

The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

February 2019



“Let us all work for the Greatness of India.”

- The Mother

Year 9

Issue II

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SUCCESSFUL FUTURE

(Full of Promise and Joyful Surprises)

Botanical name: Gaillardia Pulchella

Common name: Indian blanket, Blanket flower, Fire-wheels

Year 9

Issue II

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A Declaration

We do not fight against any creed, any religion.

We do not fight against any form of government.

We do not fight against any social class.

We do not fight against any nation or civilisation.

We are fighting division, unconsciousness, ignorance, inertia and falsehood.

We are endeavouring to establish upon earth union, knowledge, consciousness, Truth, and we fight whatever opposes the advent of this new creation of Light, Peace, Truth and Love.

— The Mother

(Collected works of the Mother, Vol. 13, pp. 124-25)

THE BALAKOT STRIKES: A TURNING POINT IN INDIA'S NATIONAL POLICY

The country has undergone massive changes in recent times, especially on the front of terrorism and national security. While the country saw an unprecedented terror attack in Pulwama recently, the subsequent response of the government has been equally strong. The Pulwama terror attack in Kashmir has been one of the worst attacks on security forces in the post-1990 history of Kashmir. Launched on a CRPF convoy using a high weight and intensity IED device and in the form of a suicide attack, it instantly killed the 40 CRPF personnel travelling in the bus.

The attack was claimed by none other than the Islamic terrorist outfit Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), whose leader Masood Azhar has made it his life's mission to wreak destruction on India. The JeM traces its roots to the Afghan Taliban, since Azhar fought with the Afghan mujahideen against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan during 1979-89. Azhar was arrested in Kashmir in 1994 for terrorist activities and was released when the Indian government negotiated to secure the release of the hijacked IC-814 Air India aircraft in 1999.

It was after being released from India that Azhar founded the JeM and became one of India's sworn enemies. The JeM has been, in the past, responsible for some of the worst terror attacks in India's history. It was responsible for the 2001 attack on the J&K assembly and later the 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament. It was also responsible for other major attacks such as the post-2014 attacks, including in Pathankot and Uri military bases. The Indian government has shared proof that the outfit is funded by Pakistan's ISI, even though it attempted to

assassinate Pakistani President, Pervez Musharraf, in 2003 and has been banned in Pakistan. The JeM's banning is a toothless paper tiger at best. For, Azhar continues to roam free and hold rallies and lectures in Pakistan without being listed as a terrorist by the UN 1267 Sanctions Committee on global terrorists.

When Pakistan decides to 'ban' terrorists, one should always know that it is mostly a hoax. The recent decision – after the Balakot strikes – of the Pakistani government to 'arrest' 44 terrorists, including Azhar's brother and son, has been rejected by India, since this was not arrest under the country's anti-terrorism laws, but simply 'preventive detention' which would soon enable them to roam free, much like Saeed has been allowed to in spite of 26/11.

One should also not be under the delusion that this was done to pacify India, solely. Besides dissuading India from taking military action, it was also done because of immense international pressure and scrutiny of Pakistan for harbouring terrorists and so that its name could be removed from the 'grey list' of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which could undermine its already poor economy's chances of further getting any investments.

None of these self-serving actions should satisfy India, since they mean nothing. India's quest for actually listing Azhar as an international terrorist in the UNSC 1267 Sanctions Committee remains unfulfilled. Such a sanctioning would be necessary to effectively clip Azhar's wings and freedom of movement. Hafiz Saeed's effectivity has been blunted, to some extent, after being listed as a terrorist. It is not, therefore, enough to globally ban terror outfits, since the individual terrorists can always start new outfits to escape any sanctions, much like Saeed started JuD and FIF, even though he himself needs to be in hiding.

However, due to the opposition by China in the UNSC, the listing of Azhar remains problematic.

The politics over sanctioning Azhar has also made India realize the futility of diplomatic measures alone. After the Pulwama attack and India's air strikes in Balakot, it is being brought home to the people of this country that diplomacy is, perhaps, the one of the worst and weakest methods to deal with terrorism. It is a good means to develop relations with other countries in the time of need, but terrorists can only be dealt with by directly eliminating them. India has been one of the slowest to realize this, and previous Indian governments have not only relied on international pressures and diplomacy after every terror attack, but have also known to commit the folly of negotiating with the terrorists themselves.

The Surgical Strike of 2016 marked a break from this trend, but the Pulwama terror attack in Kashmir has brought things to a head for India. Not only did the JeM openly claim responsibility for it, but also declared that they would stage more such attacks in the near future. The fact that several Kashmiri civilians are really Over Ground Workers (OWG) for terrorists and obstruct the work of the Indian military, does not help either.

With India being in such a situation, the use of force is an option that should have been exercised long ago, in the interest, not only of national security, but also national honour. This is finally dawning on the government, with a beginning having been made with the Balakot strikes by the Indian Air Force (IAF) – a significant progress over the Surgical Strike of 2016 also. The strikes in Balakot, deep inside Pakistan's undisputed territory, marks a watershed moment in the country's history of dealing with terrorism emanating from Pakistan.

The operation has been officially described by India as ‘pre-emptive non-military’ strike, underscoring that it was conducted on the basis of intelligence reports that indicated that JeM was planning more suicide attacks in India, rather than in retaliation to Pulwama.

Therefore, India had carefully calibrated everything – including the strategy to use a certain type of Israeli munition which pin-pointedly targets the main centres and leaves the buildings intact – to ensure that such a message goes out that would leave very little legitimate space for Pakistan to retaliate.

The air strikes in Balakot are important for several reasons, but the most important one is that it has firmly, for the first time, put India on an active path to end all compromises with terrorism and markedly raised India’s standing among the comity of nations, to the point that, besides others, even China refused to support to Pakistan in any military quest against India and made it clear that it was in Pakistan for economic development projects only.

Combined with the Surgical Strike of 2016 in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK), the Balakot air strikes have radically shifted India’s policy towards terrorism and towards Pakistan. ***It has also changed the national psyche, ensuring that there will be heightened public pressure to give a strong military response after every terrorist incident on Indian soil.***

A HISTORY OF WEAKNESS

The Balakot air strikes mark a watershed in India’s history of engagement with Pakistan-sponsored terrorism. Prior to Balakot, official India-Pakistan hostilities had not gone beyond the Line of Control (LoC) and Indian attacks – such as the Surgical Strikes of 2016 – have not gone beyond India striking the PoK.

