a more thoughtful way. What does the Taliban takeover say about the war? It proves that you cannot buy an army. You can only rent one for a while. Once the money spigot turned off, how many stuck around to fight for our vision of Afghanistan? Not Gul Agha Sherzai, the warlord-turned-governor. He has reportedly pledged allegiance to the Taliban.

Ms. Farah Stockman is a member of the editorial board, joined the Times editorial board in 2020. For four years, she was a reporter for The Times, covering politics, social movements and race. She previously worked at The Boston Globe, where she won a Pulitzer Prize for commentary in 2016.

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## **The ignorance of political Islam continues to doom western policy in Afghanistan**

By Julian Spencer-Churchill

The current controversy over whether to recognize and constructively engage the odious Taliban regime or isolate it continues to be guided by a general ignorance by secular Western elites of the important role of religious legitimacy in political Islam. Secular and progressive policymakers fail to recognize that political Islam is not doctrinally monolithic nor is it static and that the Taliban's hardline variant of Islamic governance is ephemeral and will not survive in Kabul.

Unlike the Taliban of the 1990s, which exchanged legitimacy for peace, the contemporary regime will come under pressure to modernize, which opens up significant policy opportunities for aid donors. The catastrophically abrupt collapse of the Western-backed government in Kabul confirmed a complete lack of Western understanding of the dynamics of how to create political legitimacy in a traditional Muslim state. Secular state efficiency was never going to be sufficient because in Islamic societies, religious and political legitimacy are indistinguishable.

The military campaign and provision of services, however effectively executed, should have been accompanied by a third campaign of ideas. NATO's failure to address the issue of political Islam in Afghanistan doomed its efforts to failure and continues to haunt western policy. The secular development strategy in Afghanistan was largely the result of domestic constraints in European countries, whose electoral constituencies were facing controversial political and cultural disputes over the impact of Muslim immigration.

More egregiously, Western states, and I know the cases in the US in particular, rejected proposals for the promotion or setting-up of religious institutes in Afghanistan, favorable to NATO, primarily for the engagement of religious public diplomacy. One can certainly anticipate the controversy of such an effort. At worst, it could have been seen as blasphemous or disingenuously manipulative. In academic writing, I had proposed the harnessing of Bareilvi Islam for the NATO effort but did not venture into the realm of policy because I was assured the Western effort in Afghanistan was on an even keel.

My confidence was utterly unfounded, and I am now writing this post-mortem two decades too late. I have never been to Afghanistan. However, I did conduct foreign policy research in Pakistan for over ten years, starting in 1999, and came in close contact with senior military, political, diplomatic, intelligence and police leaders from three of the four provinces and Kashmir, complemented by activities at Fort Leavenworth and Coronado Island, and written extensively on the topic of Pakistan-Afghan relations.

My quick litmus test of whether an aid worker, contractor, civil servant, soldier, or diplomat had an inkling of the measures of regime legitimacy in Afghanistan was whether they could identify the particular "fiqh," or Islamic legal tradition, of the Afghans, and in my experience, the vast majority, secular to the bone, could not. The most articulate and persistent extreme threat to establishing a democratic Islamic regime, like the prospective one in Kabul, are Takfiri militants, or those that believe that Muslim regimes revert to pre or non-Islamic society are illegitimate.

We need to say militant because ninety-nine percent of Takfiris have a non-violent philosophic and political strategy. Like the Mujahideen before them, the Afghan Taliban are under the influence of the orthodox Hanbali fiqh (legal tradition) emanating from the Gulf States, and this is because of the heavy funding support channeled through Pakistani evangelical movements like the Ahl-i-Hadith, as well as private individuals, and political parties like Jamiat-i-Islamia.

The latter party is based on a nineteenth-century South Asian Deobandi reform movement, which sought to use Arab Islamic orthodoxy to arrest the decline of Islam vis-à-vis the rise of political Hinduisim in the sub-continent. Deobandism crudely dovetails with the goals of militant Islamic scholars supporting or in Afghanistan, seeking to justify resistance, but without the extra baggage of rebuilding the Mughal Empire.

The orthodox Hanbali tradition of the isolated Arabian Peninsula is streamlined, and Salafist (literarily fundamentalist) fits nicely with an illiterate or recently literate rural population, unburdened by years of accumulated Islamic scholarship and poetry that is typical of Afghanistan. The permissiveness in Afghan social culture, Pakhtunwali, of decentralized violence associated with an emphasis on tribal justice and honor, is compatible with the Hanbali fiqh's simplified and occasionally strict legal code.

The influences on Sunni Islam experienced by the Afghan Pashtun in Afghanistan have elements of Persian mysticism, Turkish Sufism, but is primarily dominated by the Hanafi Fiqh, or legal tradition of South Asian Islam, and its main ritual tradition, that of Barelvi Sufism, with its emphasis on saintly worship. Barelvi Islam is far less prone to militancy than other traditions, but it has associated groups that have nevertheless engaged in acts of sectarian terror against Shiites and non-Muslims.

The Hanafi fiqh could be described as South Asia's equilibrium Islamic spiritual culture, optimized to survive in a highly competitive yet interdependent religious market, characterized by the close mutual proximity of the attractive alternatives of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Christianity, and their variants. Muslim and Hindu Sindhis, also Barelvis, and Kashmiris in Pakistan, for example, share the same shrines and poets, without contradiction.

Sunni Afghans are mostly Hanafi and have been so since approximately the 1920s, which matters because of the prominent role of Islam in family law, and the political enterprise of Islam to create paradise on earth through just social laws. The popularity of Islamic law does not primarily sideline or compete with Western commercial and contract law, though litigation is very time-consuming in the latter, but rather against feudal law, which is seen as favoring privileged and landed elites, and therefore a constant issue for Islamic scholars promoting justice.

The Taliban's composite Hanbali fiqh cum Deobandi philosophy is, consequently, very vulnerable and ultimately doomed to decline for four reasons. First, these traditions are alien to those segments of Afghanistan's population that are not seeking to justify armed mobilization, particularly the urban population, merchants, and prosperous farmers. Second, the inevitability of increasing literacy and access to the internet will expose the cultural poverty of the Hanbali Fiqh when confronted with other South Asian religions.

Ninety percent of Afghanistan's historical and current commerce is through Pakistan with India, so it cannot avoid exposure, and further infrastructural developments with Central Asia and Iran will further highlight these contradictions. Third, the growth of Hanbali movements among urban groups throughout South Asia has been stagnant for decades. Fourth, the Hanbali fiqh's strictures against the worship of saints as intercessors run counter to local Afghan traditions. The Taliban face a never-ending problem of having to barricade their warriors' cemeteries from grandmothers who sneak in praying for the health, fortune and fertility of their children.

This vulnerability was exploited by the British Raj, with the result of a remarkable loyalty by the Muslim British India Army, despite a century of religious enticements by Russian, German, and especially Turkish and Arab authorities. The British achieved this by providing heavy subsidies to established local shrines. Nor is Sufism toothless: when Afghan leader Amanullah Khan (1919-1929) unsuccessfully attacked the British in 1919, in 1929, the latter exploited a retaliatory revolt by the mystic leader of the Afghan Naqshbandiya, Bacha Saqqao, a Sufi faith within the broader Barelvi tradition.

In the resulting chaos, the British then permitted a rebel Afghan general to raise an army in the sanctuary of the British controlled Pashtun areas and to descend into Kabul and overthrow the government there. The first revolt against the contemporary Afghan regime, credibly thought to have been encouraged by support from Pakistan's Frontier Force in 1973, was led by the mystic leader Muhammad Atta-ullah Faizani of the Hizb-i Tawheed, who had secured considerable influence within the Afghan military.

The Qadiriyyas and Chistis are other similar mystical movements with broad appeal in mainstream Afghan society. The British East India Company and the subsequent British Raj inherited a system of incentives and punishments from the Mughal Empire and benefitted from the cooperation of other landed elites already patronizing the pirs and shrines. The district employees in the British-Indian Civil Service were typically fluent in the local language and were often members of families employed for two or three generations.

It was these instruments of policy that kept Punjabi garrisons loyal to the British Raj and facilitated the creation of Pakistan, despite Hindu and Muslim opposition. A more contemporary example, Pakistan exercised its ideological influence initially through Jamiat-i-Islamia, a Leninist-structured Pakistani religious party, which had extensive independent contacts with Islamist groups throughout South Asia. Pakistan shifted its patronage to the more pliable Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, particularly for recruiting militants through refugee camp madrassahs.

Afghanistan has been lost at tremendous cost. There are, however, innumerable ongoing campaigns against Takfiri militants across the globe, and this defeat is an abject lesson on the importance of equipping combatant commanders and nation-builders with the appropriate instruments to fashion stable and peaceful societies. Political authorities must convince western taxpayers that the essential value of investing in Islam is not a betrayal of secular values.

Dr. Julian Spencer-Churchill is an associate professor of international relations at Concordia University, former army engineer officer, and has written extensively on Pakistan.

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### **The great game in Afghanistan**

Fraudulent beginning - fateful end

1. An extremely important thread on the Geopolitical Landscape: a Magnitude 10 Earthquake whose epicenter was in Kabul. One that has sent shockwaves across entire planet; in every Capital - challenging & threatening the New World Order & the Global Reset: Agenda 2030 up in smokes. Yes!

2. When the US Forces invaded Afghanistan - also romantically known as *\*The Heart of Asia\**; in the year 2001, *\*America had multiple Grand Strategic Objectives...\**

Defense of Israel

Direct Control of Strategic Global Resources

Destruction of Political Islam.

De-Nuclearization of Pakistan: leading to the defense of Israel.

Encirclement of Russia.

Containment of China.

Control of global Trading Routes & Sea Lanes.

3. Around 1998, American Enterprise Institute (AEI) had written a *\*Strategic Report\** aimed at creating strategies to maintain global dominance of the US in the 21st century. The report was called: *\*"Project for the New American Century (PNAC)"\** - which had outlined measures that would ensure for the US to maintain its dominant role in the 21st century.

Accordingly events of 9/11 were conceptualized, articulated & executed as the perfect "pearl harbor" - the US needed to launch this (so called) war-on-terror: to accomplish its Grand Strategic Objectives.

4. So, US were NOT in Afghanistan to catch Bin Laden - period... A established base in the "Heart of Asia" served to fortify all those grand strategic objectives.

After the British Empire destroyed the Ottoman Caliphate (now Turkey) in 1923, they had vowed; *\*never to allow rise of Political Islam again...\** Accordingly rise of Talibans in Afghanistan posed a direct threat to their Project for the 21st Century.

5. Philosopher & Poet (of the East) Dr. Muhammad Iqbal had the farsighted vision to write in 1920, when Communism was on the rise in the East as a direct threat to Capitalist Order in the West (this was presented as

such for next 70 years). However, (Iqbal wrote) \*for the Western Civilization, real threat will always come from the Islamic Civilization - from Political Islam & NOT Communism.\*

He was right!

6. Invasion of Afghanistan - using the fraudulent events of 9/11 as pretext and after \*dealing with the "threat" of Political Islam,\* the CIA/MI6/Mossad got to work immediately - initially on their own, later they subcontracted RAW/NDS/Saudi/Egyptian/UAE Intelligence Services \*on a singular Project: to destabilize Nuclear Armed Pakistan\* with the objective that by 2015 Pakistan will cease to exist as a single established State...

7. America's Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), British MI6, Israel's Mossad & India's RAW, after establishing their occupation in Afghanistan; \*created the deadliest terror outfits: Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in Afghanistan\* & launched this group and others as well, like BLA & BNA; against Pakistan.

Over the next few years nearly 100 - 200,000 Pakistanis lost their lives - while countless others were maimed or wounded besides more than 150 billion USD were lost in Pakistan's economy due to this secret CIA / Mi6 / Mossad / NDS / RAW sponsored terror attacks on Pakistan.

8. US presence in Afghanistan \*had removed the "threat" of Political Islam\* & they were now well on their way to dismember & dismantle Pakistan - as per their own timeline: 2015.

Simultaneously, presence of US Forces in Afghanistan \*had blocked Russian access to the "Heart of Asia" & were well poised to block any Chinese adventure towards: One-Belt-One-Road(OBOR) projects and the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) type trade routes across Asia.\*

9. Indians & Israelis \*were having a dream ride under the US umbrella\* removal of their common mortal enemy: Pakistan - the Only Nuclear Armed Islamic state on the planet.

\*The grand strategy of invading & establishing an operational base in "the Heart of Asia" Afghanistan: seemed to work very well for a while\* - especially as Pakistan bled profusely under the secret, sustained often ferocious onslaughts of multiple terror outfits created, funded, trained and launched from across Pakistan's western borders.

10. Despite the broad perception around the world - primarily created by the malicious disinformation and propaganda campaigns against Pakistan; \*the established fact is that Pakistan did NOT support the Afghan Taliban...\*

Quite the contrary,

Pakistan remained the strongest frontline Non-NATO Ally of the US led occupation force in Afghanistan, formally allowing nearly a million containers of weapons, logistics & other heavy military supplies through its ports, its lands & its air bridges in support of the US & NATO forces in Afghanistan while suffering deep divisions among its own populace & the destruction beyond repair of the country's infrastructure.

11. By the year 2007, Pakistan was surely and steadily on its way towards dismemberment. Gen Musharraf, the then President of Pakistan was removed through a Pentagon sponsored, CIA/MI6/Mossad orchestrated regime change movement & a CIA asset Asif Zardari was installed as the President & another CIA asset Hussain Haqqani was installed as Pakistan's Ambassador to the US in Washington DC.

12. Pakistan and Pakistan's mighty Armed Forces was effectively losing the secret war against CIA / Mi6 / Mossad / NDS / RAW backed terror outfits created, funded, trained and launched from Afghanistan. Even a serving Lieutenant General was killed right outside the gates of the well protected & fortified Army GHQ in Rawalpindi - in a suicide bombing attack. Headquarters of the globally acclaimed Pakistan's Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) all over the country were bombed. Army GHQ itself was attacked & almost taken over...

\*Those were very bad days for Pakistan...\*

13. By 2008, the then DG ISI General Shuja Pasha had figured out the CIA/MI6/Mossad/RAW/NDS game plan and had begun conceptualizing & building the counter strategy\* and thus the push back began in earnest by mid-2008.

\*Every echelon of the Pakistan Armed Forces began its historically most large scale high intensity military operations both within the major cities of Pakistan and across the country\* to reclaim lost territory.

14. It was a long, gruesome 4-year bloody battle\*: by 2012 Pakistan's Armed Forces had successfully reclaimed all the lost territory from CIA/MI6/Mossad/RAW/NDS backed terrorists assets; who were by then fully operational from US & NATO controlled Afghanistan. Even so this brutal and bloody war-of- terror could not be stopped till today as the paid & trained assets & mercenaries were protected in Afghan sanctuaries by CIA / Mi6 / Mossad / NDS / RAW.

15. Once the security situation in Pakistan began to improve, China swiftly moved in to counter the US & NATO's strategic objectives & launched its own Economic & Trade Corridors through Pakistan which US & NATO were

trying to scuttle. OBOR & CPEC Projects were launched in Pakistan. By this time, it was clear that the CIA/MI6/Mossad's 2015 plan to dismember Pakistan & dismantle Pakistan nuclear weapons program had failed miserably.

16. By the end of 2015, Afghan Taliban had also emerged as a strong, very disciplined, more potent & with more capacity for strategic resistance to the US & NATO occupation forces in Afghanistan. \*US by now was also suffering from deep "imperial overstretch"\* - exhausted; having taken both economic & human losses \*in the now well-known graveyard of the empires.\* The tide had turned in favor of "Haq against Baatil"

17. Pakistan's Armed Forces fought gallantly - sometimes suffering heavy losses; ONLY to protect itself within its own borders \*against terrorists: created, funded, trained and launched by its OWN allies\* who were occupying Afghanistan.

Ironic yet a factual narrative! \*Afghan Taliban did NOT receive a single container of weapons, armaments or supplies from Pakistan in the last 20 years.\* They ambushed, snatched and also received weapons and armaments from ANA/US/NATO/India/Iran/Russia and fought a tactically brilliant guerrilla warfare and strategically patient battle on all fronts.

18. In the end, it was the Afghan Taliban who won the war in an honorable & fair fight against the combined might of 57 flags: US, Britain, NATO and all the other nameless allied forces. The Taliban were NOT helped by any other country in this long-drawn strategic battle for independence from foreign occupation forces. US President Biden squarely blamed the defeat on the collapse of the Afghan National Army (ANA) - whom they created, they funded, they equipped & they trained. A defeated President Biden while acknowledging the defeat of the US & NATO forces in Afghanistan did not lay the blame on Pakistan or on any other country.

19. Now what? Why is the world screaming & demonizing a band of resoundingly brave & viciously free people who led a truly genuine freedom fight to liberate their own land- locked poorest country on this planet against foreign occupation? Why are they such a threat to the big global powers?

For any reflective & critically thinking reader; this is the crucial next phase of the jigsaw puzzle to understand & grasp.

20. Surely, the Global Powers are not screaming in pain & fear for their concern for \*human rights in Afghanistan\* or the \*rights of the Afghan women...\* That's a big \*hogwash to say the least...\*

\*The Taliban victory in Afghanistan is a direct & existential threat to the Zionist's plans towards Globalization and the New world order - the Global Reset (Agenda 2030);\* which they are unfolding right now under the false flag cover of Covid-19 \*Global Plan-demic.\*

21. The idea of Political Islam\* is reborn: an idea the Western Civilization had hoped would stay in the Museums of history. \*Political Islam now has a country and an operating base of its own.\* The ultimate nightmare for the Globalists have come true. More so; when these people (the Taliban of Afghanistan) have (historically) defeated the British Colonists, the Communist Ideology & now Capitalist Order: their power centers politically ravaged in the last 4 decades.

