

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): An Analysis of the External Challenges

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Pakistan faced several external challenges of a complicated nature that could affect the CPEC project. Perhaps, the foremost challenge was the Afghanistan situation. The Afghanistan factor was therefore considered at first. Today's Afghanistan situation was proving a formidable challenge to Pakistan. The country was a mess. President Ashraf Ghani came into power in September 2014. His government was widely seen as weak, corrupt, and ineffective. Poor governance, and incapacity were the norm and not the exception in Afghanistan. Although the same can be said of the Nawaz government also. However, Pakistan was no failed state. America's longest war was now in a downward spiral as insurgents scored significant territorial gains; Afghan casualties reached a new high; political rifts between Afghan leaders hindered long-overdue governance reforms, and opium production increased by 43 percent compared with 2015 output. Meanwhile, security posed the gravest concern. Emboldened by their battlefield success after foreign troop drawdowns, the Taliban appeared "even less inclined to make peace and are likely to escalate violence to project power and seize more territory...one thing is certain: an abrupt reduction in US military and financial commitments would undo precarious gains and make Afghanistan, once again, Grand Central for international terrorism".ⁱ

Meanwhile, the Taliban and IS threats are on the increase and the Ghani Government couldn't get its act together. Plus, the possibility of a peace deal with the Taliban seemed to be remote. Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan remained strained. The Ghani Government alleged that Pakistan-based terror groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), the Taliban, JeM and al-Qaida target India's interests and goals in Afghanistan and pursue other objectives like creating sanctuaries and safe havens in tribal areas between Kabul and Islamabad. In Afghanistan, regional terrorist groups have cooperated with the Taliban based on their common goals and mutual interests. These groups included LeT, TTP, Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), al-Qaida and Lashkar-e-Islam, Sipah-e-Sahaba, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Eastern Turkistan Islamic movement. These groups pose a strategic threat to the security and stability of Afghanistan. In a

scathing attack on Pakistan last month, Afghanistan had said the killing of notorious terrorist leaders, including Osama Bin Laden and Mullah Mansour in "safe havens" in Pakistan, prove that it violated sovereignty of other nations. The Ghani government had accused "elements within the state structure of Pakistan" of facilitating most of the terrorist groups active in the region and had warned that a country using "good and bad terrorists" against each other is "playing with fire".ⁱⁱ To many Afghans, the roots of their country's problems were in Pakistan. The role of Pakistan's ISI support of some elements in the Taliban has been well documented by now. It's hardly a secret that the HQN and the Quetta Shura operated from safe havens inside Pakistan.ⁱⁱⁱ

Meanwhile, the Afghanistan peace talks were at a dead end with no hopes of starting in the immediate future. Earlier, the Quadrilateral Coordination Group had been discussing a roadmap to peace talks, and even that process had been off to a sputtering start. In April 2016, a Taliban delegation in Pakistan said it was ready to meet with officials. The Afghans refused to take part, and accused Pakistan of refusing to use its influence over the Taliban to push for peace.

Pakistan's relations with both the United States and Afghanistan have been further strained because of these incidents. Peace talks in Afghanistan have been stalled. Pakistan's involvement in any peace talks is key, and that would require a shift in Army policy that was not forthcoming.

Given the political, economic, and security situation playing out right now, the Taliban has little incentive to talk, and rather more to take advantage of the chaos. The Afghan government was also so consumed by its multiple crises that it is in no position to push for negotiations.^{iv}

Pakistan expects the current stalemate in its ties with Afghanistan to continue after recent efforts to repair the strained relationship received a lukewarm response from across the border. The decision by the two countries on June 24 to set up a high-level 'bilateral mechanism' to discuss matters related to border management and security renewed hopes the two neighbors would overcome the strains in their ties. However, since then there has been no forward movement. The plan to set up a bilateral mechanism headed by the foreign ministers of Pakistan and Afghanistan was agreed upon last month after troops from the two countries clashed over the new border rules Islamabad started enforcing at Torkham. Pakistan was particularly upset at the tirade launched by the Afghan leadership, including President Ashraf Ghani, who used his speech at a recent NATO summit to blame Islamabad for the mess in his country. President Ghani accused

Pakistan of continuing to distinguish between ‘good and bad’ Taliban. Afghan Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah made a similar charge by suggesting that “sanctuaries of terrorists still exist in the neighborhood. This pattern shows that Afghanistan was not keen to engage with Pakistan.v

The Pakistan Army had now moved to tighten controls along a porous border with Afghanistan. Pakistan’s building of fences and fortifications has triggered cross-border skirmishing in the past. And it has periodically shut the border when it wanted to express annoyance at Afghanistan. On May 10, 2016, the border was closed for four days after Afghan forces blocked Pakistan’s efforts to erect border fencing. But this time passport controls look set to become permanent. Officials promise to extend them to the six other border crossings in due course.

Pakistan’s Army insists that tighter controls are a security measure, unrelated to the region’s power politics. The Army believes that three terrorist attacks in and near Peshawar, including the gruesome slaughter of more than 130 boys at the city’s Army Public School, involved terrorists who had freely crossed into the country at Torkham. Demands that Afghan refugees, some of whom have lived in Pakistan since the Soviet invasion of the 1980s, return home have grown louder.vi