Previous attempts to give a strong response to Pakistan's harbouring of terrorists who attack India has been extremely limited, as seen during the Kargil war, the 2001 border crisis and 26/11 attacks. ***In all of these much more severe previous national crises, despite bearing the brunt of terror in its very heartland, India inexplicably continued to treat the LoC as a 'sacred' line that Indian forces must never cross – their maximum and rarest reach being till the Pok at best.***

It defied all logic about why India would want to look at its own heartland through the lens of Kashmir – the Indian policy has, in the past, treated the terror attacks on the Indian soil as a part of the "Kashmir problem", not realizing that radical Islamic terrorists have, in words and action, made it a mission to wage jihad against India and that the illusion of political freedom for Kashmir is just a stooge. When terrorists are attacking India in Parliament and in Mumbai, it made little sense to continue to respect the 'sanctity' of the LoC. Yet, Indian policy has always done that in the past. It has bought into the whitewashing propaganda of Pakistan and the terrorists.

The so-called 'nuclear balance' that has prevailed in the region has prevented India from engaging in anything that might lead to the escalation of hostilities between the nuclear-armed states. But ***Pakistan has had no such boundaries or 'nuclear balance'. It has liberally used terror proxies in not just Kashmir, but all over India, to further its policy of 'bleeding India by a thousand cuts'. India's misplaced sense of moral responsibility towards Pakistani aggression, in the name of maintaining the nuclear balance, has been one of its worst and a self-defeating policies.***

Thus, in the quest to unilaterally respect the nuclear balance, after 1971, the use of air power has been severely restricted.

On the other hand, after being stung by India during the 1971 war, Pakistan accelerated its nuclear programme. Once both India and Pakistan conducted nuclear tests in 1998, India adopted a 'no first use' policy, according to which India, in the event of a war, will not be the first one to use its nuclear weapons for offensive attacks. Pakistan has not been bound by any such policy or morality.

The current Balakot strikes have brought home by their effectiveness and results – Pakistani capitulation and fear and international support and respect – that the doctrine of a nuclear balance has been a sham of sorts. It had instilled a false and misplaced sense of responsibility and hesitation in India, even as Pakistan accelerated the use of terrorists to attack India relentlessly. Apparently, therefore, India imposed a self-defeating policy on itself, in trying to appear moral and responsible in front of the world, while the entire international community, from US to Europe to Russia, turned a blind eye to – and even indulged – Pakistan's use of state-sponsored terrorism.

While the restrictions imposed by the nuclear balance have hobbled India, Pakistan has, consistently, since 1987, accelerated its venomous policy of gradually 'bleeding India by a thousand cuts' in which it has deployed the use of state-sponsored terrorists to attack the country. Terror outfits like LeT and JeM have operated in Kashmir with impunity and have, during the decade of 2000s, struck elsewhere in the country, the most notable being the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks in 2008. Despite this impunity and the clear evidence in all cases linking this terrorism to Pakistan, India has not responded with anything other than diplomatic pressure.

Worse still, India has, historically, stuck to the bogus narrative parroted by the Pakistani government and the Kashmiri terrorists' viz. the conflict in Kashmir has been a political issue, a struggle for self-determination by the self-designated separatists in the Valley. As a result, terrorists and their local supporters have been given legitimacy by none other than the Indian state, by using terms such as 'militants' and 'separatists' for them. Even though their affiliation to Pakistan was clear and there was evidence of many of these so-called separatists going to Pakistan – including the valorized separatists such as JKLF's Maqbool Bhat and others – to get training from Pakistan's ISI, yet, they were not only accorded security cover, but even entered into negotiations with by previous governments, be it the UPA or the Vajpayee-led NDA.

The result has been that, due to the failure of the Indian narrative and strong position, the rest of the world has started viewing them as 'freedom fighters.' ***In the same way, the problem with Pakistani aggressions has been treated softly by the Indian state, with kid gloves. There is no such thing as 'cross border terrorism' existing in a vacuum within the LoC zone. What the Indian establishment has, historically, termed as 'cross border terrorism' has been nothing short of 'acts of war' perpetrated by the Pakistani government using its terror proxies. These terrorists were trained in Pakistan and received arms and support from them, often, as is common knowledge, infiltrating into India during winters under the cover of shelling by the Pakistani army.***

Yet, the term 'cross border terrorism' by the Indian establishment has somehow unjustly ended up whitewashing the Pakistani hand. And never has India, till recently, given any strong response to these acts of war by Pakistan, except,

maybe, a diplomatic rebuke or two. Worse still, India has often termed these clearly state-sponsored Pakistani terrorists as ‘non-state actors’ – a fashionable iconography in International Relations, but applicable only to NGOs, not terror groups. This has always meant handing Pakistan an opportunity on a silver platter to absolve itself of its connection to terrorism.

Even when things came to a head during the 1999 Kargil war, Prime Minister Vajpayee refused to allow the air force to cross the ‘sacred’ LoC, to deal with Pakistani army’s brazen attempt to control vital positions on the Indian soil. In 1998, by releasing Masood Azhar during the IC-814 hijacking, the government provided unwarranted legitimacy to terrorist groups by initiating negotiations with them in the first place.

Yet again, after the Parliament attack of 2001, carried out by JeM, while armed forces from across the country were mobilized at the LoC, in the words of former Indian Navy Chief, Prime Minister Vajpayee refused to give a green signal to attack Pakistan, saying ‘Baad mein Baataynge’ (We will tell you later), thereby keeping the costly border status quo for over 10 months to no avail and then withdrawing after that.

After the 26/11 attacks, it was even worse. While the Manmohan Singh government had almost given a green signal to conduct air strikes in the LeT hub at Muridke in Pakistan, it withdrew subsequently due to political pressures. Like the governments before it, it confined itself to dealing with Pakistani proxy terrorism only through diplomatic and political means.

It was only with the surgical strikes of 2016 that a threshold of crossing the LoC was achieved, but even these were ground-based strikes and conducted across the PoK – a disputed territory. The Balakot strikes were a complete game changer.

They signal the use of air power by a nuclear armed state and have, moreover, occurred in what is an undisputed territory of Pakistan, much beyond the LoC and right in the region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa – and that too, without the IAF Mirage-2000 fighter aircraft crossing into Pakistani airspace, since the munition used, SPICE-2000 and AGM Popeye, have a range of 60-100 km and 90 km respectively.

They also set a new bar in sub-conventional warfare between India and Pakistan and a ‘new normal’ viz. the use of air strikes to continue destroying anti-India terror camps anywhere in the territory of Pakistan in the future as well.