\*This is simply a geopolitical and geo-strategic miracle. Nothing else can justify this victory except by reference to a Gift from the Divine\*

22. Imagine this...

The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is NOT going to follow the Covid protocols.\* It will show the world that Covid is not only a fraud but that its no threat at all.

No masks, no social distancing, no quarantines, no lockdowns, no vaccinations...& still NO Covid.

These guys will destroy the entire COVID propaganda campaign of the Globalist cabal.

23. Once a truly Independent Islamic Government is formed anywhere in the world, it becomes a magnet for other Muslim countries in the region & movements around the world to attempt to copy the Taliban model. The Afghan Jihad of the 80's triggered the Intifadas of Kashmir, Palestine, Chechnya & Algeria.

Same may happen again from this Taliban victory.

24. One may understand the resistance, pushback & attacks by US, EU, India & Israel but the most severe resistance & animosity to this poor Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan will come from Saudi Arabia, the UAE & Egypt...the three most petrified countries - \*terrified by the idea of Political Islam taking over power as a model & getting a foothold.\* under the current Global Order.

25. And just to let one ponder a bit more...

Afghan Jihad of the 80's & the Taliban resistance & ultimate victory of today in Afghanistan: are the only Muslim Resistance Movements in the last 200 years that have actually succeeded in driving out foreign occupation forces: returning victorious from the battlefield.  
Truly a romantic moment in human history!!

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## CHINA

### **China determined to build iron ore hub in Africa as Australia goes Quad**

World's largest untapped reserve in Guinea could be online by 2025, expert says

By Ken Moriyasu

There was a time when Japan, like China today, was the rising power in the East that kept military planners in the West awake at night. "It is very certain that no other nation at the present time is spending so large a part of its revenue on naval preparations," military author Hector Bywater wrote in the 1921 book "Sea-Power in the Pacific -- A Study of the American-Japanese Naval Problem."

But Japan had a critical weakness: a lack of steel. "Since the close of the Great War, shipbuilding in Japan has been seriously hampered by the difficulty of obtaining steel," Bywater wrote, referring to World War I. His book accurately predicted a naval conflict between Imperial Japan and the U.S. two decades later. Japan had previously imported large quantities of American steel under a special agreement between the two governments. But in 1917, the U.S. imposed a steel embargo which stemmed the flow to the Asian country.

"So serious has the shortage become of late that the output of tonnage in Japan during 1920 was 25% short of the forecast of 800,000 tons which had been made in January of that year," Bywater wrote. "This scarcity of steel reacted on the naval program, delaying the launch and completion of ships." Chinese state planners looking to learn from history would quickly notice that the glaring vulnerability for Beijing today is its dependence on iron ore from Australia.

While Beijing has tried to squeeze and punish Canberra for proposing an international investigation into the roots of COVID-19, it has been unable to wrestle itself away from Australian iron ore, which accounts for over 60% of China's imports. As Australia deepens its connection to the Quad grouping with the U.S., Japan and India, forming a de facto anti-China tag team in the Indo-Pacific, Beijing has found it increasingly uncomfortable to depend so much on Canberra for iron ore -- the basic material behind its own military buildup.

But that dependence may very well change by 2025, says Peter O'Connor, senior analyst of metals and mining at Australian investment firm Shaw and Partners. "They are very serious" about diversifying supply and flattening the cost curve of iron ore, O'Connor told Nikkei Asia. The top focus for China's diversification push is Guinea, an impoverished but mineral rich country in West Africa, O'Connor said. A 110 km range of hills called Simandou is said to hold the world's largest reserve of untapped high-quality iron ore.

Commodity watchers have known of Guinea's potential for many years, but the lack of infrastructure has hamstrung such development efforts. A roughly 650 km railroad would need to be built from scratch, as well as a modern port from which the iron ore would be shipped. Cost calculations have always discouraged potential entrants, such as Rio Tinto. But Beijing has more incentive to carry out the project than mere return on investment calculations, as China needs to avoid the fate of Japan in the early 20th century.

"Infrastructure is a function of time, money, the willingness to invest and, more importantly, the capability," O'Connor said. China is building railroads around the globe through its Belt and Road Initiative and has no shortage of experience. But what about the funding? China currently buys 1 billion to 1.1 billion tons of iron ore yearly from third parties, O'Connor said. "For every \$1 the Chinese can lower the long-term iron ore price ... that's \$1 per ton times a billion, so a billion dollars of saving per year," he said.

"It's not just about diversity; it's about lowering the price. It's not about the return on equity or return on capital of the actual investment; it's more about the benefit of the longer-term structure of the price." The long-term trajectory envisions the price of iron ore dropping to around \$60 per ton from around \$160 currently, according to market views. The project to develop Simandou has been split into four blocks, and China holds either a direct or indirect stake in every one of them. The area holds an estimated 2.4 billion tons of ore graded at over 65.5%.

"Extraction of Simandou's iron ore reserves would transform the global market and catapult Guinea into an iron ore export powerhouse alongside Australia and Brazil," Lauren Johnston, a research associate at the SOAS China

Institute of the University of London, told Nikkei. If China unlocks Simandou's reserves and drives a drop in international iron ore prices, "it could see selective commodity markets increasingly driven by intra-developing country dynamics," Johnston said.

China would find such waters easier to navigate than having to do business with Quad member Australia. Guinea is this year's chair of the "Group of 77 plus China" at the United Nations, a grouping of 134 developing countries that form a large voting bloc China can depend on. Guinea has actively made statements on behalf of the group since assuming the chairmanship in January.

Johnston predicted that China would be pleased if progress on Simandou were achieved ahead of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation to be held in neighboring Senegal this year, the first time the Beijing-led gathering -- held every three years -- will be hosted by a West African country. As if to reflect Beijing's determination to see this project through, China was quick to congratulate Guinean President Alpha Conde on his reelection in October, despite accusations from the opposition of fraud. The election came after Conde altered the constitution, letting him run for a third term.

On March 3, the first batch of China-donated COVID-19 inoculations arrived in Conakry, Guinea's capital, making the nation one of the first to receive vaccine assistance from China. Foreign Minister Ibrahima Khalil Kaba was at the airport to receive the gift, with Chinese Ambassador Huang Wei by his side. "I believe that with the support of China, Guinea will surely overcome the epidemic," Kaba said, according to the Xinhua News Agency.

The website of the Chinese Embassy in Conakry shows that Huang is a regular visitor to Kaba's office. "It's not a coincidence," O'Connor said. China is "preparing the pathway" to develop Simandou, with an expeditious 2025 timetable, he said. "That would seem stretched if you're talking about a Western producer in Australia or Brazil, but it's entirely plausible that China could be producing in that time frame."

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### **The road to balance in Asia Pacific**

Geopolitics of American Rebalancing and Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, explains the unique coupling in the political, economic, and security-military spheres that can make or break the global order

By Dr. Atia Ali Kazmi

One of the defining factors of twenty-first-century world politics is the yin-yang philosophy of China-US relations. This unique coupling in the political, economic, and security-military spheres can make or break the global order, explains the NUST scholar Dr. Atia Ali Kazmi in her insightful book, *The Road to Balance in the Asia Pacific: Geopolitics of American Re-balancing and Chinese Belt and Road Initiative*. Through the medium of objective historical parallels and contemporary developments, her well-detailed and deeply contextualized work shows how the United States and China are proceeding in the region while keeping a keen eye on their self-interest.

Stressing that conflict or competition is not a rational choice; the book methodically brings forth the evolving dynamics of Sino-American relations in the backdrop of their new century ambitions in the Asia Pacific. Stability in the Asia Pacific affects the stability of international politics. Their intentions and conduct of this complex interaction thus hold far-reaching implications. The constructive manner adopted in this book for describing concerns surrounding China's rise and resulting anxieties is creditable. The imperatives of these concerns for regional stability have also been called into question.

Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has proved a watershed moment for China's regional outreach and development of its members. At the same time, the initiative has deeply impacted China-US relations and will continue doing so. If lessons are to be drawn from the trajectory of their relations, the current flow of events may lead to war or might even trigger an inclusive peace none will be a historical first. Although several episodes around the corners of history have been ringing alarms, nothing appears inevitable for the future so far.

Given that all players are destined to remain focused on self-interest, the readers of this book shall find logical and evidence-based answers to some leading questions about the emerging world order vis-à-vis the Asia Pacific: will the duo be able to balance the adversarial power equation? Are the contemporary postures marking competition, cooperation, or a competitive-cooperative arrangement? What are vital regional states doing in the face of expanded Sino-American ventures? And finally, can the two powers avoid hot or cold war politics?

It looks as if the symbiotic nature of China-US relations and interactions would never allow them to set off on a distant journey. The famous China-US rapprochement in the 1970s, marked by President Nixon's visit to Beijing

employing Pakistan's mediation, initiated the decisive phase of normalized relations. Set in the phenomenon of globalization, this relationship is complex, inter-reliant, and multidimensional today.

Reasonably, a state's interface with another barely occurs in isolation from the previous policy choices and practices and its future plans. An influential American presence in Asia necessitates navigation of its relations with China that has been considered a "constructive strategic partner" by President Clinton, a "strategic competitor," by President Bush and a "national security threat" by President Trump. The scholarly endeavor thus notes intriguingly how the present-time fashions of their rendezvous in the Asia Pacific find linkages with interactions more than a century ago.

It is essentially a three-dimensional analysis of one, China-U.S. bilateral relations; two, their approaches to critical regional states; and three, the impact of this interaction on the geopolitics of the Asia Pacific region. Their policies of engagement with regional states re-balancing and Belt and Road Initiative started almost in parallel and have only strengthened their foothold on the region and the impact on the regional balance of power.

The study focuses on policies and events primarily from 2011 to 2018. Although President Obama's re-balancing had a different hue in President Trump's Indo-Pacific strategy, the former's two terms and the steps he initiated for greater engagement in the Asia Pacific cannot be undermined or ignored in any case. Moreover, the Trump administration's critical decisions were even viewed as re-balancing re-branded. His Indo-Pacific strategy just enlarged the scope from the Asia Pacific to the Indian Ocean region while retaining the essence of Obama's so-called re-balancing. The American geopolitical radar now covers almost the entire route of BRI's Maritime Silk Road.

President Joe Biden's foreign policy outlook whether he will carry forward Obama's legacy or choose salient elements from Trump is worth waiting for, though the recent AUKUS has already set the strategic direction. Policy preferences of great and major powers named so based on their national power potentials, particularly military build-up, economic might, and the ability to wage war are sure to influence regional matters, decisions, and their fallout.

The core interests of China and the US, whether at a tangent or otherwise, will set the course of regional politics and development, leaving regional states to either remain skeptical about policies of both, optimize their gains by playing balancing acts, or prefer allegiance and bind relations with a chosen one through strategic partnerships and alliances. Interdependent choices of states in this regard can safeguard shared win-wins. Zero-sum games of building power at others' cost do not suit any of the players in the Asia Pacific. Simply put, there is lesser room for aggressive foreign policies on both sides, lest to sleepwalk towards a collective catastrophe. The geopolitical legacy and imperatives of the day will shape future relations. Stability in relations is often lost to the broader chessboard of strategic and economic imperatives. The advent of Covid-19 has exacerbated competition, and the probability of a conflict is not being overruled even by leading experts of world politics. A balanced equation of their bilateral relations is thus significant for a peaceful and developed international order.

The author simply dubs it a game of choices by selecting the path of cooperation rather than confrontation, they choose a collective redemption. It has been predicted that, in general, they will be bound to maintain some degree of cooperation. However, in case of collision of core national interests, conflict could happen and deepen. The risks of a cold war or a hot conflict between Washington and Beijing have never been ruled out.

The range of this original, balanced and engaging narrative by a Pakistani scholar is extraordinary. It draws attention to an issue being debated everywhere around the globe. No research of this scale has yet appraised the two strategies of re-balancing and BRI to analyze their implication for China-US relations and the Asia Pacific region. Additionally, a perspective from Pakistan holds a significant value as relations with China and the US are the key foreign policy focus of Pakistan and vice versa.

Many elements of this book, such as detailed accounts of the Belt and Road Initiative and American engagements in the Asia Pacific and regional states' behavior, deserve careful consideration. The comprehensive work is in its first edition and is essential reading for inquiry, content, and impact. For the scholars and practitioners of international politics, foreign and defense policies, and strategic and development studies, this book provides a fresh and different outlook on crucial geopolitical facets of the Asia Pacific.

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### **China researchers score a quantum leap**

Scientists in Hefei have established the world's first integrated quantum communication network

By Dave Makichuk

“Those who are not shocked when they first come across quantum theory cannot possibly have understood it.”

— Niels Bohr

In the strange world of quantum mechanics, the laws of physics as we know them are tossed out the window. In other words, reality is not exactly what we think it is.

For example ...

Today, sensitive data is typically encrypted and then sent across fiber-optic cables and other channels together with the digital “keys” needed to decode the information. The data and the keys are sent as classical bits a stream of electrical or optical pulses representing 1s and 0s. And that makes them vulnerable. Smart hackers can read and copy bits in transit without leaving a trace. Even if that cable is at the bottom of an ocean, it can be tapped into and hacked.

Throughout history, the battle between encryption and decryption never ends. Enter quantum communication, which takes advantage of the laws of quantum physics to protect data. These laws allow particles typically photons of light for transmitting data along optical cables to take on a state of superposition, which means they can represent multiple combinations of 1 and 0 simultaneously. The particles are known as quantum bits, or qubits. The beauty of qubits from a cyber security perspective is that if a hacker tries to observe them in transit, their super-fragile quantum state “collapses” to either 1 or 0.

This means a hacker can't tamper with the qubits without leaving behind a telltale sign of the activity. In a giant technological step toward this end, Chinese scientists have established the world's first integrated quantum communication network, combining over 700 optical fibers on the ground with two ground-to-satellite links to achieve quantum key distribution over a total distance of 4,600 kilometers for users across the country, Phys.Org reported.

The team, led by Jianwei Pan, Yua Chen, and Chengzhi Peng from the University of Science and Technology of China in Hefei, reported in Nature their latest advances toward the global, practical application of such a network for future communications. Unlike conventional encryption, quantum communication is considered “uncrackable” and therefore the future of secure information transfer for governments, banks, power grids and other sectors.

In the 1980s, researchers developed a theoretical method for generating secure keys using quantum mechanics. They figured out that secure keys could be encoded into the quantum properties of individual particles, and exchanged secretly back and forth. The advantage of this “quantum key distribution” (QKD) is that quantum physics dictates that the very act of observing a particle irreparably changes it.

So any spies who tried to intercept the quantum key could be immediately detected by the changes in the particles. So far, the most common QKD technology uses optical fibers for transmissions over several hundred kilometers, with high stability but considerable channel loss. Materials in cables can absorb photons, which means they can typically travel for no more than a few tens of kilometers. In a classical network, repeaters at various points along a cable are used to amplify the signal to compensate for this.

QKD networks have come up with a similar solution, creating “trusted nodes” at various points. The Beijing-to-Shanghai network has 32 of them, for instance. At these way stations, quantum keys are decrypted into bits and then re-encrypted in a fresh quantum state for their journey to the next node. Another major QKD technology uses the free space between satellites and ground stations for thousand-kilometer-level transmissions.

In 2016, China launched the world's first quantum communication satellite (QUESS, or Mozi/Micius) and achieved QKD with two ground stations 2,600km apart. In 2017, a more than 2,000km-long optical-fiber network was completed for QKD between Beijing and Shanghai. Using trusted relays, the ground-based fiber network and the satellite-to-ground links were integrated to serve more than 150 industrial users across China, including state and local banks, municipal power grids, and e-government websites.

In essence, the achievement indicates that quantum communication technology can be used for future large-scale practical applications. Similarly, a global quantum communication network can be established if national quantum networks from different countries are combined, and if universities, institutions and companies come together to standardize related protocols. In the last couple of years, the team extensively tested and improved the performance of different parts of the integrated network.

For instance, with an increased clock rate and more efficient QKD protocol, the satellite-to-ground QKD now has an average key generation rate of 47.8 kilobits per second, which is 40 times as high as the previous rate. The researchers have also pushed the record for ground-based QKD to beyond 500km using a new technology called twin-field QKD (TF-QKD).

TF-QKD is a new extraordinary QKD protocol, which can overcome the fundamental rate-distance limit without quantum repeaters. Experimentally, TF-QKD has already been performed over 400km of telecom fibers, as well as more than 1,000km of free space through satellite to ground links. This result is possible thanks to a different way of encoding and retrieving the information in the quantum carriers used for the protocol.

In TF-QKD the information is encoded in the phase of the optical pulses prepared by the two users that want to establish the secure communication, and the secret key is retrieved via a single photon interference measurement made by a user in the middle. Another interesting aspect of TF-QKD is that it is also Measurement Device Independent, which means that it meets the strictest standards of security.

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## **China will emerge as World Power together with Russia - Quad and AUKUS shall not work**

By Interaction Desk

In response to Quad and AUKUS, Russian and Chinese warships have encircled the American base in Japan to limit the mobility of US forces. It has happened after Russian President Vladimir Putin's statement that China need not to attack Taiwan to occupy it. Meaning thereby that situation shall be so developed that Taiwan will fall in the lapse of China like a fruit from the tree. The first step has taken and more to come.

In response to Putin's statement American President Joe Biden has committed himself that any attack on Taiwan USA will come to rescue. If one examines the statement of Putin it has the larger prospective and hidden strategic plan for China taking in to possession its island of Taiwan. On the other hand, the United States, UK, Japan, India, and Australia has formed Quad and then white race based AUKUS defense alliance between the United States, the United Kingdom. It seems that AUKUS is the second defense line of USA and third one will be NATO.