The strikes mirror an effective policy that countries like US and Israel have been following for, at least the past decade and a half, in targeting and destroying terrorist camps in countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Palestine and Syria, the West-backed Saudi and Emirati alliance have also extensively used this in the ongoing Yemen war. ***The extensive use of pin-point airstrikes at terrorists – even by nuclear armed states – have made them a normal part of sub-conventional warfare. It is something which Indian governments had contemplated before but have never been able to execute, due to self-imposed weaknesses.*** Apparently, for political and illusory moral compulsions known best to past governments, India alone has been one of the last countries to catch up on this front.

THE HERALDING OF A NEW CHAPTER

Now that the Indian government has caught up and seems to have shed its past weaknesses, the initial results have been all the more effective. The Pakistanis’ flustered response to the Balakot strikes shows this. In a compulsive and face-saving retaliatory move, after doing its half-baked customary bit to

enter the Indian airspace and target India's military installations near the LoC, it has been trying its level best to press for de-escalation of tensions. It even went to the point of releasing the captured Indian Air Force (IAF) pilot, Abhinandan Varthaman, as a 'gesture of peace', to morally pressurize India to not strike back in a military response¹. Earlier, it had attempted to blackmail India over the pilot issue, which clearly did not work.

India has, till date, maintained that it will not engage in any 'peace talks' with Pakistan unless it takes action against terror outfits like JeM, based in Pakistan. Further movements have been visible, as in the preceding days, Pakistan has not just admitted that Massod Azhar is, indeed, in Pakistan and is terminally ill, but has also signaled that it might allow Azhar to be finally put on the United Nations Security Council 1267 committee sanctions list – a long standing demand of India. Likewise, in the past few days, China has been not only willing to discuss the issue beyond its fixed mechanical statement on the listing of Azhar, indicating that it might abstain during the UNSC vote to allow India's resolution to list Azhar to be passed², but has also refused to support Pakistan.

For the first time, all countries – US, France, Germany, Australia, China, Russia and Japan – have supported India

¹ The dogfight between Varthaman's Soviet era MiG-21 Bison and Pakistan's US manufactured advanced F-16 is another story that has become the stuff of air power legends, since a Soviet era aircraft felled a four times advanced US aircraft. The fight lasted 90 seconds and Varthaman's aircraft went down only after it felled the F-16.

² There have been media reports claiming that China might be willing to accede to India's demand to list Azhar, if in exchange, India supports China's bid for Vice Presidency at the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), since whoever is the Vice President automatically becomes the President. This is just being seen as a possibility.

strongly and unequivocally. Contrast this with the response after other major terror attacks in India – the 2001 attacks after which George Bush prevailed on PM Vajpayee to not take action against Pakistan, and, the 2008 attacks after which internal political pressures of a “secular” coalition run by the party and pressure by Barack Obama convinced Manmohan Singh not to take any action against Pakistan, not even the customary trade actions such as revoking of the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status.

Neighbours like Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Iran – who also have borne the brunt of Pak-sponsored terrorism – too have come out in full support. Iran has threatened to itself launch action against Pakistan’s terrorists, while Afghanistan has declared that the air strikes were long due and that India should have done it long ago. Bangladesh, till date, refuses to recognize the Pakistani envoy in Bangladesh, even as the post of Pakistani High Commissioner in Bangladesh has remained vacant since March 2018.

Last year in the meeting of Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC), thanks to the strengthening relationship between India and Bangladesh, the latter ensured that the OIC main statement had no reference to Kashmir – a break from the past 50 years’ tradition. This year, India, after a gap of 50 years, was a ‘guest of honour’ at OIC, despite Pakistan’s threats to boycott it and despite the Balakot airstrikes. This time again, the main statement of OIC had no reference to Kashmir, though, individual nations’ resolutions – which are non-vetoable – pressed by Pakistani envoys made sure that there was a customary mention.

These developments have been unprecedented. Not only do they put an unarguable seal on Modi government’s foreign policy, but has also shown that **the world respects only a strong**

power. The effectiveness of a foreign policy based on efficient soft power and assertion of hard power for national honour and security has also been borne out by the fact that Pakistan's card of playing victim and mobilizing the support of Muslim countries in the name of religion has not found any takers even among its traditional Gulf allies. The message is unequivocal – a country which treats itself as weak and bound by misplaced morals will be treated similarly by the rest of the world also.

As was borne out after Balakot, even China not only respects, but even appreciates the language of power, since for them nationalism is a thing of utmost importance.

One strong action by India has made a beginning in achieving what years of fruitless diplomacy had difficulty doing. The false narratives being pedaled by the opposition ranks in India and within some sections of media, who have doubted the casualties in the strikes and have asked for more 'evidence' is also a whitewash, for anyone who cares to make sense of the evidence that has been available from day one itself. These misleading demands need to be addressed.

CLEARING THE SPECIFICS

Not only is the quest for 'proof' dangerous, since it exposes India's capabilities and secret operations in a cheap public display that might be taken advantage of by the country's enemies,³ the naysayers have blinded themselves to the ample information already available about the February 26th IAF operations. By further asking for proof, Indians are essentially parroting the narrative fed by Pakistan, blinding themselves to the fact that

³ The government officials involved have clearly stated that, "It is for the political leadership to decide if it wants to release that imagery and make public what is a 'classified' capability." (Singh, 2019)

Pakistan has sealed off the madrassa within which the strikes took place and has not allowed any international media into the place.

Pakistan has shown them the nearby forest areas where there were craters and splintered trees, to peddle the ridiculous claim that the strikes caused no damage. Pakistani officials have taken the journalists to a hilltop at Jaba, where the pin-point, precision-guided IAF strikes never took place, while they have sealed off the real site.

The recent controversial Reuters report – on 6th March 2019 – that came out purported to show satellite images that the madarssa buildings which the IAF struck were still standing, even though Pakistani government has not permitted even a single foreign or domestic journalist to go inside the building and assess the damage or see the bodies of those killed.

The buildings would obviously still be standing, since, from day one, it was never the intention to destroy the whole building, but to strike pin-point targets viz. command and control centres inside the building – the damage had to be limited and specific. Without knowing the pre-determined objectives of the operation, the foreign media is peddling claims that do not fit in with any aspect of the operation.

It must also be noted that, at a time, when all countries, their intelligence establishments, our own forces – up to the highest levels – and our own intelligence, have validated that the purpose of the operations were on spot, foreign media – an often bought-out entity – is hardly the best source to quote, over original sources.

At the outset, let us understand the nature of the operations. The operations were pin-pointedly targeted at

striking select terrorist facilities within a madrassa through explosions that can take out targets and not have any effect on the nearby, surrounding areas. Thus, the IAF had targeted 4 buildings inside the campus of Madrasa Taleem-ul-Quran. Evidence is available in the form of imagery captured from devices which were monitoring the mission live.