Here, the question arises if NATO exists to support USA's design of primacy over world as UK and USA have ditched France in the sell agreement of Nuclear Powered Submarines to Australia. Nevertheless, the leaders of AUKUS and QUAD held several joint and one-on-one meetings in Washington. The stated outline of QUAD's summit was to discuss the security and stability of the Indo-Pacific Region, climate change, and supply of COVID-19 vaccines to the Indo-Pacific poor nations.

When QUAD countries were meeting, the world was observing the anxiety of the US due to the rising power of China and the establishment of a growing block of China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, and a few Muslim States of central Asia bordering with Afghanistan. The withdrawal of US & NATO forces in Afghanistan is a complete defeat to the US and her allies in Afghanistan by the Taliban once the friends of the US.

The formation of an alliance 'QUAD' between the United States, Japan, India, and Australia is not new to the world. It was founded in 2007 by the then Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe; the Vice President of the United States, Dick Cheney; the Prime Minister of Australia, John Howard; and the Prime Minister of India, Manmohan Singh. The alliance was also dubbed as 'Asian NATO' by European and some Asian countries, as the founding agenda of QUAD was to strengthen the Indo-Pacific defense power against the rising power of China.

In the official statement released from the Australian PM Office, Scott Morrison mentioned, 'We also recognize that our shared futures will be written in the Indo-Pacific, and we will redouble our efforts to ensure that the Quad is a force for regional peace, stability, security, and prosperity.

Towards that end, we will continue to champion adherence to international law, particularly as reflected in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), to meet challenges to the maritime rules-based order, including in the East and South China Seas. We affirm our support to small island states, especially those in the Pacific, to enhance their economic and environmental resilience.

We will continue our assistance with Pacific Island countries on responses to the health and economic impacts of COVID-19 and on quality, sustainable infrastructure, as well as a partner to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change, which poses especially serious challenges for the Pacific.'

The Australian government is working against itself economically and the very existence of the continent of Australia by joining Quad and AUKUS as the world has changed and USA's primacy over the world is in the process of evaporating. It is better to let an emerging power to emerge and join hands with China and Russia a better option for Australia Japan and India.

If these countries ponder they might reach to conclusion that China together with Russia and Pakistan are close to USA military power; rather in certain China has excel in Quantum Satellite and Hypersonic glided Vehicle and

other new technologies. With the support of RUSSIA or better China and Russia together have become more powerful than USA militarily.

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### **This Chinese combat drone can dominate Asia**

If the recent Air Show China, formerly known as the Zhuhai Air Show, made a single lasting impression it's the PLA's unrecognized advantage in unmanned aircraft. Although the event, which is held every two years, is for promoting the domestic aerospace sector and its suppliers over time the emphasis on military technology has grown. For 2021 it was military technology in all domains that dominated the week-long event.

The state-owned AVIC in particular commanded an enormous pavilion for displaying its latest generation of aircraft. These included the J-20 stealth fighter, the Y-20 heavy lift transport, the Z-20 medium helicopter, and the GJ-11 stealth UCAV. (Pictured above.) The GJ-11 first came to the world's attention in October 2019 when the Chinese military paraded all its newest weapon systems and technology. The display of so much equipment finally rubbished the long-held notion that the PLA's kit is derivative and subpar.

The GJ-11 was carried on the bed of a truck and at the time its exact role was speculated. Other drones such as loitering munitions and a jet-powered spy plane were featured too. What was the GJ-11's job, anyway? Analysis by the US-based think tank CSIS identified it as a "carrier-based UCAV" meant for aerial reconnaissance and long-range strike missions. Air Show China 2021 confirmed these very assumptions.

It's a stealthy long-range strike aircraft with "swarming" potential; this means entire formations can be networked with a "mothership" like the J-20 stealth fighter or an AEW&C aircraft and conduct attacks independently. The implications of the GJ-11 on US allies in the first island chain are dire. China's navy and air force have multiple long endurance drones at their disposal. If the PLAN's upcoming carrier strike groups will be the main operators of the GJ-11 this means hundreds of stealthy UCAVs can impose air superiority over bodies of water and even geographical features. The air forces of Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines in their present states aren't equipped to deal with such a threat.

However, it's possible the GJ-11 may only be in limited use if the PLAAF / PLAN diversify their drone fleets with different stealthy models. For example, the other state-owned aerospace manufacturer CASC has two models similar to the GJ-11. These are the CH-7, another single engine stealth UCAV whose appearance resembles the Northrop Grumman X-47B prototype a carrier-based UCAV with an uncertain future but with flight endurance and radius that matches most carrier-based aircraft, and a demonstrator called the CH-6 that conforms to the usual layout for MALE drones.

The CH-6 was put on display at Air Show China 2021 while the CH-7 was heavily promoted in the same venue four years ago. This year's show featured a surplus of fixed wing UAVs for every conceivable mission. Questions persist about the payload of a stealthy UCAV such as the GJ-11. According to open sources drones of its size and engine type can take off with almost twice their empty weight but this depends on additional mission systems installed on the airframe and the munitions loaded into the weapon bays.

The GJ-11 clearly has two internal bays located in the space between its landing gear. Many Chinese state-owned manufacturers have catalogs of air-launched precision weapons and at this point there are so many glide bombs, loitering munitions, and even cruise missiles tailored for long endurance combat drones. Chinese air-launched munitions are combat proven, by the way, having proven their lethality in the Middle East and North Africa. Hence, the payloads a formation of GJ-11's may carry are diverse and very threatening.

To be clear, not a single country in the Asia-Pacific fields a UCAV that matches the GJ-11 in appearance or performance, although Australia is now testing the Boeing Loyal Wingman concept Chinese aerospace manufacturers have also embraced. Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan each have domestic unmanned aircraft programs of varying sizes but their collective efforts are moving at a snail's pace. To its credit, Korea Aerospace Industries (KAI) is working on a prototype jet-powered UCAV with a flying wing layout but its success is uncertain.

The proliferation of Chinese stealth UAVs and UCAVs can't be downplayed. Should the PLA/PLAAF/PLAN deploy these in sufficient numbers local air forces will be strained and rendered ineffective, being unequipped and unprepared to secure their airspace against stealth aircraft, thereby assuring China's success in expanding its sphere of influence. This puts the onus of territorial defense on ground-based resources such as multi-layered radars, electronic warfare, road mobile SAMs, and possibly direct energy weapons. But investing in these still takes years and can strain overstretched government budgets.

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## Tajikistan approves construction of new Chinese - funded base

As Beijing's security presence in Central Asia grows

By Reid Standish

Tajikistan has approved the construction of a new Chinese-funded base near the country's border with Afghanistan as Tajik officials warn of growing threats emanating from its southern neighbor.\* In a separate development, the Tajik government has offered to transfer full control of a preexisting Chinese military base in the country to Beijing and waive any future rent in exchange for military aid from China, according to a communique sent from the Chinese Embassy in Dushanbe to Tajikistan's Foreign Ministry and seen by RFE/RL's Tajik Service.

The two developments paint a picture of a growing Chinese military footprint in the Central Asian country as Beijing and its neighbors in the region turn their attention toward an increasingly tenuous security situation in Afghanistan since the Taliban's mid-August takeover. "This decision to build such a facility is one of only a few known examples for China around the world," Raffaello Pantucci, a senior associate fellow at London's Royal United Services Institute, told RFE/RL.

"The fact that we keep seeing this activity in Tajikistan shows the level of Chinese concern towards Afghanistan and the region." China already operates a military base in Tajikistan in the Murghab region near the Afghan border in a remote stretch close to the Wakhan Corridor. The collection of facilities and outposts is believed to have been in operation for at least five years and was the subject of a recent investigation by RFE/RL that showed Chinese personnel taking on a growing role in the area.

Both the Chinese and Tajik governments have officially denied the base's existence and few details about its ownership and operation are known. The documents seen by RFE/RL's Tajik Service say that Chinese personnel are operating at the base in Tajikistan, but that it currently is owned by Dushanbe. According to the documents, the proposal to transfer ownership of the base to China was presented by Tajik President Emomali Rahmon to Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenghe when he visited the Tajik capital, Dushanbe, in July.

"This highlights how Central Asia is going to be a major focus of Chinese attention," said Pantucci. "Going forward, Beijing may struggle to avoid getting itself entangled in regional security problems." The documents do not state if Beijing has agreed to the proposal put forward by the Tajik side, but they summarize an offer put forward by Rahmon in which China would provide increased funding to build up Tajik military points along the border with Afghanistan in exchange for Dushanbe transferring full control of the existing facilities to China and not charging any basing fees.

"For China, security on its border is crucial and is part of its core interests in Central Asia," Temur Umarov, an expert on China in Central Asia at the Carnegie Moscow Center, told RFE/RL. "Expanding its security presence in Tajikistan is the most effective tool that it possesses right now." Construction of the new facility was approved in Tajikistan's lower house of parliament on October 27 as lawmakers voted on the agreement reached between Tajikistan's Interior Ministry and China's Public Security Ministry.

Tajik First Deputy Interior Minister Abdurahmon Alamshozoda said the facility would be located in the village of Vakhon in the country's remote Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province and that the base would be owned by the country's Rapid Reaction Group – special forces that operate under the purview of the Interior Ministry. Lawmakers said regular Tajik troops would also be present at the facility. Tajik lawmaker Tolibkhon Azimzoda said in parliament that the new base would be built with Chinese funding and that the total cost would be about \$10 million, which he tied to a worsening security situation in Afghanistan since the Taliban toppled the Western-backed government.

Azimzoda told RFE/RL's Tajik Service that Chinese personnel would not be stationed at the new facility. "The construction comes amid the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan and growing security threats along the country's border," Azimzoda said. The exact function of the new base is unknown, although lawmakers said it would carry out policing duties focused on combating organized crime and that the facility would have "special equipment for the Interpol information system" installed from China.

Beijing is navigating a delicate security situation in the region since the Taliban takeover. China has a pragmatic working relationship with the group, but it remains to be seen how closely the Taliban will cooperate on counter terrorism issues with Chinese authorities. For years, China has sounded the alarm about Uyghur extremists

potentially using Afghanistan as a staging ground for attacks on Chinese targets in the region or in its western Xinjiang Province.

While the full scope of the threat posed by Uyghur militants is disputed, with many analysts saying the fighters lack coordination and numbers to launch attacks, the prospect of terrorist threats spreading from Afghanistan are a central concern for Chinese policymakers. "Developments like this were coming, but the instability in Afghanistan has accelerated things," Umarov said. "In the future, we might see Chinese military and intelligence cooperation intensify across the region."

The Chinese Embassy in Dushanbe did not respond to a request by RFE/RL's Tajik Service for comment about the proposal allegedly put forward by Rahmon. This story has been amended to clarify that Tajik officials say only Tajik troops will be stationed at the Chinese-funded base.

Reid Standish is a correspondent for RFE/RL focused on China in Eurasia. He previously worked for Foreign Policy magazine in Washington and Moscow and has reported across Europe and Central Asia for The Atlantic, The Washington Post, and Politico Europe.

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### **Just how strong is the Chinese military?**

China is investing in advanced weaponry and equipment, and overhauling its military command structure to modernise its armed forces

By Shawn Yuan

Amid repeated air incursions close to Taiwan, and reports that China has tested hypersonic weapons, the world is paying closer attention to the modernisation of China's armed forces and its pursuit of ever more sophisticated weaponry. Once hailed by the Communist Party as having defeated past adversaries with only "millet plus rifles", the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has now grown into the world's largest fighting force, with more than two million active personnel.

Under President Xi Jinping, China has become more diplomatically assertive and shown an increased willingness to back up its claims over disputed territory with demonstrations of its military prowess. Neighbouring countries, and the United States have been watching closely. "The increasingly loud voices sounding alarm of a potential China-US conflict in the South China Sea mostly came from the fact that the US is now seeing China on equal footing because of the latter's growing army," said Yin Dongyu, a Beijing-based analyst on the Chinese military. "And that's quite a good indication of China's growing military strength already."

In recent months, the navies of the US and its diplomatic allies have sailed regularly through Asia Pacific waters including the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait to assert navigational rights in international waters. In October, the US announced AUKUS a new security alliance with the UK and Australia that will lead to Australia acquiring nuclear-powered submarines from the United States.

Washington has also stepped up weapons sales to Taiwan, which is modernising its military and developing so-called asymmetric warfare capabilities to thwart any attack from Beijing, which claims the island as its own. President Tsai Ing-wen this week confirmed media reports that the US had been providing Taiwan with specialist military training for more than a year. "No one can say without hesitation whether China and the US would go into real conflict over Taiwan or South China Sea, but with China's growing army, no one wants to see that happen," Yin said.

#### **Rapid naval expansion**

The PLA's ground force has traditionally been China's foundation for asserting power in the region. It took the lead recently with India at the two countries' Himalayan border, for instance. Within its ranks, there are more than 915,000 active-duty troops in its ranks, dwarfing the US, which has about 486,000 active soldiers, according to the latest Pentagon China Military Power Report.

The army has also been stocking its arsenal with increasingly high-tech weapons. In 2019, the DF-41 intercontinental ballistic missile, which experts say could hit any corner of the globe, was unveiled during the National Day military parade. But it was a DF-17 hypersonic missile that caught most people's attention. This year, it was reported China had actually tested hypersonic weapons twice once in July and once in August with a top US general describing the breakthrough as almost a "Sputnik moment", referring to the 1957 satellite launch by the Soviet Union that signalled its lead in the space race.

With the South China Sea emerging as a flashpoint, the PLA is also developing its navy. China claims the sea almost in its entirety amid competing claims by Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei. The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) is now the largest navy in the world, according to the government's defence white paper, and its submarines have the capability to launch nuclear-armed missiles.

To support the navy, China also has so-called maritime militia, funded by the government and known as "little blue men", which are active in the South China Sea, while this year Beijing authorised its coastguard to fire on foreign vessels.

"China's military strength has been significantly boosted by a large number of new weapons being added to the arsenal, especially in its Navy force," said Yin. "That's where the country's army is showing some of its fastest growth." The air force has also grown into the largest in the Asia-Pacific region and the third largest in the world, with more than 2,500 aircraft and roughly 2,000 combat aircraft, according to an annual report by the US's Office of Secretary of Defense published last year.

Most notably, the air force now possesses a fleet of stealth fighter jets, including the J-20, China's most advanced warplane. It was independently developed and designed to compete with the US-made F-22. Globally, China is also stepping up weapons' exports to other developing countries with the goal of developing warmer relationships with friendly nations amid the regional competition.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, China's weapons exports went mostly to Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Algeria over the past decade. Over the same time period, China has also been one of the world's leading exporters of armed unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), commonly known as drones, with customers including the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, according to SIPRI.

"You see loads of UAVs being exported to the Gulf because the US Congress banned many countries from purchasing them from the US over human rights concerns, and China is soon filling that gap," said Yin. But China's arsenal of headline-grabbing weapons, and seemingly unstoppable military growth masks an opaque command system, endemic corruption, and questions over the quality of its recruits.

The corruption stems largely from a tradition of nepotism and favouritism, and a general lack of oversight, while recruitment is suffering because despite some incentives, the younger, well-educated Chinese that the military wants are more attracted to the booming private sector. That has left the PLA reliant on conscription for about a third of its manpower. Every province has an annual conscription quota, with each conscript required to complete two years of military service.

This year, after a delay because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the military began holding recruitment and induction twice a year instead of once. It has also begun allowing more "second enlistments." And despite accumulating more advanced weapons in recent years, the PLA still has a large amount of older and more outdated equipment, some of it built using technology from the former Soviet Union, which collapsed 30 years ago, according to analysts.

China's navy, for example, has more ships than the US with 360 vessels but the fleet consists mostly of smaller vessels. It has only two large aircraft carriers, the Liaoning and Shandong, with the third aircraft carrier Type 003 still under construction. The US has 11 aircraft carriers, the most of any country.

Additionally, the lack of training to operate and maintain the newly developed weapons has also hindered the army's ability to reach "jointness", according to a 2018 report published by the RAND Corporation, a US-based think-tank, referring to an army's ability to command its various forces simultaneously to achieve its military goals. "Corruption and an outdated command structure have left a very negative impact on the army," said Shi Yang, a Beijing-based Chinese military analyst. "The large number of relatively outdated weapons also restricted Chinese army's combat ability."

### **Learning from the US**

Potentially more of an issue, however, according to some analysts, is that the PLA simply lacks contemporary combat experience. "It was 1979 when China last engaged in real world conflict and that was in Vietnam," Shi explained. "Without fighting real wars, some might argue that the [PLA] might not be able to live up to its expectations." The military units still organise various exercises resembling real combat. Earlier this month, for example, China intensified its military drills near Taiwan, with mass air force incursions into the island's air defence zone.

In the same time period, the army also conducted ground drills in southeastern Fujian province directly across the sea from Taiwan amid increasingly loud assertions over its claim that Taiwan is part of its territory. Some say a lack of real-world combat experience is not necessarily detrimental. Such lack of experience "wouldn't erode China's

military strength in any significant way”, according to Shi. “The military power of the Chinese army in modern conflict will mostly depend on technology, which has been steadfastly marching towards the right direction,” Shi said.

President Xi has taken a number of steps aimed at addressing some of the military's shortcomings. Borrowing from the US military, he has established a new army structure that gives the Central Military Commission, chaired by the president, more direct leadership over the armed forces. Under the sweeping reforms, five “theatre commands”, geographically located across the country, were established in 2016. The Army, Navy, and Air Force divisions in each area report directly to the theatre command, ensuring the PLA operation is more effectively integrated.