Reconnaissance software such as the Israeli Phalcon Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) and the Netra Airborne Early Warning and Control System Aircraft (AEW&C) aircraft, deployed to monitor the mission, showed that no aircraft was within 100 km while the operation was carried out – and proving that the Pakistan Air Force was caught napping. These reconnaissance devices have their own data.

Most importantly, the entire mission was monitored and the damage assessment data recorded the Heron Unmanned Aerial vehicle (UAV). The government has not released the images or the ‘proof’ captured by the Heron UAV, since classified information of national security cannot be paraded for public consumption. Also, at a time when the Indian government, right after the strikes, gave Pakistan the space to de-escalate by terming the strikes as ‘non-military’, releasing the Heron UAV images would have defeated the whole strategic intention of the mission. None of this obviously means that the proof does not exist – the point is it has never been and should not be released, for the sake of national interest.

Imagery from the Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR), shows that the four buildings were hit by five S-2000 precision-guided munition (PGM) fired from IAF’s Mirage-2000 fighter jets. In addition to the S-2000 PGM, even the 90 km-range Crystal Maze Mark2 (or the AGM Popeye) missile was used for ensuring pin-

point accuracy and ***not causing any extra damage***. None of the missiles need to be vertically above the target to hit it. They have a wide range.

The S-2000 PGM is an Israeli munition that, as the term 'precision' in its name suggests, is not meant to destroy the whole building, but cause damage to a specific and isolated target only. The munition enters the building and explodes after a delay. It was meant to damage the command and control centers only and not even the whole of the building (Singh, 2019).

The entire operation was filtered and calibrated extremely carefully, from the beginning, and that calibration is being pedaled as a loophole to suggest that there was no damage. The target and the level of damage desired, and the munition used for that, has been achieved as set out. If the IAF had desired to cause greater damage, then they clearly would not have used the S-2000 PGM – the message to all is to look beyond the appearances.

Yet another important point is that ***the impact of S-2000 PGM does not leave craters on ground or splinter trees, as Pakistan has been claiming was all that was done. With the S-2000 PGM, there is no such possibility, since the munition goes inside the earth and then explodes, thereby causing a mound of earth instead (Singh, 2019). Since it is a 'precision' guided munition, this would happen at the site sealed off by Pakistan. One wonders what myth the neighbouring country has been propagating and some in India parroting by pointing to splintered trees and craters on the ground.***

Another important point about the S-2000 PGM is that ***it can be fired from a range of 60-100 km. Therefore, the IAF,***

while striking deep inside Pakistan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, did not cross the LoC to do so. While other IAF aircraft distracted the Pakistan Air Force (PAF), the main mission of the IAF, consisting of 12 Mirage-2000, which took off from Gwalior, had direct and clear access from the LoC to strike inside Pakistan.

But that the IAF did not need to cross the LoC to fire the S-2000 PGM sounds a death knell for yet another Pakistani myth that the IAF entered its airspace and then fled – dropping its payload in a forest – when intercepted.

Lastly, and most importantly, neither the Indian government nor the IAF claimed to have killed 300 terrorists. This was reported by the media, based on the strength of the target camps and was, therefore, a logical conclusion. According to latest information, on the night of the strikes around 80-100 terrorists were present. Importantly, some identities of the dead have also been revealed. An ISI colonel, Salim Qari, JeM trainer, Maulana Moeem, and, Pulwama suicide bomber's handler, were among those eliminated by the strikes (Banerjee, 2019).

No aspect of the Balakot mission – even from the basics that are available in the public domain – has provided anything even remotely to support the unfounded myths being propagated. The later statement issued by Jaish – in the form of an audio clip by Azhar's brother who ran the madrassa – directly contradicted and criticized the Imran Khan government and said that the IAF strikes had struck at the camp and would be met with retaliation.

The point is that the answers are clearly available in the technical details of the operation, and validate what the IAF chief has said all along – that the operation achieved the set purpose.

THE EJECTION OF THE WORST

However, far from presenting a united front, the country is getting divided further. The political divisions over something as important as national honour and security are spawning an atmosphere of sheer ill-will and disregard for the country. As we have seen above, India's weak historical policy vis-à-vis Pakistan and Pakistan-spawned terrorism has been a direct result of a vitiated national character and limitations imposed by the tendency to sacrifice everything – including the nation – at the senseless altar of secularism. It is certainly true of the previous dispensations that the Muslim vote-bank in India has made them completely oblivious to the concept of Islamic terrorism.

The extent to which our political leaders have compromised with the country's dignity to reach an understanding with terrorists and so-called separatists and even with Pakistan, has been a direct result of our culture being taken hostage by the false and destructive narrative of self-tormenting and self-doubting secularism. In our quest to appear moral and secular and democratic, our politics has reflected and spewed the worst kind of destructions. Evidently, as the increasingly venomous political reaction towards the Balakot strikes show, this is still the case. It shows that the country is set to go through a lot more hardships to purge it of the elements that have hobbled and haunted it.

The Balakot strikes have opened an important chapter in India's national security policy, despite the internal disarray. It has raised a bar on India's response to terrorism which would be difficult to redact by any future government. That bar needs to be raised even further till it is ingrained in India's psyche and national character that weakness is unacceptable. Till India

comes to a full realization of the Divine in the nation, our collective spiritual density will continue to elude us. It is clear that impediments continue to abound and more impact is needed for national awakening to become permanent and unshakeable. We have made a beginning now, as the Balakot strikes, for the first time, gave expression to the collective public will, which has otherwise been always sacrificed at the altar of petty, utilitarian interests.

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INDIA'S ROLE IN THE AFGHAN PEACE TALKS

The US announcement of withdrawal of American troops from Syria and Afghanistan wars – ostensibly on the ground that terror outfits in these regions, such as the ISIS in Syria, have been neutralized – has come as a rude surprise to various countries. Further, the spectacle of US negotiations with the Taliban to conclude the ‘Afghan peace process’ is deeply unsettling, as it betrays and throws cold water on whatever decisions and actions were taken since 2001, when US became involved in Afghanistan. While in Syria, ISIS has been neutralized and nearly finished in most regions, in Afghanistan, the US policy has been an abject failure.

Not only has the Taliban managed to increase its territory and population under control in Afghanistan – a clear indication of the US failure – but the short-sightedness of the US policy has not been able to do much about the rising ISIS threat in Afghanistan, which has been compounded after the decimation of ISIS in Syria. Despite the warnings by US commanders that ISIS is now capable of using Afghanistan to launch direct attacks on the US – as al-Qaeda had done during 9/11 – the Trump administration’s failed war is no longer compelling it to stay to further destroy these terrorists.

Source: Chughtai (2018)

Besides the increase in territory under Taliban control, which the US has failed in preventing despite its presence in the country since the last 17 years, the western allies have not even been able to cut off the major sources of Taliban's revenue viz. opium production and trade. Even though estimating that Taliban's operation of nearly 500 drug labs and collecting a 10% tax on opium production from farmers, have been key to their money supply, nearly 65% of their income, the massive strikes by combined NATO, US and Afghan army forces – nearly 200 since

2017 – have been unable to destroy them (Hennigan, 2019).

Not only this, but the Taliban's strength is visible from the fact that, over the last few years, it no longer has to illegally transport opium to foreign locations to process into drugs, but has managed to create its own cheap and cost-effective drug labs, mainly in southern Helmand province where the insurgency thrives.¹

That the US, despite its grand bombing campaigns using its most advanced aircrafts, has not been able to destroy the labs or cut off the Taliban's opium economy, shows its failures in the country. The spectacle of the most powerful US stealth fighter jets and strategic bombers dropping 250 and 500 pound bombs on cheap and insignificant buildings, is an irony and a powerful reflection of the failure of the 17-year long US war against terror in the region. Towards the last three months of 2018, the Trump administration ceased the campaign and fizzled out the number of bombings – an admission of failure.

Whereas the bombing campaign worked in Syria with ISIS and killed off their black oil market, the same thing failed in Afghanistan, since the drug labs here are cheaper and easier to rebuild, within three days, after they are destroyed, and are a small component of a bigger supply chain that the US has been unable to choke off. ***At best, the 2017 air strikes on opium factories in which the US boasted of destroying 50 barrels of opium coking at the time and worth millions of dollars, costed the Taliban no more than \$2863*** (Mansfield, 2018). ***For the same reason, it is being widely asked why the best US F-22 stealth***

¹ Taliban operates a \$200 million-a-year opium economy, which US has been unable to cut-off despite best efforts. The US has spent nearly \$9 billion in counter-narcotics since 2001 (Hennigan, 2019).

fighter jets, designed to defeat advanced enemy jets and costing \$35,000 per hour for a flight, are being used for cheap and rudimentary opium factories in Afghanistan, and failing even at it (Hennigan, 2019).

According to the latest quarterly report of the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), only 53.8 percent of Afghanistan's 407 districts are with the government, covering 63.5 percent of the population, with the rest of the country either controlled or contested by the Taliban (Al Jazeera 2019). It is no wonder than that Taliban is in no hurry to reach a deal with the US, even as the US wants to exit as soon as possible. Out of its 14,000 American troops stationed in Afghanistan, the US plans to withdraw 7000 troops in the next few months, while the exit can be complete not before 18 months. Besides the US troops, about 8000 foreign troops are also a part of the mission under NATO.

A COMPLICATED HISTORY

But, as the latest data shows, even the presence of foreign troops working along side the Afghan army has not been able to prevent the Taliban from expanding. The US had started its campaign in Afghanistan after 9/11, by enlisting Pakistan as one of its major allies in the war against terror. Afghanistan has been crucial to the US strategy since 9/11, as it had, during the 1990s, provided a safe haven to Osama Bin Laden and al-Qaeda and became the prime location for launching terrorist activity in the US. After the uprooting of Taliban in 2001 and the formation of a democratic government in Afghanistan under Hamid Karzai, Afghanistan has been heavily dependent on foreign troops to prevent the Taliban from rebounding. Evidently, these efforts have failed and now the region is nearing a point of crisis.

Afghan army has not been able to develop its independent capabilities during the last 17 years to the point of being able to deal with the Taliban alone. Neighbouring countries like India, Iran and China will not get militarily involved in Afghanistan as the stakes are too high. Iran has had a hot and cold relationship with the Taliban. Both India and Iran fought against Taliban during the 1990s as a part of the Northern Alliance, consisting of non-Pashtun Afghan minorities such as Hazaras and Tajiks as well.² The Alliance delivered results once its firepower was supplemented by the entry of NATO after 9/11 and the Taliban was pushed out. However, during the 1990s, Iran suffered heavy casualties inflicted by the Taliban. India, too, continues to suffer the consequences of the IC-814 Air India aircraft hijacking to Kandahar and the resultant liberation of Masood Azhar by India.³

Prior to India's support to the Northern Alliance and the Pakistani support to the Taliban, India did not have a very complicated relationship with the Afghan Taliban or the other mujahideen in Afghanistan. ***It was India's support to the Northern Alliance that sowed the seeds of hostility in the formal sense.***

China, on the other hand, has strictly kept itself isolated from partisan groupings in the region. In return for the implicit

² Afghanistan has a complex web of tribal communities and intense political factionalism and rivalries. The Tajiks and Hazaras, while a minority, have occupied important and affluent political and economic positions and cornered benefits, thus making them easy targets of Pashtun Afghan nationalism channelized by the Taliban. Besides communal rivalries, Afghanistan has an immensely fractured polity as well, with continuous making and breaking of political relationships since the 1960s, including within the ranks of Taliban.

³ Azhar's Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) traces its origins to the Afghan Taliban.

understanding that Taliban would not provide any support to the Chinese Uighur Muslims in its Xinjiang province, China has refrained from acting against the Taliban or other Pakistan sponsored terror groups in the region.

Iran, with the establishment of the near-permanent US presence in Afghanistan reversed its 1990s policy of fighting the Sunni Taliban. ***At present, Iran alternates between periodically supplying support to the Taliban in order to keep the US in check and at the same time, wants the Taliban's control to remain fragmented, since a powerful Sunni terror group in its backyard would spell disaster for Iran on yet another front.*** Therefore, it makes sense to it to have a fragmented political system in Afghanistan with power distributed unevenly across multiple power brokers competing with each other.

India, too, would want such an outcome. But ***whatever shape the final arrangement takes, India will have to accept that Taliban will be a part of it. In Afghanistan, it is not just the unpopular Ghani government that has been isolated from the peace talks between US and Taliban despite repeatedly pleading to be included, but India too is isolating itself.***

The Indian approach towards Taliban has been framed by Pakistan. Indian policy towards the Taliban since the 1990s has been guided by Pakistan's supposed control over the Afghan Taliban. However, in reality, and unofficially known to Indians as well, the picture is more complicated and calls for a much more nuanced approach. ***India's refusal to engage with Taliban should be based, not on any calculation, but on the simple fact that it is an Islamist terror network. But it should never view its interests in Afghanistan or dealings with Taliban (if any, in the future) through the bogey of a weak country like Pakistan.***

It is undeniable that Taliban, unlike other terror networks, is of such a nature that it espouses two aspects viz. its terrorist nature and roots and, at the same time, its loyalty to the Pashtun political cause and increasing ambition to control state power and gain international acceptability. Its size, shape, stint in running a government and rising sophistication makes its labelling more complicated than other networks like LeT, JeM and others. The Taliban has had a peculiar nature, unlike other terrorist organizations. It is not simply an Islamist terror network sponsored by Pakistan. It is a mix of ethnic Pashtun nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism and emerged very much from within the majority Afghan Pashtun ranks and, due to its independent tribal mentality, has never been fully under the control of Pakistan, much like how Afghans have historically been since centuries.