Tackling corruption has been a cornerstone of Xi's presidency. In the armed forces, that has led to the purge of hundreds of officials accused of taking bribes and other forms of corruption. Xi is also channelling more money to the armed forces with an ever larger defence budget. In the 2021 fiscal year, 1.36 trillion yuan (roughly \$209.16 billion) was allocated to defence 6.8 percent more than last year. It remains a fraction of the US defence budget, however, which amounted to \$705.39 billion in 2021.

“Many countries in the region have seen China as a threat, and the US is also in that group, so with the growing Chinese military strength, other countries, with the help from the US both explicitly and secretly, are trying to catch up,” Yin Dongyu said of the escalating arms race in the region. “With China's more assertive attitude towards its territorial claims, I don't see this arms race to end anytime soon.”

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## RUSSIA

### **From Russia, with (Taliban) love**

Asia's power brokers dropped an Afghan bombshell in Moscow: 'the country's reconstruction must be paid for by its military occupiers of 20 years'

By Pepe Escobar

Facing high expectations, a five-man band Taliban finally played in Moscow. Yet the star of the show, predictably, was the Mick Jagger of geopolitics: Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. Right from the start, Lavrov set the tone for the Moscow format consultations, which boast the merit of “uniting Afghanistan with all neighboring countries.” Without skipping a beat, he addressed the US elephant in the room or lack thereof: “Our American colleagues chose not to participate,” actually “for the second time, evading an extended troika-format meeting.”

Washington invoked hazy “logistical reasons” for its absence. The troika, which used to meet in Doha, consists of Russia, the US, China and Pakistan. The extended troika in Moscow this week featured Russia, China, India, Iran, Pakistan and all five Central Asian 'stans.' That, in essence, made it a Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) meeting, at the highest level. Lavrov's presentation essentially expanded on the themes highlighted by the recent SCO Dushanbe Declaration: Afghanistan should be an “independent, neutral, united, democratic and peaceful state, free of terrorism, war and drugs,” and bearing an inclusive government “with representatives from all ethnic, religious and political groups.”

The joint statement issued after the meeting may not have been exactly a thriller. But then, right at the end, paragraph 9 offers the real bombshell: “The sides have proposed to launch a collective initiative to convene a broad-based international donor conference under the auspices of the United Nations as soon as possible, certainly with the understanding that the core burden of post-conflict economic and financial reconstruction and development of Afghanistan must be shouldered by troop-based actors which were in the country for the past 20 years.”

The West will argue that a donor conference of sorts already happened: that was the G-20 special summit via video-conference earlier in October, which included UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. Then, last week, much was made of a European promise of one billion euros in humanitarian aid, which, as it stands, remains extremely vague, with no concrete details. At the G-20, European diplomats admitted, behind closed doors, that the main rift was between the West “wanting to tell the Taliban how to run their country and how to treat women” as necessary conditions in exchange for some help, compared to Russia and China following their non-interference foreign policy mandates.

Afghanistan's neighbours, Iran and Pakistan, were not invited to the G-20, and that's nonsensical. It's an open question whether the official G-20 in Rome, on 30-31 October, will also address Afghanistan along with the main themes: climate change, Covid-19, and a still elusive global economic recovery.

### **No US in Central Asia**

So the Moscow format, as Lavrov duly stressed, remains the go-to forum when it comes to addressing Afghanistan's serious challenges. Now we come to the crunch. The notion that the economic and financial reconstruction of Afghanistan should be conducted mainly by the former imperial occupier and its NATO minions quaintly referred to as "troop-based actors" is a non-starter. The US does not do nation-building as the entire Global South knows by experience. Even to unblock the nearly \$10 billion of the Afghan Central Bank confiscated by Washington will be a hard slog. The IMF predicted that without foreign help the Afghan economy may shrink by 30 percent. The Taliban, led by second Prime Minister Abdul Salam Hanafi, tried to put on a brave face. Hanafi argued that the current interim government is already inclusive: after all, over 500,000 employees of the former administration have kept their jobs.

But once again, much precious detail was lost in translation, and the Taliban lacked a frontline figure capable of capturing the Eurasian imagination. The mystery persists: where is Mullah Baradar? Baradar, who led the political office in Doha, was widely tipped to be the face of the Taliban to the outside world after the group's takeover of Kabul on 15 August. He has been effectively sidelined. The background to the Moscow format, though, offers a few nuggets. There were no leaks but diplomats hinted it was tense. Russia had to play careful mediator, especially when it came to addressing grievances by India and concerns by Tajikistan. Everyone knew that Russia and all the other players would not recognise the Taliban as the new Afghan government, at least not yet. That's not the point.

The priority once again had to be impressed on the Taliban leadership: no safe haven for any jihadi outfits that may attack "third countries, especially the neighbours," as Lavrov stressed. When President Putin casually drops the information, on the record, that there are at least 2,000 ISIS-K jihadis in northern Afghanistan, this means Russian intel knows exactly where they are, and has the capabilities to snuff them, should the Taliban signal help is needed. Now compare it with NATO fresh from its massive Afghan humiliation holding a summit of defense ministers in Brussels this Thursday and Friday to basically lecture the Taliban. NATO's secretary-general, the spectacularly mediocre Jens Stoltenberg, insists that "the Taliban are accountable to NATO" over addressing terrorism and human rights. As if this was not inconsequential enough, what really matters as background to the Moscow format is how the Russians flatly refused a US request to deploy their intel apparatus somewhere in Central Asia, in theory, to monitor Afghanistan.

First they wanted a "temporary" military base in Uzbekistan or Tajikistan: Putin/Biden actually discussed it at the Geneva summit. Putin counter-offered, half in jest, to host the Americans in a Russian base, probably in Tajikistan. Moscow gleefully played along for a few weeks just to reach an immovable conclusion: there's no place for any US "counter-terrorism" shenanigans in Central Asia. To sum it all up, Lavrov in Moscow was extremely conciliatory. He stressed how the Moscow format participants plan to use all opportunities for "including" the Taliban via several multilateral bodies, such as the UN, the SCO where Afghanistan is an observer nation and crucially, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which is a military alliance. So many layers of 'inclusiveness' beckon. Humanitarian help from SCO nations like Pakistan, Russia and China is on its way.

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### **Russia active in the great game**

By interaction desk

Gloves are off, finally, and Russian fist is roughly pushing back US from the region. No more niceties, please. Only Lavrov can pull it off with such aplomb & poker face! Central Asian states are wary of US-sponsored colour revolutions & 'regime change' agenda toward ex-Soviet republics. Nor do they want to get entangled in US shenanigans to destabilize the region bordering Russia and China by manipulating ISIS! Delhi should take note. All of Russia's Central Asian allies and neighbors are unwilling to have the armed forces of the United States or any other NATO member state stationed on their soil, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Thursday. Asked at a news conference about Washington's intentions of deploying anti-terrorism forces on the territory of

Uzbekistan, Lavrov stated, "All our Central Asian neighbors, allies and strategic partners confirm in talks with us that they find such approaches to be inadmissible", TASS reported.

"I did not hear about this issue and perhaps this question should be addressed to our colleagues in Uzbekistan," he continued, adding, "I should reiterate that all our friends in Central Asia are telling us that they are against such approaches either from the United States or from any other NATO member state." The Wall Street Journal reported earlier citing its unnamed sources that Moscow and Washington were allegedly in talks discussing the possible use of Russian military bases in Central Asia by American troops. However, during a meeting in Moscow on October 12 with US Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov pointed out that Russia was against Washington's military presence in Central Asia. 'The Moscow format was established in 2017 on the basis of a six-party consultation mechanism of the special envoys of Russia, Afghanistan, India, Iran, China and Pakistan.' From Russia with Love! Moscow offers lifeline to Delhi to climb out of the foxhole - and shake hands with Taliban FM Amir Khan Muttaqi, the rising star in Kabul .

Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov has confirmed that contacts on Afghanistan are being prepared in Moscow, referring questions about further details to the Russian Foreign Ministry. "The Foreign Ministry is working on this issue, this is where these questions belong," the Kremlin spokesman said on Thursday, commenting on the upcoming contacts with the Taliban (outlawed in Russia). "The consultations on Afghanistan are currently under preparation," Peskov noted. Earlier, Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova announced that Russia was expecting a representative delegation of the Taliban to take part in the third Moscow format consultations on Afghanistan. The consultations are scheduled for October 19 and 20, 2021. The Moscow format was established in 2017 on the basis of a six-party consultation mechanism of the special envoys of Russia, Afghanistan, India, Iran, China and Pakistan.

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## AMERICA

### **Baleful intentions of United States**

Future of Pakistan - US relations

By Asif Haroon Raja

"The 9/11 attacks gave the US an ideal pretext to use force to secure its global domination ... the so-called 'war on terrorism' is being used largely as bogus cover for achieving wider US strategic geopolitical objectives ... In fact, 9/11 offered an extremely convenient pretext to put the PNAC plan into action. The evidence again is quite clear that plans for military action against Afghanistan and Iraq were in hand well before 9/11." - Michel Meacher

Occupational agenda based on fake charges

The initial target of the George W. Bush administration influenced by the Zionists, the neo cons, and the American Jewish lobby was Iraq, but in Sept 2001 the order of priority of taking on eight Muslim countries was changed and Afghanistan was picked up as the first target country. Seven Muslim States in the Middle East were listed to change its boundaries, capture oil, and pave the way for the establishment of Greater Israel. Based on this agenda 9/11 attacks were fore-planned.

Afghanistan was chosen to make it a permanent military base of the US, from where it could eliminate all the Islamic radicals including Al-Qaeda who had taken part in the Afghan Jihad against the Soviets, block China's economic growth and Russia's resurgence, denuclearize Pakistan, bring a regime change in Iran and harness the resources of Central Asia and gain dominance over the Eurasian belt. Afghanistan was invaded, heavily bombarded and occupied since the ruling Taliban regime was accused of violating human rights, particularly women rights, committing the grave sin of harboring Al-Qaeda and refusing to hand over Osama Bin Laden.

Apart from avenging the deaths of 2977 people in World Trade Centre in New York allegedly by Al-Qaeda, declared objectives of occupying Afghanistan were to free the Afghans from the clutches of cruel Taliban, reset the ideology of the country from Islamic Emirate to a Republic, make the Afghans well-educated, progressive and to make the country peaceful and prosperous by introducing western democracy, and promoting human/ women rights.

Factually, the US had no intentions of accomplishing these objectives since its hidden motives revolved around geo-economics. Not only attacks on the WTC on 9/11 were engineered, both Afghanistan and Iraq were occupied on fake charges. It was due to insincere and baleful intentions that in spite of spending \$ 2.3 trillion during its 20 years period of occupancy, the socio-economic conditions and security of Afghanistan instead of improving further

deteriorated. Standard of life of the elite class living in major urban centres was improved and the women liberalized, but 70% of the downtrodden people continued to live in abject poverty.

#### **Quest for military solution proved fruitless**

Bush, Obama and Trump firmly believed in the use of military force for a military solution, failed on all counts and created a big mess which went beyond their capacity to clear it. Other than the nukes, the invaders employed all sorts of lethal weapons to crush, or intimidate, or tire their opponents but achieved zero-sum results.

After failing to gain a military edge over the Taliban with the help of two troop surges and raising the combat level to over 140,000 in 2009, Obama concluded that it was beyond the capability of the ISAF and ANDSF to defeat the Taliban. He ordered the completion of the drawdown of troops by Dec 2014, starting in July 2011. Pentagon and ISAF Commander Gen Petraeus prevailed upon him to retain a small Resolute Support Mission (RSM) of about 12000 troops to back up ANDSF which till then had not acquired desired operational preparedness to fight independently. Islamic State of Khurasan (IS-K) was also brought in from Iraq and Syria in 2015 by CIA and RAW as a backup support.

Donald Trump raised the level of RSM to 20,000 in 2017, escalated the air and drone war and dropped the mother of all bombs at Nangarhar. Finding the US-NATO troops in a logjam, and their well-trained and equipped 350,000 strong ANDSF unable to even contain the momentum of attacks of the Taliban, Trump had to sullenly open parleys with the Taliban to arrive at a political settlement. The Kabul regime was excluded from talks since the Taliban considered them collaborators, puppets and not worth talking about.

#### **Doha deal and its implementation**

The US-Taliban remained engaged in a series of peace-talk sessions for 18 months (Sept 2018-Feb 2020) and signed the Doha peace agreement on Feb 29, 2020 according to which all foreign troops were required to quit by May 1, 2021. In compliance with the Doha deal, the Taliban desisted from attacking foreign troops and allowed them to pull out safely. Not a single attack was carried out from March 2020 onwards.

After the agreement, Trump had ten months (March to December 2020) to withdraw forces by air and to shift heavy baggage, military vehicles/equipment by land through Pakistan. By the time he handed over power to his successor Joe Biden in Jan 2021, the US troop level in Afghanistan had been reduced from 20, 000 to 2500 and the exit was orderly and graceful with no mishap.

Biden had four months at his disposal (Feb to May 2021), which were quite sufficient, but under intense pressure, he extended the date of departure to Sept 11, and then pushed it back to Aug 31. Seven months period was long enough to undertake an orderly drawdown of only 2500 troops, but the intentions were dishonest. Instead of making any gain by this extension, a sudden flurry of attacks by the Taliban which reached a crescendo in July triggered fright and everything was lost.

Many were surprised to hear Biden giving his expert opinion in July 2021 that the Taliban will take six months to reach the outskirts of Kabul and that the ANA will fight it out. This optimism that Kabul would hold on, was based on the feedback of thousands of the US think tanks, Pentagon, CIA, RAW and NDS. The policy makers in Washington were confident that six months' time was sufficient to arrive at a political settlement and to tie up all details for a smooth withdrawal.

Much against the speculation that they would take at least 6-8 months to threaten and take over Kabul, sudden encirclement and occupation of Kabul on August 15 by the Taliban, resulted in panic and a hasty and disorderly withdrawal, which was more of a rout.

#### **Misreading of Taliban's final offensive**

The Taliban spring offensive was launched after May 1, 2021 by which date all foreign troops were supposed to have exited. It was the final phase towards the victory stand. Their rapid gains bewildered the policy makers in Washington as well as the spoilers. Their hurricane-like advances on multiple fronts flabbergasted the Pentagon, leaving it with no choice but to vacate the military bases in haste. Vacation of the biggest Bagram airbase on the midnight of 2/3 July was a classic example of confusion, disorder and jangled nerves.

They were left with no choice other than destroying the weapons and equipment stacked in the fortified military bases. One fails to comprehend why this big timeframe of fall of Kabul in six months was given, which was later reduced to three months in August, when most of the provinces had been captured by the Taliban, seven military bases abandoned, only 650 US troops were garrisoned in Kabul base, and the ANA had been surrendering one province after another without a fight.

It is also intriguing as to why Ashraf Ghani behaved so obstinately till the very end when his boat was fast sinking, and why the US didn't force him to step down on August 14 if not earlier when his goose was cooked? Was Ghani

forced not to resign in order to create conditions for bloodshed? Was his sudden flight to UAE with lots of cash on the afternoon of August 15 by design so as to create an administrative and security vacuum and to stimulate bedlam in Kabul since the Vice President Amrullah Saleh and Deputy President Rashid Dostum had already fled? The war mongers hoped against hope that a broad-based government in Kabul inclusive of the leaders of Northern Alliance would pave the way for continuation of the US presence in Afghanistan. They had also wishfully hoped that extending the cutout date given by Biden might convert defeat into victory. Tussle between the two sides, one favoring and the other disfavoring, was at the cost of wasting precious time and prolonging the agony. Extending the date proved costly for Biden.

### **Ill-intentioned narrative and expectations**

One wonders on what basis the Indo-Western media started harping from June onward that there will be disarray, bloodshed, civil war and refugee exodus. The biased media stuck to this narrative when not a single incident of violence was reported in all the districts and cities captured by the Taliban? Intelligence reports speculated pitched battles between the Taliban and ANA in cities and it was expected that the former would resort to re-tributions.

The detractors were very hopeful that the fleeing refugees from the big cities would home towards Pakistan and taking advantage of the melee, all the terrorists and spies would be pushed into Pakistan. To ensure the safety of Kabul, and in case of its fall, safe exit of the US diplomats and other American nationals as well as the Afghan interpreters and loyalists, the US took control of Kabul airport and its security where a sophisticated air defence system was installed.

An engineered suicide attack at the gate of Kabul airport by IS-K was launched on August 25, about which the US officials had been warning from August 22. If the US was in the know of an impending attack, why did the US take such a big risk of inducing thousands of Afghans to reach Kabul airport to be flown to the wonderland of the USA, and presented such a lucrative target? Besides putting the lives of Afghans in danger, it endangered thousands of its troops, diplomats and nationals stranded in Kabul. Was the real purpose to foment chaos?

As predicted, the mob assembled outside the airport gate was struck by a suicide bomber on August 25 killing 170 Afghans, 13 US Marines and wounding hundreds. Reprisal actions with drones on August 26th and 29th struck innocent civilians. The US C-130s airlifted thousands of Afghans packed like sardines, but left behind US-NATO troops, diplomats and nationals. The US apologized for the August 29 attack and has offered compensation to the next of kin of the 11 victims.

### **Future of Pak-US relations**

From 1954 onwards, Pakistan had put all its eggs in the basket of the USA and on several occasions had put its national security at stake to prove that it was the most allied ally of the USA. Infatuation to the USA by successive regimes of Pakistan didn't lessen even after getting betrayed repeatedly. Pakistan was put off the radar of Washington in 1990 after which it only sees India in this region and none else. Pakistan has become an eyesore due to its nuclearization, closeness with China and the CPEC.