Containing Pashtun nationalism – antipathic towards Pakistan – is one of the major objectives of Pakistan, in which the country has not been successful in bending the Afghan Taliban to its will, despite having established a strong rapport with it.

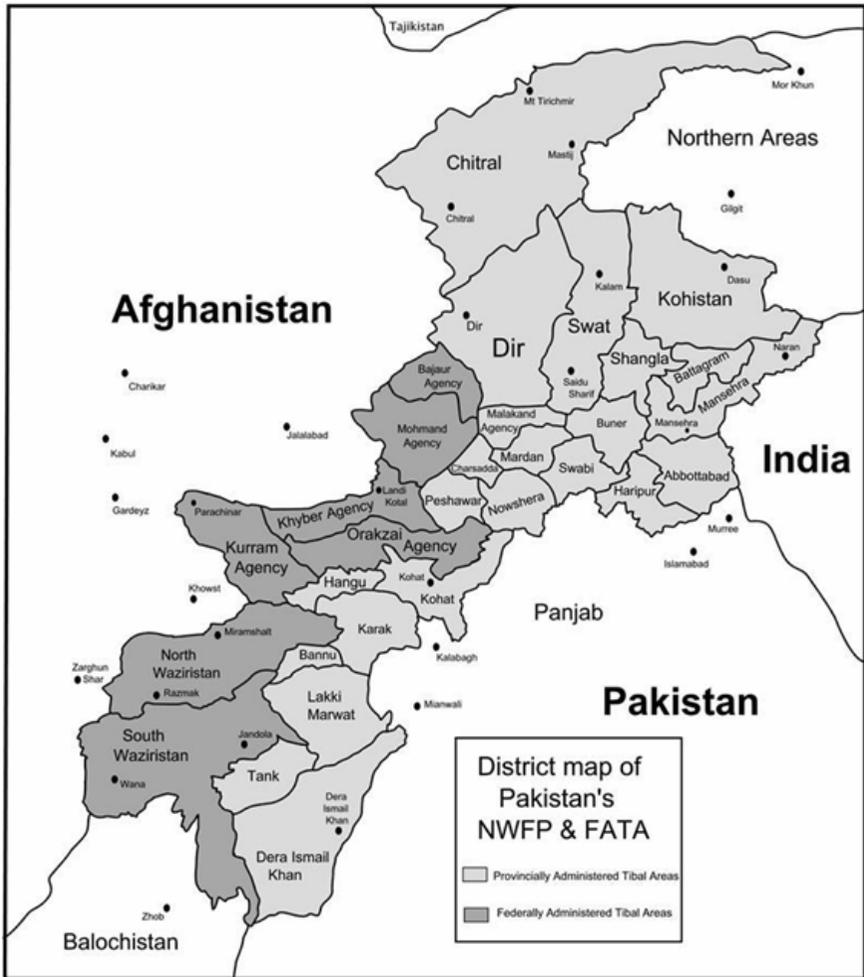
Taliban emerged out of the mutual, competing rivalries that broke out between various mujahideen factions of Afghanistan, who had together fought to expel the Soviets during the 1980s, thereby ending the Soviet rule which lasted from 1979 to 1989. In the process, the Cold War alignments ensured that these multiple Afghan tribal mujahideen factions received support from the US and its Western allies as well as from US's ally Pakistan.

However, once the victory was achieved and the puppet Soviet-installed Afghan President, Mohammed Najibullah, was removed, there broke out a power struggle between various

ethnic groups and mujahideen factions of Afghanistan. The US was also no longer active. Ahmed Shah Massoud – who would later lead the Northern Alliance against the Taliban – emerged as a powerful figure and had played a key role in ousting the Soviets.

However, in this early power struggle and mutual bloodshed, one of the Afghan mujahideen leaders, Mullah Omar led a band of students and formed the Taliban, which commenced an armed struggle to capture power and finally succeeded in capturing Kabul and establishing their rule in 1996. ***The Taliban has received moral and material support from Pakistan. However, Pakistan has not, especially, during the later years, been able to bend the Afghan Taliban to its will.***

Over the years, the relationship between Taliban and Pakistan has become even more fractured and complicated as has the nature of Taliban itself. ***Not only are internal factions of Taliban battling within themselves for supremacy and there are fundamental disagreements on policy between Afghan Taliban and Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), but even Pakistani forces alternate between battles and reconciliation between various factions of Taliban. The TTP – operating in Pakistan's North and South Waziristan under the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) – has launched persistent attacks on the Pakistani army and forces.***



Source: Agha et al (2010)

The supposed motive of TTP was to wage jihad in Pakistan against its alliance with the US. But the reality is much more than that. Under a scenario, where even if a peace deal is reached in Afghanistan, leading to a withdrawal of US and NATO forces, it is unlikely that the TTP will merge with Afghan Taliban and try to stake claim for positions in the Afghan power structure. Rather, the TTP – going by its current hostile relationship with Pakistan – will be emboldened to pursue a strategy similar to what the

Afghan Taliban pursued in Afghanistan viz. pressurizing the Pakistani state to share power with its members.

Significantly, the Afghan Taliban – in its immediate current form – does not have enmity with either India or Pakistan and continues to make the Afghan power struggle its focal point. The recent case in point would be Pakistan's threat that Afghan peace talks would be derailed in case India retaliates against the Pulwama attack. The Taliban denounced this and refused to take sides, maintaining that peace talks would go on, regardless of what happens between India and Pakistan.

Therefore, the TTP attacks on Pakistani forces have happened over the last decade despite the Afghan Taliban's disapproval, even as several key leaders of the TTP have, in the past, vocally proclaimed their allegiance to the mentorship of Afghan Taliban's Mullah Omar. Within its own ranks, the TTP leaders are constantly fighting over territory disputes, while battling the Pakistani forces.

Thus, it has been clear, for more than a decade now, that progressively, Pakistani intelligence forces have lost control over Afghan Taliban. This is especially so as, over time, Taliban has become more sophisticated and strategic and wants international recognition and a stake in power. Recent statements by Taliban emphasize that, unlike the Stone Age they had made of Afghanistan during their rule from 1996-2001, they are now open to issues like women's rights and rights of minorities like Tajiks and Hazaras.

More than these signals, from India's point of view, the Taliban has clearly indicated its position that it has no hostility with India, does not act at Pakistan's behest and is not seeking India's ouster from Afghanistan. Its problems with India have

centered around India's support to the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance and, later, to the Western forces in Afghanistan, and the perception that India is not simply undertaking development projects in the region but taking sides (unlike China which has remained neutral), thereby, making Indian embassy and agents targets for the Taliban on Afghan soil.

These facts were highlighted during a published interview with Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, in 2010. When asked whether Afghan Taliban and the Pak-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) were attacking India at Pakistan's behest, Mujahid stated that, "The Lashkar has no presence in Afghanistan and we have no links with it. ***Unlike the Lashkar which is focused on Jammu and Kashmir, the Afghan Taliban concentrate on Afghanistan. We have never taken part in any attack in India, nor do we attack anyone at Pakistan's behest***" (Outlook 2010).

He further stated that, "We favour neither India nor Pakistan. We can't ignore Pakistan as it is a neighbouring Islamic country and gave refuge to hundreds of thousands of displaced Afghans. Pakistan was on good terms with us when we were in power. India, on the other hand, backed the anti-Taliban forces of the Northern Alliance (NA) and refused to do business with our government...We are not saying that India should get out of Afghanistan. Nor can India be completely expelled from Afghanistan. ***The Taliban aren't in any direct conflict with India. India troops aren't part of NATO forces, they haven't occupied Afghanistan. India and Afghanistan have had historic ties. If the Taliban returns to power, we would like to maintain normal relations with all countries including India. It's possible for the Taliban and India to reconcile with each other.*** Our complaint is that India backed the NA, and is now supporting the Karzai government" (Outlook 2010).

This was the case even at the peak of Taliban rule in Afghanistan, prior to 2001, and when Pakistan had much closer relations with the then Taliban government in Afghanistan.

In an interview in 2001, Taliban's former ambassador to Pakistan, Abdul Zaef, had articulated the desire to have "normal relations" with India based on "non-interference" and to cultivate "diplomatic and commercial ties". He had also maintained, at the time, that Taliban-ruled Afghanistan's close relations with Pakistan "is never an obstacle to having good relations with anyone else" and that adversarial relationship between India and Pakistan "will not have an impact on Indo-Afghan ties" (Chandra 2009).

Similarly, in 2009, the earlier ***Taliban government's former foreign minister, Muttawakil, had stated that, "India should look at Afghanistan through its own lens, not through the Pakistani lens...one of India's biggest mistakes was to support the puppet Soviet regime in Kabul because the mujahideen were based in Pakistan...India's second mistake was not to recognize the Taliban...the Indian government should accept the presence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and support the peace process. After all, the Taliban are a part of Afghan society"*** (Chandra 2009).

EXORCISING THE PAKISTAN BOGEY

From these utterances of various Taliban leaders, during their rule as well as later, and from the complicated relationship between Pakistan and Taliban, what should be India's response to Taliban? At the outset, ***the misplaced idea that Pakistan is somehow able to exercise control over Taliban needs to be abandoned. India immediately needs to delink its engagements in Afghanistan from whatever Pakistan says or does, giving it an action-based response if at all Indian assets are targeted by Pak-based terrorists.***

The next question is should India engage with Taliban, in the light of the latter's wish to have relations of practicality with India? This is not at all necessary. It is true that most other countries, including the US, are engaging with Taliban, and Russia, China and Iran have adopted a purely transactional approach.

Even though Russia and Iran were a part of the Northern Alliance that was fighting against the Taliban, over the years, and presently, they have maintained considerable flexibility in their approach towards Afghanistan. ***India, on the other hand, till as recently as few months back, reiterated its position that it will support only an "Afghan-led and Afghan-owned" peace process and has refused to share the table with Taliban. Even when India finally capitulated and sent its retired diplomats to a conference in Moscow where talks with Taliban were convened recently, it declared that they were there only as silent partners and that India would 'not talk to Taliban'.***

Unlike China, Iran and Russia – none of who have sent troops to Afghanistan – ***India's opposition to Taliban is purely ideological and justified, especially since it has direct implications for India's own approach towards terrorism. Previous Indian governments have already committed a folly by giving recognition and legitimacy to Pak-sponsored terrorists, who torment Kashmir and other parts of the country. Bound by its misplaced sense of secularism and morality, previous Indian governments have sought to engage and negotiate with these terrorists and their funders in Pakistan. How can India do the same with the Taliban in Afghanistan, no matter how amenable the Taliban becomes towards India? At a time when the Modi government has radically shifted the country's Pakistan policy to signal zero tolerance towards***

terrorism, it would not at all be apt for India to officially open its channels with the Taliban. Unofficial and deft handling is enough to ensure that Taliban does not cause any damage to India in Afghanistan, especially since it is already favourably disposed towards India. The US is officially talking to Taliban out of compulsion, while China, Iran and Russia are adopting a purely transactional approach which neither sits well with the Indian vision nor with the current government's policy towards terrorism.

The work done by India in Afghanistan, in terms of civilian reconstruction and financial aid, has been immense, second to none and most appreciated by the Afghans, more so than the self-interested and mercenary approach taken by the Western allies. ***India should build on that, while ensuring that no troubles come on the Taliban front. No official contact with the Taliban is needed for that. But the bogey of Pakistan can be completely abandoned from the India-Afghan situation at this stage.***

While Taliban sheltered al-Qaeda, ***there is certainly scarce evidence of al-Qaeda or Taliban or other West Asian or Central Asian terrorist groups intervening in Kashmir, least of all at Pakistan's behest. To imply so would be giving Pakistan the kind of power it has never actually possessed,*** even in the Islamic world. Therefore, India neither needs Taliban nor needs to give attention to Pakistan in its new chapter in Afghanistan. It can ensure reasonable security without having to negotiate with the terrorists.

THE PRESENT PROSPECTS OF PEACE

From the history of India-Taliban equation, it is clear that reconciliation, excluding Pakistan, is not difficult. Since Taliban does not, officially, consider India as its enemy, India does not

need to officially engage with the terror outfit for any reason and should keep a safe distance from it. Thus, any future peace settlement between US and Taliban in Afghanistan should not pose a major threat to India, even after the US troop withdrawal from the region.