After 9/11, the US unenthusiastically took Pakistan on board to ease its occupation of Afghanistan, and then to fight the longest war and lastly to pull out safely. Pakistan was forcibly dragged into the US imposed war on terror which it fought tenaciously and produced best results but suffered the most. Since the US was governed by baleful intentions from the very outset, all the achievements of Pakistan security forces distressed the US and India.

When the heavily fortified strongholds of Swat and South Waziristan were overpowered in 2009, and all the tribal agencies of FATA less North Waziristan, that had been taken over by the foreign supported TTP, were recaptured in 2010, and the ISAF had to abandon its boots on ground strategy in Afghanistan and announce a plan of withdrawal due to resurgence of the Afghan Taliban in Afghanistan, the flummoxed Obama and Pentagon took out their anger on Pakistan in 2011 by carrying out series of hostile acts starting from Raymond Davis incident, to Abbottabad attack, to Memogate and Salala attack. The last hostile act against the so-called ally which dipped Pak-US relations to lowest ebb forced Pakistan to respond defiantly.

### **Pakistan a convenient scapegoat**

Throughout the war, the US and its strategic partners kept hatching conspiracies to disable Pakistan's nuclear program while Pakistan considered them allies and kept doing more and in the process got bled. Pakistan played a key role in the success of Afghan peace talks culminating into historic Doha agreement, in starting intra-Afghan dialogue in Sept 2020, and in restraining the Taliban from attacking foreign military targets. It played a historic role in evacuating 10,000 people from Kabul including American-NATO forces, American diplomats, IMF-World Bank officials and Afghan nationals and lodging them in Islamabad hotels.

Pakistan's sacrifices and its efforts to please the overbearing USA were rudely brushed aside and was held responsible for the cataclysmic ending of the war. Conversely, India which failed the US on all fronts was kept in its tight embrace and handsomely rewarded simply because it offered profitable economic and IT markets, bought heavy consignments of armaments from the US and Israel, helped in boosting the game of intrigue and deceit, and in spreading fake news and narratives.

With all its troops back home, the US now wants to avenge its humiliation at the hands of the Taliban allegedly supported by Pakistan. The whole blame of the US defeat and its chaotic exit is pinned on the convenient scapegoat Pakistan.

### **Pakistan no more useful to USA**

The only interest the US has in Pakistan is to make it agree to provide an air base or air corridor to enable the US air force to conduct counter terrorism air operations in Afghanistan. In other words, the US is least interested in peace in the Af-Pak region and is determined to stoke instability and to keep the Chinese, Russian and Iran influences in Afghanistan at bay.

If Pakistan relents, it will be tolerated, and if it defies, it will be punished. Currently, the US leaders are in a bad mood and their patience is wearing thin. The indicators to that end are Joe Biden refusing to make a telephone call to Imran Khan, the unfriendly statements of the American civil and military leaders, Secretary of State Wendy Sherman stating that "we don't see ourselves building a broad relationship with Pakistan", anti-Pakistan bill moved by the 22 Republican Senators, and American Charge d'Affaires in Islamabad hobnobbing with Pakistan's opposition leaders.

The other hostile acts are the IMF's sinister dictations, pressing Pakistan to further devalue its currency and raise the taxes on petroleum, gas and electricity, FATF hesitating to whiten Pakistan, and India's recent threat of launching a surgical strike, and Indian submarine sneaking into Pakistan's waters which was chased out. India's belligerence is encouraged by the USA.

Under the given circumstances, India and not Pakistan will be the preferred partner of the USA in South Asia. Any hope nurtured by the ruling regime in Pakistan or GHQ to alter the frostiness in Pak-US relations into friendly relations is like chasing the rainbow.

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### **Yes, China could park Nukes in orbit America would have itself to blame**

By David Axe

China in theory could develop an orbital nuclear weapon that could dodge America's mainly north-facing strategic radars. The United States in theory could head off this possible development by agreeing to give up certain missile defenses. It's a hypothetical scenario. But there's real danger of it becoming real, U.S. Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall warned at an industry event in Maryland on Monday. "There is a potential for weapons to be launched into space, then go through this old concept from the Cold War called the Fractional Orbital Bombardment System, which is a system that basically goes into orbit and then de-orbits to a target," Kendall said. There are no indications China is developing a FOBS. But there also is no reason it couldn't develop one.

At the same time, there's one good reason why it might do so. Namely, the United States for decades has been developing and deploying increasingly sophisticated anti-ballistic-missile defenses, including land- and sea-based interceptors. "As long as the U.S. pursues an ABM capability that can, in concert with modernized strategic offensive forces, neutralize Russia, China or North Korea's strategic deterrent capability, those countries will try to build their way back to deterrence," tweeted Jeffrey Lewis, an arms-control expert at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies in California. "That may well include FOBS."

FOBS has a long history. The Soviet Union between 1969 and 1983 fielded a small number of these fractional orbital missiles. Then, as now, the prospect of American missile-defense systems swatting away normal nuclear-tipped missiles motivated the FOBS deployment. Early in the nuclear arms race, successive U.S. administrations worked on surface-launched missile systems that could shoot down incoming intercontinental ballistic missiles. President Richard Nixon in 1969 finally approved the deployment of the Safeguard Anti-Ballistic-Missile system.

Safeguard included two types of nuclear-armed missile-interceptor cued, in succession, by satellites with infrared sensors, then north-looking strategic radars and finally a pair of shorter-range radars. American officials were

aware that missile defenses risked escalating the arms race. Strategic deterrence works when both combatants in a potential nuclear war understand neither side can win so fighting isn't really an option.

Deploying missile defenses signals that one side believes it can win and thus might risk a first strike. Why then wouldn't the other side develop even better offensive missiles? "Were we to deploy a heavy ABM system throughout the United States, the Soviets would clearly be strongly motivated to increase their offensive capability so as to cancel out our defensive advantage," said Robert McNamara, secretary of defense for presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson.

"It is futile for each of us to spend \$4 billion, \$40 billion or \$400 billion and at the end of all the spending, and at the end of all the deployment, and at the end of all the effort, to be relatively at the same point of balance on the security scale that we are now." It should have surprised no one that, in response to Nixon's approval of Safeguard, the Soviets quickly designed a FOBS. As its name implies, a fractional orbital nuclear weapon launches like an ICBM but then enters a brief but stable orbit before firing a small rocket in order to de-orbit after just a fraction of a trip around Earth.

Where a traditional ICBM briefly escapes the atmosphere as it predictably arcs toward its target over the North Pole, in the case of a Soviet or Chinese rocket heading for the United States a FOBS actually stays in orbit just long enough that, depending on its trajectory, it can streak toward a target from any of several directions. As many of the most powerful strategic radars are fixed, and thus point in just one direction, a FOBS has great potential for an atomic sneak-attack.

The less warning a target country has of an incoming nuclear strike, the less likely its anti-missile defenses are to work. Thus FOBS is a kind of strategic remedy to ABM systems. The Soviet Union deployed 18 R-36O FOBS missiles starting in 1969. Three years later, the U.S. and USSR signed the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, which limited the two countries each to two ABM sites. Further negotiations decreased the limit to one site.

In 1975, the U.S. Congress voted to dismantle what was left of Safeguard. Eight years later, following the signing of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks 2 agreement, Moscow withdrew the FOBS missiles. "Why did the Soviets give up on FOBS?" Lewis tweeted. "Because the U.S. gave up on ground-based missile defenses."

America's missile-defenses spurred the Soviet FOBS deployment. Diplomacy eventually unwound that escalation after 14 dangerous years. What's chilling about the state of the world in 2021 is that the United States, having unilaterally withdrawn from the ABM Treaty back in 2002, is deploying ever-better anti-missile systems without also negotiating in a serious way with any other nuclear power.

Indeed, thanks in large part to a deep resentment toward any arms controls on the part of ex-President Donald Trump and his Republican allies in Congress, the United States in recent years has been canceling treaties rather than writing them. It's an open question whether a Chinese FOBS assuming Beijing opted to develop and deploy one would change minds in the U.S. government and bring presidents and diplomats back to the negotiating table in good faith.

In this hypothetical scenario, the Chinese surely would give up a theoretical FOBS only in exchange for an end to U.S. ABM development. Would the Americans be willing to discard missile-killing missiles in exchange for the Chinese abandoning their own (again, theoretical) missile-defense-dodging orbital nukes?

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## **America is turning Asia into a powder keg**

The perils of a military-first approach

By Van Jackson

Asia is trending in a dangerous direction. Across the continent, advanced missile technology is proliferating among U.S. friends and rivals alike. Nuclear powers are undertaking expansive nuclear modernization efforts. Democratization is stalling and, in some cases, rolling back. And the economic influence of the United States is waning while that of authoritarian China is growing. The United States is not the cause of these troubling trends, but its overly militarized approach to Asia is making them worse.

By surging troops and military hardware into the region and encouraging its allies to enlarge their arsenals, Washington is heightening tensions and increasing the risk of an avoidable conflict. Even worse, by treating the Chinese and North Korean military threats as Asia's only real problems, the United States is ceding the economic playing field to Beijing and relinquishing its ability to address inequality, climate change, and other underlying causes of regional insecurity through nonmilitary means.

## **Defense over diplomacy**

Washington's approach to Asia has long been over militarized. Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump both sought to shore up what remained of U.S. hegemony in the region the former with his signature “pivot to Asia” and the latter with his objective of a “free and open Indo-Pacific.” Both initiatives saw a threat in China's growing wealth, political influence, and military power, and both came to be associated almost entirely with Pentagon pronouncements and efforts to preserve U.S. military superiority. President Joe Biden is continuing this military-first tradition in Asia.

In a bid to counter China's rapid naval modernization, the Biden administration has embarked on an ambitious set of defense initiatives in what it now calls the “Indo-Pacific.” It has encouraged Japan to develop hypersonic weapons and extend the range of its antiship cruise missiles and other autonomous long-range missiles. It has pushed for \$2.6 billion in new arms sales to the Philippines (on top of \$2.4 billion in sales since 2016), despite congressional concerns about human rights abuses there.

It has agreed to transfer cruise missiles to Australia and to support Australia's acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines as part of a three-way defense-technology pact with Australia and the United Kingdom known as AUKUS. And it has announced plans to expand the U.S. military presence across Oceania, including with a new base in the Federated States of Micronesia, an expanded presence in Guam, a new base in Papua New Guinea to be shared with Australia, and new radar systems in Palau.

The Biden administration's response to China's nuclear expansion has been similarly militarized. During Trump's presidency, Pentagon officials warned that China might be abandoning its traditional strategy of deploying just enough nuclear weapons to deter an attack by an adversary. Partly in anticipation of that shift, the Trump administration drew up plans for a three-decade nuclear modernization effort that would cost between \$1.2 and \$1.7 trillion.

The United States maintains a large margin of nuclear superiority over China, but Biden has nonetheless supported his predecessor's plan for enormous investments in submarine-launched nuclear cruise missiles and a new “low-yield” nuclear warhead called the Trident D5, additional missile defenses for Northeast Asia, and a fleet of 145 B-21 stealth bombers more than six times as many planes as the current B-2 bomber force commands.

Biden has also pursued a strictly military approach to North Korea, which has continued its nuclear and missile buildup, most recently by developing tactical nuclear weapons, hypersonic glide vehicles capable of evading missile defenses, and ballistic missiles that can be launched from railcars. In a reprise of the so-called strategic patience of the Obama years, when the United States sought to convince North Korea to denuclearize by piling on sanctions and beefing up its military presence in lieu of negotiations, the Biden administration has emphasized defense activities over diplomacy.

In May, Washington and Seoul jointly announced that South Korea no longer has to restrict the range and payload capabilities of its domestically produced missiles, lifting restrictions that dated back 42 years and aimed to curb regional missile proliferation. The Biden administration has also stood by its South Korean ally as it fields its own submarine-launched ballistic missiles and as calls for developing an indigenous nuclear capability grow within Seoul's discontented political opposition. And Biden has continued the policy of his two immediate predecessors of aiding South Korea's military as it develops precision-guided conventional missiles that it advertises as being capable of preemptive and “decapitation” strikes against North Korea's leadership.

## **The risks of militarism**

The United States should not be blamed for the actions of China and North Korea, both of which are advancing their nuclear and missile capabilities of their own volition. The Biden administration, like the Trump and Obama administrations before it, must respond to its rivals' military buildups. But the fact that the United States must do something does not mean that the Pentagon must do it. Mobilizing more military hardware, stationing U.S. forces closer to opponents, and spurring weapons proliferation among allies only makes the region more of a powder keg.

Biden's approach brings antagonistic military forces into closer proximity, heightening the risk of preventable accidents that could spiral into conflict. It also threatens the leadership and nuclear arsenals of China and North Korea, incentivizing both to invest in improved military hardware that can hold U.S. forces at a greater distance. Predictably, Beijing and Pyongyang have embraced an arms-race logic, responding to U.S. posturing by expanding their own military forces, coercing U.S. allies and partners to halt cooperation with Washington, and attempting to project power farther from their borders.

China's recent nuclear expansion is clearly a response to the gratuitous, unrestrained nuclear policies of the Trump administration. Even before the planned modernization and expansion of U.S. nuclear forces, the United States had 3,750 nuclear warheads compared with China's 350 (at most). Given this enormous advantage, China's nuclear advancements should be understood as an effort to catch up to and counter the United States not to overtake it or launch a bolt-from-the-blue surprise attack.

Massively outgunned, China is acting rationally and predictably. Less rational is Washington sitting in a position of advantage, observing China's clear track record of seeking to counter U.S. nuclear modernization, and then proceeding as if Beijing won't do so in this case. By modernizing its nuclear force, the United States is giving China every reason to expand its own. Washington's conventional arms competition with Beijing is similarly risky and self-defeating.

Beijing may perceive a U.S.-supported Australian submarine fleet as a threat to its shipping lanes, just as it might come to see Japanese long-range cruise missiles and South Korean ballistic missiles as tools for striking China's leadership or its nuclear arsenal. Moreover, Chinese officials have long argued that U.S. ballistic missile defense systems are intended to neutralize China's much smaller second-strike capability.

Their fears are likely heightened by the Pentagon's recent boasts about converting ship-based anti-air missiles from defensive to offensive weapons and by Washington's refusal to publicly admit that neither it nor Beijing has the ability to disarm enough of the other's nuclear arsenal to prevent a retaliatory strike a mutual vulnerability that it acknowledges with Moscow.

The United States' military excesses are also reshaping the Korean Peninsula in dangerous ways. The dramatic imbalance between U.S. forces and the North Korean military incentivizes Pyongyang not only to continue to expand its nuclear weapons arsenal but to consider using it first in a crisis. Worse, the two Korea with help from the United States have begun an unconventional asymmetric arms race: both are increasing the range and payload potentials of their missiles and both are developing sea-launched ballistic missiles (though neither really needs them). All of this adds up to a uniquely volatile form of one-upmanship with no clear exit.

#### **A tragedy in the making**

Washington's over militarized approach not only increases the risks of war and arms racing but also reduces the prospects for stability and prosperity in Asia. The game that matters most in the region does not involve armies and navies but rather development, trade, and investment. Yet the United States has largely neglected Asia's economic needs, allowing China to make enormous gains at its expense.

While Washington has busied itself with new arms sales and expanding its force posture, China has become the region's economic hegemon. Chinese trade with the rest of Asia dwarfs U.S. trade with the region, and China's infrastructure loans and investments have outpaced those of the United States for years. Beijing has also helped forge a complex web of multilateral institutions and agreements that privilege China and marginalize the United States. These advantages validate a narrative, already accepted by many Asian political elites, of China's ascendance and the United States' relative decline.

There are better, more stabilizing alternatives to the crude militaristic approach that the Biden administration is currently pursuing. Instead of fueling an arms race to nowhere, the Biden administration could limit its military investments to capabilities that erode its adversaries' ability to project power while refraining from threatening their territory or nuclear forces. But even an optimal defense policy can only establish the geopolitical conditions in which it is possible to build a more secure region by nonmilitary means.

By reducing foreign policy to defense initiatives, the United States is forsaking any meaningful attempt to arrest the underlying causes of future regional insecurity, including extreme inequality, environmental degradation, and kleptocracy. The United States should be working tirelessly to shrink the widening gap between Asia's haves and have-nots, to subsidize climate adaption policies in countries with at-risk populations, and to penalize corruption and strongman politics. It is through these measures that the United States can help prevent tragedies such as the ongoing civil war in Myanmar, India's slide toward illiberalism, and the human rights crisis in the Philippines.

Unfortunately, the Biden administration has largely ignored the conflict in Myanmar. It has mostly refrained from speaking out against the abuses of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government in India in favor of touting its importance to the regional balance of military power. And it continues to proudly provide security assistance to the Philippines, even as that country's authoritarian leader has silenced journalists, allegedly taken payoffs from China, and ordered extrajudicial killings now being investigated by the International Criminal Court. In short, the United States is sabotaging Asia's future and by extension, its own. By treating security as something that only missiles and submarines can ensure, allowing its economic position to weaken, and forfeiting opportunities to

address underlying sources of violence, the United States is helping create a perilous situation in the Indo-Pacific. If the Biden administration doesn't shift gears, it will be culpable in Asia's next tragedy.

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## **INDIA**

### **Dark clouds gathering over Ladakh**

China understands our military capabilities but it is the political will that it would like to test, besides denting our economy, because Beijing views India as a rival and hindrance to a China-centric Asia

By Lt Gen Prakash Katoch

After his recent visit to Ladakh, Army Chief General MM Naravane stated that the Chinese Army has deployed its troops in considerable numbers all across Eastern Ladakh and Northern front right up to our Eastern Command, adding, "Definitely, there has been an increase in their deployment in the forward areas, which remains a matter of concern for us." But this is only half the story.