India will have to adopt a nuanced policy of balancing out its interests in Afghanistan, instead of handing it over to Pakistan on a silver platter. ***By looking at the region solely through the Pakistani lens, India is closing off its own doors of expansion in the region and, via Afghanistan, to Central Asian republics as well.***

Moreover, once the US troop withdrawal is effected, a number of other factors will come into play to supplement Indian interests and ensure peace and stability in the region. These include the changing dynamics within Taliban and its general openness towards India, the rising presence of Moscow in the region, the critical Chinese investment projects and the need of Iran to maintain a balance of power in the region to safeguard itself.

Russia is expanding its influence once again in Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, since the last several years. It mediates conflicts between the bordering states of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and has built a military base in Kazakhstan and plans to build another one, besides economic relations with these countries. This Russian presence will provide a degree of stability in the region and it would be in Russia's interests to avoid a lawless Afghanistan.

More crucially, ***for Russia, Iran and India, the operationalization of the 7200 km International North South***

Transport Corridor (INSTC) is of utmost importance, opening up lucrative trade routes between Russia and India via Iran. For India, the INSTC completely bypasses Pakistan and provides an alternative to China's BRI, giving India access to Central Asia and Russia through ship, rail and road networks along the route. Afghanistan is crucial to these links. It is India's gateway to Central Asia and beyond.



Source: Tehran Times (2018)

Ensuring stability in Afghanistan becomes critical to the stability of these developing trade routes and investment projects, be it the India-led INSTC or the China-led BRI. ***Much like the INSTC, even more important for India has been the operationalization of the Chabahar port since 2017, when the first shipment of wheat was exported from India to Afghanistan via Iran, completely bypassing Pakistan.***



Recently, Afghanistan dispatched, for export, truck loads of items, consisting of dry fruits, carpets, textiles, mineral products etc., with 23 trucks consisting of 57 tonnes of items – the first time Afghan-India trade has been facilitated by completely bypassing Pakistan. ***Not only does it offer a direct trade route between India and Afghanistan without Pakistani obstructionism, but is also 800 km closer to Afghanistan than the port of Karachi.*** Indian companies have already acquired mining rights in resource rich regions of Afghanistan, which earlier could not be realized into trade outcomes, since Pakistan did not allow India transit through its territory, but has now been made possible. Indian business activity around Chabahar and in Afghanistan is already picking up pace.

For Iran, Chabahar is important since it is a better option than the Bandar Abbas port which currently handles 85% of Iran’s trade, but, not being a deep water port, is unable to handle cargo ships of 250,000 tonnage and above, with such ships having to dock at UAE first and then transfer their cargo in

smaller shipments to Iran. Chabahar removes these problems, due to its wide capacities. At a time when Iran's relations with the Arab countries are at their worst and it has been hit with US sanctions, the country is looking to get its revenues in terms of trade and transit fees through the Chabahar port.

For India, the opening of these new trade routes are not simply an economic investment, but of immense geopolitical importance. Corridors like INSTC accord India a historic opportunity to accelerate its engagement with the Central Asian landlocked countries and Afghanistan to ever greater heights not seen before, thanks to Pakistan's persistent barrier. Even though, over the years, India has risen in position and stature in the world, various obstructions have kept it tied down to South Asia. The latest developments, centering around Afghanistan accord India an opportunity to expand its footprint and influence and have engagement even further.

Power fragmentation between multiple actors in Afghanistan would suit China, India and others the best. Till now, US was a convenient buffer, while Afghanistan's neighbours like India and China did not have to deploy military or take sides. With the US gone and in the event that no peace deal is sustained, the resultant terrorism and lawlessness will directly threaten China's borders near its restive Xinjiang province, which houses its Uighur Muslim population. It will also threaten China's immense BRI investments in Afghanistan and in the region as a whole.

As China is worried about Xinjiang, so India is contemplating the consequences of US withdrawal from Afghanistan for Kashmir. India calculates that ***with the US gone and with peace returning to Afghanistan, Pakistan will be able to remove its human terror resources from that country and***

unleash them comfortably in Kashmir. It does not even need the support of the Afghan Taliban – which is no longer a stooge of Pakistan – to do that. ***This is, in fact, India’s biggest concern – bigger even than Taliban coming back to power – in Afghanistan.***

However, there are other factors to ensure that the likelihood of a diversion of Pak-based terrorists from Afghanistan to India remains dim. For one, the current stalemate in the US-Taliban peace talks is mainly because of the fact that none of the involved powers – US, Russia, China or India – would countenance handing over a strategic and important country like Afghanistan on a platter to the Taliban, where it could make the US vulnerable again or launch terrorist activity. Therefore, the final arrangement in Afghanistan will have multiple layers of power and Pakistan may not have that easy a relationship as to divert all its terrorists to Kashmir. If in 2001 – at the peak of Taliban power and close relations with Pakistan – the Taliban government could send feelers to India to communicate, then in 2020, the situation would be much better and much more different.

INDIA’S POSITION IN THE WORLD

The most unfortunate aspect of the Afghan peace talks, from India’s perspective, is that India has, over the last so many decades, undermined itself to the extent of forgetting its own rightful place and role in the region and the wider world. It is tragic that India is viewing itself as a country with no stakes in Afghanistan, beyond the Pakistan problem. As a neighbour and a great power, India should have a say and an active participation in its affairs.

Centuries ago, India was the thriving centre of trade and

cultural exchange in the region, with Arabs, Central Asian countries, Persia, China and Indian Ocean island nationalities – until the gradual incursions of Dutch, Portuguese and English began to monopolize this trade, create exclusions and ultimately impoverish India.

That a country like India should have no presence or deeper linkages in the wider Asian region is an anomaly that India should rectify, at a time when even China is positively doing so through the BRI. For India to allow Pakistan to become such an insurmountable obstruction as to influence its relationships with countries beyond it would be a weakness and selfish politics on part of India. India cannot sacrifice national interest at the altar of superficial diplomacy.

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Nationalism – Our One Immediate and Practical Necessity

“With us today Nationalism is our immediate practical faith and gospel not because it is the highest possible synthesis, but because it must be realised in life if we are to have the chance of realising the others. We must live as a nation before we can live in humanity. It is for this reason that Nationalist thinkers have always urged the necessity of realising our separateness from other nations and living to ourselves for the present, not in order to shut out humanity, but that we may get that individual strength, unity and wholeness which will help us to live as a nation for humanity. A man must be strong and free in himself before he can live usefully for others, so must a nation. But that does not justify us in forgetting the ultimate aim of evolution. God in the nation becomes the realisation of the first moment to us because the nation is the chosen means or condition through which we rise to the higher synthesis, God in humanity, God in all creatures, God in Himself and ourself.”

– Sri Aurobindo

(Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, Vol. 8: pp. 84-85)