On July 13, quoting security officials, the media reported that the PLA has erected concrete watchtowers with CCTV cameras "inside India-claimed lines" in Ladakh. According to an official of the Ministry of Home Affairs, "The watchtowers and posts erected by the Chinese overlook areas held by the Indian Army. It's a matter of extreme concern." An IB official said, "The Indian patrols at these friction points are outnumbered by the Chinese. The Indian Army too is erecting poles fitted with digital cameras to monitor Chinese movements inside their occupied zones."

Konchok Stanzin, Councillor from Chushul, says villagers have lost access to large grazing areas close to Gogra in eastern Ladakh due to rising Chinese presence; villagers are blocked from going to Kiu La pass, earlier used for cattle grazing by locals of Lukung, Phobrang, and Yourgo... We fear that Chinese are nibbling away at our territory. This was never a disputed area." On August 30, nearly 100 PLA soldiers with 55 horses intruded over 5 km into Uttarakhand's Barahoti District, crossing Tun Jun La Pass, stayed in the area for three hours damaging some infrastructure, including a bridge.

In January 2021, a newly constructed Chinese village was reported to have come up 4.5 km inside Indian Territory, on the banks of the Tsari Chu in Arunachal Pradesh's Upper Subansiri District. This led to anti-China protests in Arunachal Pradesh and burning Chinese President Xi Jinping's effigies. But when a media outlet sent satellite images of the Chinese village to the Ministry of External Affairs and queried the intrusion, the MEA's response was noncommittal.

General Naravane says by and by all friction points will get resolved, differences can be resolved through dialogue, and he is hopeful of achieving results. However, this may be wishful thinking and depends on how much we are prepared to cede with China holding all aces at the bargaining table. Disengagement along the north bank of Pangong Lake has created a 10-km no-patrol zone in our territory. At Gogra, a similar 5-km no-patrol zone is affected on our side of the LAC.

China is yet to respond to our invitation for the next round of Corps Commander-level talks but should it happen we may cede another 5-km no-patrol zone in our territory in the Hot Springs area. In Depsang, PLA made a 20-km deep intrusion at Y-Junction in 2013, which it vacated three weeks later only after India dismantled its structures and surveillance equipment from Chumar, some 400 km south of the intrusion area.

This time the PLA has installed surveillance structures at the Y-Junction and is not permitting our patrols to approach Patrol Points 10, 11, 11A, 12 and 13 that were established 'short' of the LAC years back on recommendations of the China Study Group. So far China has rebuffed any talks on Depsang and Demchok. Whether the message calling them 'legacy issues' in our media indicates preparing grounds for their surrender only time will show.

Not blaming China for the aggression in May-June 2020 was a major mistake on our part. Describing intrusions as "friction points" would be interpreted as cowardice by China. To top this, the line that "we too keep going across" emboldened China more. Even to-date we are officially blaming China only for the Galwan clash. Vacating the Kailash Range in our own territory was further proof of our pusillanimity what was the reason; threat conveyed by Chinese foreign minister to his Indian counterpart?

Little wonder on September 30, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said, “The Indian side has long pursued the ‘forward policy’ and illegally crossed the LAC to encroach on China’s territory” as the “root cause of tension” in the border situation. This is not surprising considering the lies Xi Jinping spoke during his address at the UNGA China has never invaded any country and blah-blah. Our rejection of the Chinese statement makes no difference to Beijing.

The political stance on the 2020 Chinese aggression conveyed by the Defence Minister is that “not even one inch of territory has been lost”. CDS General Bipin Rawat told the Parliamentary Committee on Defence in September 2020 that measures have been taken to thwart any attempt by China to “further change or alter” the status quo along the LAC. Commanders can be muzzled from speaking the truth but the troops deployed on ground tell you where all the Chinese have intruded, which is considerable.

The PLA has used talks over past several months to consolidate its new positions, deploy advanced weapon systems and drones, long-range artillery, air defence systems, and constructed new heliports, airfield and logistics bases. According to a veteran Divisional Commander of Ladakh, “If this continues then the PLA can even outflank and roll our entire defensive position from Chumar to Demchok to Loma. In addition they can attack DBO along with the airstrip and pose a threat to Siachen.” Our Pundits in MoD and MEA would laugh this off, but consider the following:

\*US President Joe Biden’s speech at the UNGA was ‘conciliatory’ towards China forget the six nuclear-powered submarines pledged to Australia that will take another 15 years or more.

\*The hidden part of the US-Taliban deal is contrary to Indian interests as commented by our external affairs minister recently.

\*America’s concern is China attacking Taiwan, not India. Chinese air violations against Taiwan have risen exponentially but that could be too diversionary.

\*Pakistani army officers are posted in China’s Western Theatre Command (WTC) facing India.

\*General Wang Haijiang is positioned as new Commander of WTC fourth change since the 2020 Chinese aggression. Wang was part of the Chinese invasion of Vietnam in 1979, when Xi Jinping was Secretary in China’s Ministry of National Defence. Before taking over WTC, Wang was Secretary, Xinjiang Military Region.

With reference to Pakistan, General Naravane said on October 2, “There were no ceasefire violations by the Pakistan Army from February till June-end. But of late there have been increased infiltration attempts that weren’t supported by ceasefire violations. In 10 days, there have been two ceasefire violations. The situation is regressing to pre-February days.”

Pakistan is Beijing’s puppy on the leash but in the backdrop of slowing Chinese economy, internal and external dissent, and the 20th National Party Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 2022 that will shake up China’s political hierarchy, Xi Jinping has turned vicious against the private sector and even artists.

China considers India as America’s lackey and Xi Jinping may like to teach New Delhi a lesson, it would be signalling the US and its allies; responding to the noise over Quad and AUKUS, and he may go for it this winter. China would also want to test its new weaponry before a possible fight with the US.

Our policy makers need to understand three things:

- Ducking behind the logic that China does not want war is irrelevant; China doesn’t want all out war but that does not prevent it from making dent(s) across the Himalayas.
- China understands our military capabilities but it is the political will that it would like to test, besides denting our economy, because Beijing views India as a rival and hindrance to a China-centric Asia.
- Massing of troops and weapon systems on the border is not enough. For deterrence to be effective, it has to be selectively demonstrated, which we have failed to do till now. The Galwan clash was an automatic response by our troops on ground. If our hierarchy had the gall, we should have captured the Galwan heights by next morning. That would have demonstrated political will.

Finally, despite our national focus on upcoming state elections, we must recognise the dark clouds over Ladakh; don’t ignore them as environmental vagaries.

The author is a veteran of the Indian Army.

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## **The whirl of terrorism and RSS’s agenda based politics**

By Mustafa Khan

The future is not without challenges with RSS agenda-based politics, India's massive pandemic crisis, especially at the peak of its second wave in April and May 2021, led many to wonder whether the Quad could deliver on its ambitious vaccine production goals, argues Mustafa Khan. The Biden Administration's withdrawal from Afghanistan, which may spawn the rise of terror networks in the troubled nation, may undercut the Quad's joint commitment to combating terror.

The US chief of joint staffs Mark Milley: "Not effectively dealing with Pakistan as a sanctuary, major strategic issue that we are going to have to really unpack," he told the US Senate committee. The Prospect of dealing effectively causes great anxiety right now even before that action has begun. What President Biden has not uttered his army chief has done now. But one has to remember that Pakistan has all along since Americans withdrew from Afghanistan made clear that it is not willing to take any more refugees and has its own life to live peacefully and achieve prosperity of its own people.

The RSS advocates for agenda-based politics and presents itself as a cultural, not a political, organization that nevertheless advocates a Hindu nationalistic agenda. In this bilateral relationship, India does not figure anywhere. However, the understanding of the United Nations' obligation to have a plebiscite in Kashmir is a serious matter of commitment. The UNO should have done its part of the problem. That was the heart of the matter on which India walked back. It was the first PM of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, who had taken the Kashmir issue to UNO. The unpacking that Milley refers must also encompass the dismantling of the snare that Kashmir is an internal matter of India, it never was and it never will be.

#### **Why should anyone be allowed to create a war of thousand years?**

If India can join the partnership in Quad, etc, Pakistan also has its widening spheres of contact with other countries. Too many cooks will spoil the meal. Furthermore, the deep state in India is RSS, a well-armed and trained militia of right-wing Hindus, who have also reached a more advanced stage of sophisticated weaponized 'army' that will again take part in the war with far greater humanitarian problems that even Afghanistan has not faced any time in its life of centuries.

PM Narendra Modi gave a taste of it when even before President Trump left the country the pogroms started right from the Jafferabad sub-station by a call given thereby Kapil Mishra and much earlier, by the minister of state for finance Anuraj Thakur Singh to shoot the traitors, read Muslims of India. It was brewing up since the Delhi election when state finance Minister Singh had also called on Hindus to shoot Muslims.

Even greater than the march of Mussolini of Italy was orchestrated by the RSS cadres in Delhi and Hyderabad. Though the RSS calls itself cultural organization it is a fig leaf that doesn't hide the real intention. Their training is going on all the time even in such a city as Poona, Hyderabad, Delhi in full view of the world and in full swing.

Despite all these, it is nevertheless necessitous to mention that huge problems of development and even human rights have not been addressed by the two major neighboring countries of the subcontinent, namely India and Pakistan. India has the worst air pollution which must turn it into a nightmare. The Prime Minister allowed the second peak of the corona virus to develop when massive bathing of the people in the Ganges at Haridwar was allowed to take place. That had led the poor people to flow their dead bodies in the holy river, something that had never happened before in India. There are many more urgent problems facing India! The situation in the state where the rules of Yogi Adityanath are remarkable in terms of the terror that is gripping the state of UP. What else but terrorism is this?

That the police kill in such a shocking situation that Indian Express editor is forced to admit the unchanging terror that is flagrantly going unpunished! Let alone looking for investment from outside India for the development in India?

#### **Even Indian-born investors will find it difficult to spend**

The editorial in Indian Express has an only great emergency in the country to say: "Who will police the Uttar Pradesh police? This question comes up with an increasing and alarming frequency in the state. It is being asked again after a late-night knock on a hotel room in Gorakhpur, during what the police claimed was a routine raid, ended up in the death of a 38-year-old businessman. The man's family and two of his friends, who were with him in the room, have accused the policemen of assaulting Manish Gupta, resulting in his death.

The police first said he died of a fall. Six policemen have now been suspended and an FIR under IPC Section 302 has been filed against six cops, three identified and three unnamed, after sustained pressure. since 2017, 146 people have been killed in 8,472 "police encounters", and 3,302 alleged criminals injured in UP police have crossed several red lines, leading to a culture in which extrajudicial killings are celebrated as justice, the National Security Act is slapped on cases of cow slaughter as a way to reinforce an anti-minority political agenda and anti-CAA/NRC

protestors named and shamed through public posters. It leads to the spectacle of indignity against a Dalit victim of gang-rape that was seen in Hathras a year ago.”

Of course, things have gone wrong in Pakistan but the game of bandying blames on Pakistan is now making us in India take cognizance of the growing reality to accept the kettle calling the pot black! The home-grown terror is not a different kettle of fish. The duo Modi and Yogi are taking India to another apocalyptic misadventure with wild abandonment.

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### **Insecure national security**

The irony is that the real threat to national security now comes from those who believe they are protecting it. How will it help the cause of national security if ordinary people start to live in fear of their shadows and their cellphones?

By Tavleen Singh

The irony is that the real threat to national security now comes from those who believe they are protecting it. As someone who believes that Aryan Khan was wrongfully jailed, it made me happy that he got bail last week in time to spend Diwali with his family. He should not have spent a single day in jail, and may not have, had he been chatting to his friends on Signal and not WhatsApp. The Government of India's mighty investigative agencies have started weaponising the private phones of private citizens and created a scary new standard in violating our right to privacy.

This is why the Supreme Court's decision to set up a committee to investigate the Pegasus case is the most important decision it has taken in a long while. If without the technology that Pegasus provides our cellphones can already be used to spy on us, imagine what will happen if the government is not severely reprimanded for buying this anti-terrorism software from Israel and using it against political opponents and journalists. We must hope that the Supreme Court's committee is allowed to do its job without interference.

The Supreme Court said something crucial when it announced that it would be investigating the Pegasus matter through its own committee. It said that national security could not be used as an excuse for spying on journalists and politicians. It made the point that the 'spectre of national security' cannot always be invoked to prevent judicial scrutiny of such things as the illegal surveillance of ordinary citizens.

No government in living memory has invoked this 'spectre' more than the government of Narendra Modi. Last week of October 2021, it was invoked to charge Kashmiri students with sedition for having celebrated Pakistan's victory over India on the cricket field last Sunday. The Indian cricket team was gracious in defeat and showed none of the belligerence that the BJP's national spokesmen showed when asked if it was not wrong to charge students with sedition simply because they cheered for Pakistan.

In a tone of menace, the national spokesman who has become the TV face of the Modi government said, “They should be in jail and they should stay in jail. We did not win 303 seats in Parliament to allow people who speak against India to remain free. The times have changed, and as long as Modi is Prime Minister, this kind of thing will not be tolerated.”

Those who speak for Modi appear not to have noticed that if students and dissidents constitute a real threat to India, then we should be ashamed. There is no point in banging on about how national security is safe in the hands of Modi if it becomes vulnerable when a handful of students behave stupidly after a cricket match. They were students, not jihadi killers, and yet the laws that have been used to arrest them in Srinagar and in Uttar Pradesh are anti-terrorism laws. We need to ask if it will make India safer to alienate ordinary Muslims in the name of national security.

This supposed concern for national security is mixed up with a poisonous kind of nationalism that allows thugs wearing saffron scarves to decide who and what is anti-national. In Bhopal last week the well-known film director, Prakash Jha, had black ink smeared on his face and his crew was attacked by a mob of 'nationalists' who objected to 'Aashram' being the title of the drama series he was making.

These thugs were not immediately jailed, as they should have been, they had time to give interviews on national television in which they said that ashrams had existed in India for centuries and so it was 'anti-Hindu' to make films about them. Bollywood has been under attack since Modi became Prime Minister for the same reason. Anti-Hindu

is a synonym these days for anti-national, and it is now the prerogative of the Sangh Parivar's more violent spawn to decide who should be targeted in the name of national security.

As a result, there is palpable fear in the air these days. Journalists hesitate to speak to each other on the phone and hesitate even more to speak to one of their political sources, so conversations usually begin with, "I hope we are speaking on Facetime Audio or Signal." The Supreme Court while ruling on Pegasus said that the right of journalists to protect their sources was fundamental to freedom of the press. But, there are new realities. Journalists who have not accepted current realities and learned to kowtow, hesitate to report boldly on the things that are going wrong because they know that doing this immediately comes to the notice of the BJP's media managers and that this can lose them their jobs.

The irony is that the real threat to national security now comes from those who believe they are protecting it. By labeling dissidents as 'anti-nationals', you end up weakening democracy. By working on the assumption that if Muslim students cheer for Pakistan at the end of a cricket match, it is alright to conclude that they are traitors who must be jailed for sedition, the message that goes out to ordinary Muslims is that they are all suspect.

How these things serve to protect national security is hard to understand, because by diminishing fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution, you end up weakening democracy. How will it help the cause of national security if ordinary people start to live in fear of their shadows and their cellphones?

Source: The Indian Express.

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### **IAF's goofs and Delhi's post-Pulwama debacle**

A Post-mortem

By Bharat Karnad

Many things are incomprehensible when pondering the post-Pulwama developments. The nature of the retaliation is one issue, and India's reluctance to say anything, do anything, that would be taken askance by China, is another. If the idea of the aerial strike on the Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) training centre in Balakot in the Pakistani province of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa was to send a message of India going fully punitive, display Indian resolve to hit the terrorists hard, and cause such losses as to signal clearly India's willingness to escalate, and to escalate again, should the Pakistan military react to the initial IAF foray, then why was a PGM (precision guided munition) the weapon of choice?

The 500kg glide bomb outfitted with the Israeli Spice 2000 terminal guidance set is very accurate and may, in fact, have penetrated the roof of the JeM hostel and killed off and incapacitated many trainee mujahideen / jihadis. But such a precision strike was inappropriate if the aim was to impact Pakistan and the world with wide-area destruction to take out the entire terrorist complex, which outcome, at a minimum, wouldn't have been questioned or spawned, as has happened, an alternative Islamabad narrative of IAF Mirage 2000s dropping their ordnance harmlessly on some trees and scooting to avoid engaging with PAF aircraft in a dog fight.

In light of disputed satellite imagery, the effect of the Indian strike was diluted and lost what deterrent value it had because it was seen to have, if not missed the target, then caused only minor damage. If massive area weapons several 1,000kg bombs to level much of the forested hilltop and the JeM facility were used instead and, post-attack, 'Before' and 'After' pictures with clearly labeled but destroyed terrorist support structures hostels, arms depot, firing range, etc., been released to the Indian and international media, Islamabad would have had little wiggle room and the world would have been stunned into pondering a suddenly decisive India.

So, the question arises: Why did IAF choose a PGM not an area weapon? If it did so under Prime Minister's instructions to minimize collateral damage, then it apparently failed to inform Modi, or the latter was not properly briefed by his National Security Advisor, Ajit Doval, and the Intelligence agencies, that the selected JeM targets were, in fact, situated on a hill far from Balakot town, whence the possibility of civilian casualties was nil, and the use of wide-area destruction bombs was appropriate.

True, this may have upped the pressure on PAF to respond in kind but to hit what targets and where? After all, Pakistan has never claimed that India is conducting a terror campaign inside Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. Had General Headquarters, Rawalpindi, in the circumstances chosen to escalate, target selection would have proved a major headache for it, because attacking military targets within India would have invited Delhi to up the ante by striking at tempting Pakistan military installations within easy reach of the border, and all-out war would have been risked that Pakistan was in no position to win.

Further, had such conventional military exchanges tripped the nuclear wire, Pakistan wouldn't have been able to prevent its own extinction as a social organism in return for the destruction of two Indian cities at most, owing to a very adverse 'exchange ratio' (the ratio of destruction absorbed to the destruction inflicted). In the event, rather than daring Pakistan to climb the escalation ladder, the Indian government and IAF were left defensively to argue their claims of Balakot damage in the face of world-wide skepticism based on satellite images that showed most of the structures still standing. The lesson to learn from this cross border anti-terrorist aerial strike is that to finish off a gnat it is sometimes necessary to use an elephant gun.

So, two major goofs by the Indian Air Force: The incorrect choice of ordnance and the equally strange absence of the MiG-29 in operations. Sending up the old and venerable MiG-21bis against the F-16 while keeping the MiG-29, rated among the best maneuvering air defence aircraft, grounded, led to the embarrassment attending on an Indian pilot's capture. These two mistakes point to something very wrong with IAF's operational mindset and, naturally, with the conduct of operations.

To match, the post-Balakot dud initiative at the UN Security Council (UNSC) showed up a deficient Indian diplomacy. Delhi revels in symbolic victories while our adversaries, in the main, China, seeks substantive gains. For the Narendra Modi government it was apparently enough that several Western nations, especially US, UK and France, voted for or co-sponsored the Indian resolution to designate Masood Azhar a global terrorist, when the odds of success were huge considering China's veto on the anvil.

The only proof, in this respect, Beijing may be convinced by is if JeM cadres hit Chinese troops in Xinjiang. Not content with the UNSC failure, Delhi has now exposed the country to further foreign depredations. By declaring that third countries are free to verify and validate India's painstakingly accumulated evidence about the terrorist infrastructure inside Pakistan, it has handed China as well as US, UK and France the means to interpret whatever material Delhi provides them through the filter of their own national interests and contingent imperatives, adding still another layer of diplomatic complication.

What happens the next time there's a terrorist strike and India responds similarly? These states may choose to meddle by publicly doubting India's reading of the threat as credible cause for its armed action, and thus put India in future diplomatic jeopardy. That this move was made with such little thought as to its ramifications speaks volumes about the impulsive thrust of Modi's foreign policy.

The Indian government still doesn't understand that Beijing's reasons for its veto have little to do with the piddling matter of JeM and Masood but with reassuring Islamabad that it can rely on China, against India anyway. The MEA, bereft of historical knowledge and basic strategic common sense, is yet to realize that China is playing the role for Pakistan that the erstwhile Soviet Union did for India such as during the 1971 Bangladesh War, when it provided political cover at UNSC to realize its goal in the then East Pakistan. And that Beijing won't budge because the benefits from having Pakistan wage, in effect, a meta-level proxy war against India to serve China's interests at little real cost is too tempting to pass up.

But, why is it so easy for Beijing? Why has India not imposed any costs on China? Well, in the extant case, because MEA rates its own persuasive power very highly, which is reflected in its statement that Delhi will "show patience for as long as it takes" to bring Beijing around to conceding that Masood is, in fact, a bonafide terrorist. Such are the small stakes that the Modi regime envisions for the country.

Modi and MEA are surely habiting an alternative universe, one in which hurt to the country's status and prestige with China repeatedly kicking it in the teeth is readily ignored. This because Modi expects the "Wuhan spirit" to pay dividend. Really, when this Spirit is taken as license by Beijing to act detrimentally against India's vital interests while Delhi sits on its haunches hoping its reticence will someday be rewarded by Beijing?

In fact, all this will do is reinforce the unalloyed contempt Beijing has always had for India. When the late K.C. Pant, as defence minister, visited China after Rajiv Gandhi's 1988 state visit featuring the long and memorable handshake with Dengxiaoping, he asked his hosts where India stood in China's threat compass. Nowhere, he was assured condescendingly by his opposite number "India is not on our threat radar."

That was 40 years ago! How much more disdain and disrespect would the Xi Jinping regime feel for Modi's India that resembles a punching bag, letting China do as it wills, hesitant to turn off the Chinese trade spigot, ban the sale of Huawei telecommunications hardware and mobile telephones despite legitimate concerns about cyber warfare bugs inserted into them, and not responding in kind to the gravest possible provocation of nuclear missile arming Pakistan, by strategically missile arming states on China's periphery, with Vietnam and the Philippines in the van? (Imposing killer tariffs on Chinese goods is entirely within India's ambit under World Trade Organization

rules and regulations considering Chinese manufacturing Companies, without exception, enjoy built-in subsidies free land, free power, free water, etc.)

All things considered, the Balakot episode, it turns out, is only the latest instance in India's ignominious history of drawing defeat from the jaws of victory.

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### **Why is Washington encouraging India to confront Pakistan?**

By Brian Cloughley

India and Pakistan share a long border and do not get along well, to put it mildly. The main cause of disagreement is the divided territory of Kashmir which as long ago as 1948 necessitated UN Security Council attention, resulting in a Resolution determining, among other things, that there should be a "free and impartial plebiscite to decide whether the State of Jammu and Kashmir is to accede to India or Pakistan."

This has not happened and the seemingly insoluble dispute could well lead to a fourth war between the countries, both of which are nuclear-armed. It might be thought that in such circumstances the world's "best-educated, best-prepared" nation that President Biden also declares has "unmatched strength" would apply at least some of its education, preparation and power to encouraging India and Pakistan to engage in meaningful negotiations and move towards rapprochement.

#### **Not a hope.**

US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman recently visited India and Pakistan, but rather than attempting to coax and persuade her host nations to reduce bilateral tension and confrontation she publicly insulted Pakistan and urged India to cooperate militarily even more closely with the US. She widened the chasm of polarisation in a public speech in India's commercial centre, Mumbai, by declaring "We don't see ourselves building a broad relationship with Pakistan, and we have no interest in returning to the days of hyphenated India-Pakistan.

That's not where we are. That's not where we're going to be." Not content with demonstrably taking sides and thus stoking fires in a tinder-box region, she said that when she went on to Pakistan next day her discussions there would be for "a very specific and narrow purpose", and everything that was discussed would be passed on to India because "we share information back and forth between our governments".

The reasons for this surge in US support for India in its face-off with Pakistan are not hard to detect, and the main one is that India and China are at loggerheads, and indeed in a state of aggressive military standoff. Any country in disagreement with China is automatically regarded with approval by Washington, while any country that actively cooperates with China like Pakistan is equally automatically considered to be an enemy of freedom.

The US needed Pakistan during its 20-year military occupation of Afghanistan, and attempted to use successive governments in Islamabad to assist in its operations. But now that it and the Nato military alliance and some 300,000 members of Afghanistan's own military forces have been decisively routed by about 70,000 barbaric, bigoted, raggy-baggy Taliban savages, it is increasingly attractive for the Biden administration to blame anyone other than the Pentagon and the Washington establishment for the catastrophic debacle.

They claim that Pakistan helped the Taliban and it cannot be denied that the government and its military in Islamabad maintained contact with the Afghan Taliban, for good reasons. As I wrote some years ago, in 2007 the then head of the Directorate of Inter-Services-Intelligence, General Kayani (who became army chief), "told the author, in answer to a direct question, that 'of course' he maintained contact with some subversive groups, thereby not only holding doors ajar for negotiations but keeping track of various members of such organisations.

He stated that if he did not have some sort of contact with these people they would simply disappear and his directorate would lose whatever degree of influence it had that it might be able to bring to bear on them when the need arose." So he kept contact and there was indubitable need for Pakistan's influence and assistance in Afghanistan. In December 2018 even Voice of America reported that after US-Taliban negotiations in Abu Dhabi "Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan . . . reiterated his country "will do everything within its power" to further the Afghan peace process."

Khan is quoted as saying "Pakistan has helped in the dialogue between Taliban and the U.S. in Abu Dhabi. Let us pray that this leads to peace and ends almost three decades of suffering of the brave Afghan people." Washington downplayed the importance of Pakistan's assistance, but VOA acknowledged that "The U.S. spokesperson also said a recent letter from U.S. President Donald Trump to Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan 'emphasized that

Pakistan's assistance with the Afghan peace process is fundamental to building an enduring U.S.-Pakistan partnership'."

The International Crisis Group is objective about Pakistan and noted recently that "As early as the 2001 Bonn conference that drew up a roadmap for post-invasion Afghanistan, Pakistan had asked for the Taliban's inclusion in consultations on Afghanistan's constitutional and political restructuring. A former senior Pakistani diplomat said Pakistan had 'pleaded with the U.S. to include the Taliban in Bonn'. Pakistan's consistent efforts to persuade the U.S. to bring the Taliban into the political mainstream appeared to bear fruit a decade later, when the Obama administration signalled its intention to leave Afghanistan and its openness to talking with the Taliban." And the numerous attempts to move to a peaceful solution staggered along, aided by Pakistan's influence, which incurred the wrath of Washington on the grounds that Pakistan provided "safe havens to terrorist organisations".

The fact that before the US invasion in 2001 Pakistan had suffered only one suicide bombing (by a nutty Egyptian trying to blow up his embassy) and that in the period January 2002 to October 10, 2021, as calculated by India's South Asia Terrorism Portal, there were 594 suicide attacks, killing over 5,000 civilians, might seem at variance with allegations that Pakistan likes terrorists, as does the fact that 1231 members of the military have been killed as a result of the US war, including 24 who died in a particularly savage strafing attack by US strike aircraft on the Pakistan side of the border with Afghanistan.

Not only has Pakistan suffered enormously from terrorist barbarism, there are about 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees in the country along with a further 1.5 million unregistered and more are flooding in following the recent debacle. Social, economic and security problems arising from the presence of these exiles continue to be enormous, yet the US refuses to acknowledge that there could be great difficulty in identifying Taliban sympathisers or adherents among the millions. And, as an Atlantic Council analyst points out, "US policymakers have turned a blind eye to the negative impact of an unstable Afghanistan on Pakistan . . ."

But Pakistan is on Washington's back-burner and President Biden won't speak with Prime Minister Imran Khan, which is regarded by Pakistan as a deliberate insult. On the other hand, the President warmly greeted Indian Prime Minister Modi to the White House in September and was effusive in declaring that he wanted "to welcome my friend and we have known each other for some time back to the White House. And, Mr. Prime Minister, we're going to continue to build on our strong partnership."

Washington's continuing bias regarding India versus Pakistan will serve no useful purpose for the US. It will drive Pakistan closer to China, with which it already has most extensive and important economic ties, and bolster India's determination to step up its dangerous face-off with Beijing. Washington wants to conquer by dividing the sub-continent, but all it's doing is increasing the probability of greater confrontation which will lead to conflict.

Wendy Sherman's declaration that "We don't see ourselves building a broad relationship with Pakistan" was a major diplomatic blunder that fueled the fires of hostility. Biden and his hawks should pause to think where they're trying to take the world, and consider an approach that could lead to negotiation and compromise rather than encouraging India and Pakistan on a course to war.

Brian Cloughley writes about foreign policy and military affairs. He lives in Voutenay sur Cure, France.

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### **Bharat bandh - Making of farmers' revolution**

In the last 10 months, the agitation against the three farm laws has spread from being a 'regional protest' to a nationwide movement

By Indra Shekhar Singh

It was September 27 and a Bharat bandh. And amidst a blooming cotton field and harvested bajra, I sat with Krishna Lal, a millet farmer on the Haryana-Rajasthan border, discussing the farmers' revolution. From his field, we could see a long line of trucks and cars, police vehicles, discomfort and success of the farmers. A group of 50 farmers had blocked the Shahjahanpur border to protest against the three farm laws.

One naturally questioned, will these traffic jams, roadblocks or Bharat bandhs actually help the farmers? Is all this worth it? The police and truck drivers alike thought it was a show. But sometimes a show is needed to awaken others. Rising fuel prices, unemployment, long work hours and no pension affected police personnel and citizens alike. Having spent over six hours among them, I hitched a bike ride to Bawal and then a Haryana Roadways bus into Delhi. Contrary to news reports, our bus crossed into Delhi through Gurugram without traffic jams.

But others travelling near Ghazipur border, or in parts of Haryana and Punjab, were not so lucky. Traffic movement was affected in many parts of the country, much more than the last time farmers called for a Bharat bandh. Images from Bihar, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and elsewhere confirmed that a lot more people were taking the Bharat bandh seriously. The Opposition parties also lent support.

So what did this bandh achieve? One, a nationwide strike. From a “handful of farmers” or “farmers from Haryana and Punjab”, the farm leaders proved that their message resonates across the country. The new pockets emerging, whether in Karnataka or Bihar, prove that the movement is spreading. The farmer leaders' 10-month campaign has got new support and perhaps a new electoral constituency.

But this achievement was not possible without political maturity. Sir Chotu Ram's talisman to farmers was “identify the enemy” and “learn to talk”; it's clear that farmers have identified the enemy and learnt how to talk not only to the media, but are now evolving as a political class. They are organising general strikes or bandhs. And each time, their strength grows.

If we compare the last few times farmers called for a general strike, September 27 has been the most successful in terms of numbers and multi-region participation. Apart from Opposition parties, trade and bank unions and others have joined their ranks. Slowly, these strikes are becoming a convergence point for dissent. Indians from all walks of life are embracing this call to protest against various shortcomings of the Government.

Looking inwards, keep in mind that 10 months have passed at Delhi's borders; energy after the Muzaffarnagar Kisan Mahapanchayat and Karnal blockade has been low. As peaceful farmers blockade Delhi, their biggest enemy is not the Government but attrition and ennui, which are eating through their ranks. Getting fresh faces and keeping the morale high is a major challenge for farmer leaders. Hence they use the Bharat bandh to galvanise their supporters and motivate their cadre. The fight against the Modi Government is also a

PR fight involving optics and chicanery. The farmer leaders constantly work to maintain media presence and remain in focus while disciplining their own. Since the Government has repeatedly tried to negate their message, the Bharat bandhs during the last 10 months are farmer leaders' attempts to stay relevant in the nation's attention. Of course, it's not all rosy. The farmers' leadership also faces some challenges. The first comes from farmers' camps at Shahjahanpur on the Rajasthan-Haryana border where both the crowds and morale seem to be dwindling.

Three prominent factions the BKU, Jai Kisan Andolan and the Left are supposed to occupy this post but even 50 farmers weren't present on the Bharat bandh day. These camps around the city and at Shahjahanpur do cause discomfort to the locals, so more effort is required to bring the locals over to their side. By November 26, farmer leaders should aim at having heavier local presence at the borders.

Many years ago when Gandhi picked salt, he didn't destroy the British monopoly but he did challenge immorality and tyranny. Similarly, the Bharat bandh didn't bring the nation to a standstill but it has challenged the Government's legitimacy. It has punctured holes in the official narrative and cast doubts in a trusting nation's mind. Are the farm laws really that good?

Ten months on, the resistance grows and another political movement evolves. Its success should be measured not by the number of cars blocked or Twitter hits, but by the resilience it has shown and hearts it has won fighting a well-oiled political giant. Finally, the biggest victory for farmer leaders is that within 10 months, they have converted a “regional protest” into a national revolution. They have successfully brought agrarian issues to the centre stage and unknowingly laid the foundation of a new politics in India.

The author writes on agriculture and environment, and is a former Director Policy & Outreach, National Seed Association of India. The views expressed are personal.

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### **China taps in the Bhutanese nail in India's strategic coffin**

Modi going to inspect a Guard of Honour presented by the Bhutanese Army in Thimpu

By Bharat Karnad

“Who will not want a friend and a neighbour like Bhutan?” an elated Prime Minister Narendra Modi asked rhetorically, after wrapping up his visit to Thimpu, August 19, 2019. “The two countries are living the definition of true friendship.” He had just concluded a warm, friendly, and successful visit during which 10 Memoranda of Understanding were signed in several fields ranging from space, aviation Information Technology, power and education.

Modi also inaugurated the Rs. 4,500 crore, 720MW, Mangdechhu hydroelectric power plant in central Bhutan, one of a series of power projects India has helped finance and build over the years to harness that country's rivers to the tune of 10,000 MW a milestone reached last year. It is electricity an energy starved India buys back at remunerative prices in a virtuous cycle of joint Indo-Bhutanese planning, Indian investment and construction, and goodly economic returns for both parties.

Two short years later, it was the turn of Beijing on Oct 14, 2021 to crow that the "deadlock" had been broken in the talks begun in 1984 with Bhutan to settle the border, and that the latest (24th) virtual round of characteristically interminable negotiations (a tactic the Chinese use to break the opposing side's patience and resolve), had resulted in Thimpu agreeing to a three step process for final demarcation of the disputed Sino-Bhutanese border, and the establishment of formal diplomatic ties.

Soon India will no more have Bhutan to itself. With a doubtless big, fully manned, Chinese embassy in Thimpu contesting the diplomatic space with India, the Chinese will overwhelm the Bhutanese with offers of infrastructure projects and easy credit to built them and, perhaps, a Chinese military training scheme and transfer of armaments to compete with IMTRAT (Indian Military Training Team). Bhutan too will begin doing what other South Asian states Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and Maldives, have learned to do do profitably play New Delhi off against Beijing. That's the least of the problems though.

What's really worrisome is that MEA had no inkling about this development, was caught unawares and was surprised by this breakthrough coming down the pike. For Bhutan, an Indian protectorate in all but name, to keep such an important decision one to cut a deal with Beijing a secret, suggests Thimpu may be willing to agree to an exchange the Chinese had proposed in 1997:

Beijing giving up its claims in central Bhutan for territory in western Bhutan that includes the Doklam trijunction with India. Except, per an earlier three way agreement, any decision on Doklam has to be in consultation with India. It will be interesting to see how Thimpu and Beijing manage this, assuming MEA doesn't just lay down as is its habit and let the Chinese run a steamroller over its diplomats.

Doklam is where Chinese ingress by way of road building southwestwards towards the Siliguri corridor the "chicken's neck", had almost sparked hostilities in June 2017. Some 270 Sikkim-based Indian troops alongside two bulldozers had then stopped the Chinese road construction. That standoff did not, however, result in a PLA withdrawal from that area and the Chinese completed the road.

Then in mid-2020, while India was preoccupied with the Chinese transgressions in eastern Ladakh, Beijing laid claim to the Sakteng wildlife sanctuary in eastern Bhutan. In response, India proposed constructing a road through the Yeti region of Bhutan to Tawang, cutting the distance to Guwahati by 150 kms to enable faster shifting of land forces in an emergency. It is not known whether there's progress, if any, in this project. And this is where matters stand today.

The historic pattern is that India always reacts and reacts some more, never ever taking the initiative at any time for anything in terms of aggressively occupying contested land, especially where China is concerned. It seems fearful of the inevitable Chinese response, which it apprehends the Indian military will not be able to deal with. The Indian army is silently complicit in this arrangement because it doesn't if it can help it want to tangle with the PLA handing it, in the process, the psychological edge. Signalling in any way reluctance to engage in military action is tantamount to ceding ground.

How one wishes for a dashing General Sagat Singh to emerge from somewhere, take charge, and get a fist up PLA's nose, as he did as GOC, 17 Division, at Nathu la in 1967. Meanwhile, with Bhutan in the bag China has about finished its grand geostrategic design of encircling India, and confining it to its sub-continental strategic coffin. Circlement and counter-encirclement are at the core and the very essence of Chinese military maneuvering and strategy. It is something the strategically dim-witted Indian government has historically been unable for some incomprehensible reason to even envision, let alone practice.

So, while India's neighbourhood is now palpably under Chinese control with Pakistan posing as Beijing's stalking horse, the Chinese periphery is terra incognita and, owing to Indian diplomatic and military passivity, is getting beyond India's political-military reach. In this respect consider the heavy weather the Indian government has made over the last 20 years of merely transferring Brahmos cruise missiles to Vietnam when this should have been A-1 priority. Indulging periodically in Malabar naval exercises with the US and other navies in the seas WEST of the Malacca Straits is not going to cut it.

Ah, yes, but as I have always reassuringly reminded everybody, there's fortunately Pakistan to berate and beat up on, and threaten more Balakots with no matter that the original Balakot aerial excursion, as I had mentioned in a

post soon after that “operation”, was a bad joke, a non-event. Pakistan, I suspect Home Minister Amit Shahji please note would welcome your verbal “sturm und drang” topped with such harmless military Indian actions!

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### **Nuclear-wise, India is seriously handicapped**

By Bharat Karnad

A decision approving a series of test firings of the Agni-5 intermediate range ballistic missile (IRBM) has been pending for the last 10 years. When it was finally taken by Prime Minister Narendra Modi it was done, it seems, again on a one-off basis, and with some reluctance. As to why this should be so is one of those mysteries only Modiji can unravel.

It is clear the trigger for the test launch of Agni-5 was not some long view calculation in the wake of the news of the spectacular Chinese test of a Fractional Orbital Bombardment System (FOBS) in the guise of testing a hypersonic glide vehicle, but an attempt by India, a nuclear minnow, to say: Hey, notice me I'm in the game too!! Just how far ahead China is may be gauged from the Chairman, US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, calling the Chinese achievement “significant” and a near “Sputnik moment” for America.

First re: Milley's Sputnik ejaculation. The US was startled out of its wits when the Soviet Union in October 1957, launched the first man-made satellite the 80kg, football-sized, orbiter Sputnik-1, which event the History Division of the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), heralds as the “Dawn of the space age”.

Incidentally, NASA was created by the stirred and much shaken Eisenhower Administration in 1958. It led, in that period, to the US handily winning the space race by landing Neil Armstrong on the moon in May 1969, and meeting President John F Kennedy's May 1961 challenge to the American science & technology community and industry to do so by the end of that decade. The shock in a complacent Washington at China's successfully testing FOBS is as great as when a doubting US was rendered aghast at the Soviet Union's pulling off a Sputnik some 65 years ago.

We can now expect a full-fledged arms race in space to get underway with American companies being pushed, pulled, prodded and incentivised to, as soon as possible, have the US military not just field an array of FOBS, but also technology to neutralize hypersonic glide weapons able to home in on targets at 21 kms per second (Mach 5 to Mach 7 speeds) after transiting through space and re-entering the earth's atmosphere.

The Chinese FOBS occasioned the 5,000 km Agni-5 IRBM test, which was a sort of small, “me too” reaction by India. There's no parity, of course, because DRDO's hypersonic programme is having the usual kind of troubles with this tech relating to the design of the glide vehicle (for smooth reentry) as also with the propellant mix for the initial and terminal phases of hypersonic flight.

It may not be like for like, but Agni-5 is the only weapon available to India to blunt Beijing's tendency to show India up as a strategic nonentity and to prevent nuclear bullying of the kind the Indian army, in the conventional arena, routinely suffers at the hands of the PLA on the disputed border. Hence, the great mystery about the Indian government's reticence in showboating with the A-5. And why it is that these Agni's aren't regularly fired into the southern Indian Ocean after pointedly sending Beijing notices warning Chinese naval and merchant ships to keep off the designated target areas (whether there are any Chinese ships in the vicinity or not); the idea being to make a splash on the minds of Chinese strategists who are contemptuous of what they consider India's strategic pretensions.

At the heart of this tragedy is a wimpy Indian government. Consider the pattern: Talented and highly motivated missileers at the Advanced Systems Laboratory, Hyderabad, design and develop missiles of various kinds and associated weapons technologies only for things to come to a shuddering halt as Delhi dithers endlessly first on testing, and then on inducting and deploying these systems, thus keeping the country in a state of peril.

The reason the A-5 is a formidable weapon is its “guidance on chip” its unique selling point, that gives it extraordinary accuracy at extreme range. In the CEP (circular error probable) metric to assess accuracy of missiles, the Indian A-5 is as good as any missile in the world. In the event, the country should by now have had, quite literally, hundreds of these missiles conventional and nuclear warheaded, to provide flexible strike options to take out the most distant counter value or counter force targets in China.

Alas, test firings of the A-5 have been few and far between, and even though there are variants of the A-5, including one that is road mobile, the A-5 technology would gain refinement from many more and regular test firings. The strategic situation versus China is aggravated, moreover, by a low production rate of Agni-5s with its

numbers to-date in the arsenal constituting only a fraction of the desired strength. But at least the A-5 has some testing behind it.

They also remain relatively exposed owing to a marked deficiency of invulnerable mountain tunnel complexes to store and stockpile these Agni's and, in crisis, to trundle out into firing positions clear of the mountainous overhang. The tunnel complexes is was I had advocated during my time on the first National Security Advisory Board and then in my 2002 book Nuclear Weapons and Indian Security.

The equally indigenous MIRV (multiple independently maneuverable vehicle) technology that allows a single missile to carry several warheads and to fire them at widely dispersed targets has not been so lucky. Designed, developed and readied for testing as far back as 2001-2002, the MIRV design and tech has been collecting dust in ASL ever since. Three governments in the new millennium Vajpayee's, Manmohan Singh's and Modi's, have felt no urgency whatsoever to give the green signal to test the MIRV prototype!

More likely, as I have argued in my books, they have succumbed to American pressure to not test and induct this disruptive tech. Meanwhile, China took only a couple of years, from design to deployment, for its MIRV-ed missiles to enter the PLA strategic rocket forces' inventory. For details of the Indian MIRV tech, see my 2008 book India's Nuclear Policy. If all these factors were not liability enough, we have the Indian government whose lack of strategic intellect is shocking, if not surprising.

The collective ignorance of the phenomenon of nuclear deterrence and its dynamics in the highest reaches of the government, the military, in the bureaucracy, generally, and in MEA in particular, is a sad but costly joke at the expense of national security. It is evidenced in the statement issued by the Indian government following the IRBM test launch: "The successful test of Agni-5 is in line with India's stated policy to have credible minimum deterrence that underpins the commitment to 'No First Use'." !!!

This is on par with the endlessly repeated piece of idiocy mouthed by political leaders, military chieftains, and addle-brained diplomats alike that "nuclear weapons are meant for deterrence, not war fighting." These strategic-nuclear illiterates are also convinced, for instance, that India's gazetted doctrine emphasizing "massive retaliation" works even though the last two decades have clearly proven otherwise with even Pakistan mocking India's nuclear posture by continuing to play the terrorism card and by speedily building up its stock of tactical nuclear weapons whose first use pronouncements, it surmises and the record bears it out, clearly deters India from exploiting its conventional military edge.

Despite the examples of Kim Jong-un threatening to take out Tokyo and the mid-Pacific US military island base of Guam in response to Trump's talk of "fire and fury" that led to Trump slinking away and earlier, of China preparing to go with nuclear first use if the US tried to impose its military will, Delhi sticks with the simpletonish, one dimensional, view of the utility of nuclear weapons. Hence, the voicing of half-understood concepts like 'minimum deterrence' and 'no first use' from the Indian government and its representatives.

It has consigned the country to a state of permanent strategic disadvantage and left it with no means to leverage a more respectful Chinese attitude to India's national interest and its position on LAC, or to dissuade Beijing from pushing and pressuring this country at every turn. Xi Jinping and his team are by now only too aware that the Indian worm nuclear or otherwise, does not turn.

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### **The burial of Tipu Sultan, Mulla Omer & Dr. A Q Khan**

The burial of Tipu Sultan is described by many British Officers such as Lieutenant Richard Bayly of the 12th Regiment. According to Lieut. Bayly "I must relate the effects and appearance of a tremendous storm of wind, rain, thunder, and lightning that ensued on the afternoon of the burial of Tippoo Saib. I had returned to camp excessively indisposed. About five o'clock a darkness of unusual obscurity came on, and volumes of huge clouds were hanging within a few yards of the earth, in a motionless state.

Suddenly, a rushing wind, with irresistible force, raised pyramids of sand to an amazing height, and swept most of the tents and marquees in frightful eddies far from their site. Ten Lascars, with my own exertions, clinging to the bamboos of the marquee scarcely preserved its fall. The thunder cracked in appalling peals close to our ears, and the vivid lightning tore up the ground in long ridges all around. Such a scene of desolation can hardly be imagined; Lascars struck dead, as also an officer and his wife in a marquee a few yards from mine.

Bullocks, elephants, and camels broke loose, and scampering in every direction over the plain; every hospital tent blown away, leaving the wounded exposed, unsheltered to the elemental strife. In one of these alone eighteen men who had suffered amputation had all the bandages saturated, and were found dead on the spot the ensuing

morning. The funeral party escorting Tippoo's body to the mausoleum of his ancestors situated in the Lal Bagh Garden, where the remains of his warlike father, Hyder Ali, had been deposited, were overtaken at the commencement of this furious whirlwind, and the soldiers ever after were impressed with a firm persuasion that his Satanic majesty attended in person at the funeral procession.

The flashes of lightning were not as usual from far distant clouds, but proceeded from heavy vapours within a very few yards of the earth. No park of artillery could have vomited forth such incessant peals as the loud thunder that exploded close to our ears. Astonishment, dismay, and prayers for its cessation was our solitary alternative. A fearful description of the Day of Judgement might have been depicted from the appalling storm of this awful night. I have experienced hurricanes, typhoons, and gales of wind at sea, but never in the whole course of my existence had I seen anything comparable to this desolating visitation. Heaven and earth appeared absolutely to have come in collision, and no bounds set to the destruction. The roaring of the winds strove in competition with the stunning explosions of the thunder, as if the universe was once more returning to chaos. In one of these wild sweeps of the hurricane, the poles of my tent were riven to atoms, and the canvas wafted forever from my sight.

I escaped without injury, as also my exhausted Lascars, and casting myself in an agony of despair on the sands, I fully expected instant annihilation. My hour was not, however, come. Towards morning the storm subsided; the clouds became more elevated, the thunder and lightning ceased, and nature once more resumed a serene aspect. But never shall I forget that dreadful night to the latest day of my existence. All language is inadequate to describe its horrors. Rather than be exposed to such another scene, I would prefer many battles."

Mulla Omer

Mullah Omar was buried on 23rd April 2013. A freak hailstorm in Afghanistan damaged even more NATO helicopters than originally reported when the storm hit on April 23rd, military officials say. After the April 23 storm struck the air base at Kandahar, officials had said about 50 helicopters had been damaged by golf ball-size hailstones. But a British newspaper, The Guardian, reported Thursday it now turns out more than 80 aircraft were affected, with some kept out of action for more than three weeks.

The half-hour storm was so violent, the hail broke rotor blades, cracked windows and ripped the helicopters' metal skin, the newspaper said, adding a local military blogger reported three Afghans die. "The sheer number of airframe repairs required after the hailstorm provided five years' worth of experience for the airframe mechanics," Regional Command South, the coalition headquarters based in Kandahar, said in a release.

Dr. A Q Khan

An unexpected and unprecedented rain and thunder storm hit Islamabad precisely at 3 pm on 10 Oct 2021, the time set for burial of Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan. Cloud cover was so complete that it became totally dark and lights had to be switched on even outdoors. And such intense thunder and lightning has been seldom seen.

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## **Five looming global flashpoints**

By Tom Rogan

China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran pose enduring challenges to international peace. But five other possible flashpoints loom.

### **1) India-Pakistan in/over Kashmir**

Claimed by Pakistan, India's Jammu and Kashmir province has long been a center for terrorist activity. In early 2019, a major attack on Indian security forces threatened to provoke a war. Considering India and Pakistan are nuclear-armed powers sharing a sectarian and theological hatred for one another, the stakes of what happens in Kashmir reach far beyond the province's borders.

In recent weeks, the tensions have again spilled over. A number of migrant workers have been assassinated, forcing Indian authorities to relocate thousands of others into protected accommodation. Indian authorities blame an offshoot of the Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorist group. That matters because Lashkar-e-Taiba is a proxy of Pakistan's ISI intelligence service. The latest attacks also evince a measure of intelligence targeting that could indicate the ISI's guidance.

ISI-related tensions between Pakistan's politically powerful army and the civilian government in Islamabad might also give the ISI cause to stir up trouble with India. Tension is high. Pakistan says it blocked an Indian submarine from entering its waters last weekend. If attacks in Kashmir or beyond keep occurring and links to Pakistan

emerge, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will face pressure to retaliate against Pakistan. Side note: Kashmir is also home to a China-India military standoff over the contested Himalayan border.

## **2) Lebanon**

The Lebanese Hezbollah has a problem. Facing an economic implosion, soaring inflation, and collapsing supplies of fuel and other basic goods, Lebanese are enraged. They have called for a new government freed from the shackles of sectarian patronage networks that have long held power in Beirut. But Hezbollah and its geriatric Christian ally, President Michel Aoun, are blocking reform efforts. With the international community refusing to provide a much-needed financial bailout until political reform occurs, things seem set to get worse.

Seven Hezbollah supporters were gunned down last week while protesting against a judge investigating last August's Beirut port explosion. The risk is clear: As the economy worsens and hope evaporates, something will give. Some may come to see a civil war as the only way to alter the status quo. In 2021, the bonds of the post-civil war Lebanese state are fragile.

## **3) Turkey-Syrian Kurds**

Following a recent Kurdish attack on Turkish security forces in Syria, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is threatening a new incursion against Syrian Kurdistan. While Erdogan faces escalating pressure from Vladimir Putin (who dominates Erdogan) in relation to Turkish activity in Syria's western Idlib province, the unstable Turkish leader may decide to act regardless. Desperate to be perceived as a strongman, Erdogan's political base also revels in nationalist hatred of the Kurds. Amid growing currency weakness and inflation domestically, Erdogan may decide that laying waste to northern Syria will serve to rally the political troops.

## **3B) Turkey-Greece**

In 2020, attempting to advance his dream of a new Ottoman empire, Erdogan ordered energy surveys within Greece's exclusive economic zone. In response, the United States and France bolstered their support for Athens with defense commitments and, in France's case, shows of force in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. While Erdogan has pared back his surveys this year, he is stirring up nationalist and religious sectarianism against Greece. This is most notable on the divided island of Cyprus and along the land border of northern Greece and Turkey. Erdogan may miscalculate.

## **4) Serbia-Kosovo tensions**

Disagreements over vehicle license plate rules and smuggling might not seem to offer *casus belli*. Perhaps not when it comes to Serbia and Kosovo. Low-level skirmishes have broken out in recent weeks over just these issues. International peacekeepers have been deployed, but there's a real threat of new bloodshed in the Balkans. Pushed by its Moscow master, the Serbian government of Aleksandar Vucic seems keen to stoke the fire. Serbian officials are upping their sectarian rhetoric, painting the tensions as a sacred struggle for the honor of the Serbian nation and people. Historically, these circumstances don't portend well for peace.

## **5) Ethiopia-Egypt**

Not content with waging a generally indiscriminate starvation war against the separatist Tigray province, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed risks a separate conflict with Egypt. At dispute is Ethiopia's construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. Egypt and Sudan fear that the dam will deny them critical water supplies. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el Sisi has warned that "all options" are under consideration to resolve the crisis. Addressing the United Nations General Assembly last month, Sisi warned that the "river Nile has been Egypt's only lifeline throughout history ... [Ethiopia] has chosen unilateralism and a policy of imposing the *fait accompli*, which threatens the stability and security of the entire region." Egypt's military, especially in the most dam-relevant field of air power, is significantly stronger than that of Ethiopia. What if Ethiopia fails to make concessions? Will this dispute spark the first 21st-century water war?

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