On June 1, 2016 for the first time, Pakistan imposed full border controls at Torkham near the Khyber Pass, used by around 15,000 people daily. For Afghanistan, the closure inflamed the conflict over the Durand Line, which defined the border. The first meeting of Pakistan Afghanistan joint technical working group on border management and related security issues will be held in Kabul on July 26. The meeting of the group will be held under the high-level consultation mechanism for coordination. Pakistan delegation to this meeting will be led by Director General Military Operations and include representatives of the concerned ministries and departments. Adviser to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz and Afghan Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani had agreed to constitute an elevated level bilateral mechanism at the level of Foreign Ministers that would also include two National Security Advisers. It was decided that the mechanism will also have a joint technical working group to deal with the mutual concerns.vii In a sign of strained relations there was a media report that Pakistan had ‘punished’ landlocked Afghanistan for signing deals for wheat flour imports with India, Tajikistan and Iran by “temporarily suspending” its own supplies that traders had committed and contracted earlier. Reports from Kabul and Peshawar say Afghanistan faced acute shortage of

wheat. The Pakistani traders have told their government that they feel competed out because India, they allege, subsidizes its exports. The export of flour from Pakistan to Afghanistan was suspended temporarily on July 12 after Afghan authorities increased custom duty on the commodity along with signing an agreement with India for import of wheat and flour.viii

Meanwhile, Afghanistan was facing a political crisis and the Ghani Government was plagued by internal bickering. It had been unable to stem the loss of soldiers or persuade the Taliban to enter peace talks. President Ghani have yet to ease tensions among ethnic groups and crackdown on corruption. ix. Factions within the Ghani government were squabbling over reforms meant to decentralize power. The economy had also weakened and Afghanistan was also faced with a refugee crisis and a sharply deteriorating security situation. This was mainly due to the massive return of the Taliban and the expanding activities of Islamic state and other Jihadist groups which led to a tremendous increase in terrorist attacks leading to an extraordinarily elevated level of civilian casualties. x Even after years of training and billions in U.S. spending, Afghan forces are not yet ready to stand alone. xi The US troops in Afghanistan will again take on a more robust and offensive posture, which will most likely result in more combat missions. Earlier, at NATO's summit in Warsaw, Poland, the alliance renewed its commitment to the Resolute Support mission and agreed to fund Afghan forces until 2020. President Obama had previously said he wanted to cut the 9,800 U.S. troops currently in the country to 5,500, but decided recently to maintain a force of 8,400 through the end of his presidency in January 2017.

Previously, President Obama's had also decided to grant expanded powers to the Resolute Support commander, Army Gen. Nicholson, allowing the general to authorize offensive strikes against the Taliban. Gen Dunford said that "When all of those things align and the Taliban figure out that they have no chance of winning on the battlefield then the prospects of reconciliation will increase." xii

Meanwhile Pakistan-Afghanistan relations remained problematic as they were determined by deep mistrust, suspicion, persisting resentment which had contributed to political deadlock and conflict in the whole region. The Afghan Government had routinely accused Pakistan of sponsoring the Afghan Taliban. Pakistan had long rejected accusations that it had provided support and sanctuary for the Afghan Taliban and its leaders, saying it had for years itself been a victim of terrorism, much of it from groups based in Afghanistan. It was alleged that Pakistan's

"double game" – in which the country serves simultaneously as a military partner of the United States. and a patron of its enemies – has been evident since the very beginning of the war in Afghanistan. But only recently, following the withdrawal of most U.S. forces from Afghanistan, had the United States seriously begun to consider withholding substantial amounts of aid from Pakistan over its alleged double-dealing.

Ultimately, the best reason given by many in United States to cut aid to Islamabad was Pakistan's extensive and longstanding support to radical Islamist groups that have been responsible for the deaths of countless U.S., Afghan lives.^{xiii}

In response, the Pakistan Army was increasingly adopting an aggressive policy with Afghanistan which it accused of playing a "blame game" instead of cooperating effectively to stop terrorism. Pakistan's critics had alleged that it supports Islamist militants in Afghanistan to maintain influence and counter attempts by arch-rival India to gain a foothold, effectively surrounding it. ^{xiv} Pakistan Army believed United States was fighting an unwinnable war in Afghanistan and that time was on the its side in the country.

Pakistan also blamed Afghanistan for the failure of the peace process to go anywhere. A spokeswoman for the Pakistani government cited the "absence of a national consensus in support of the reconciliation process," as well as the "worsening security situation, corruption and other administrative problems." The United States however believed that the Taliban and their unyielding allies are to blame as well. In June, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, leader of one militant Islamist faction, demanded that the Kabul government send all foreign troops home and disband itself. Ironically, he was America's (and Pakistan's) primary ally during the war against the Soviet Union, despite (or because of) his reputation for pathological brutality and leadership of Afghanistan's drug trade. So much for grateful allies.^{xv}

The Pakistan Army believed that Pakistan was being scapegoated by Afghanistan while it wasn't itself doing enough to secure the border. for all the wrongs of the Afghan war, Pakistan has lately taken new measures to strengthen security along its 2,600-kilometer border with Afghanistan, including construction of new check posts at eight established crossing routes, saying it would help counter terrorist movement on either side. The project, however has enraged Afghan authorities who dispute the border being an international frontier.

Recently, return of Afghan refugees became a political issue between Pakistan, US and Afghanistan. There are 1.5 million legally registered (and another 1.5 million living there illegally). Pakistan was now publicly pushing for Afghanistan to take many refugees back, even if that meant putting them in camps on the Afghan side of the border.^{xvi} Although Pakistan has extended Afghan refugees stay for six months until December 2016, Islamabad's stance on the issue had hardened in recent times. Pakistan has alleged that the refugee camps were being for subversive activities. ^{xvii} Pakistani Army said they need to return the refugees as part of a "border management program. However, Afghanistan wasn't now prepared to embrace a large influx of Afghan immigrants from neighboring nations, given the security problems and lack of resources.

But there are signs that the threat of forced mass repatriations may be mostly a rhetorical salvo in the complicated political game between Pakistan and the United States over Pakistan's role in the ongoing Afghan conflict. The United States now visualized Pakistan as a hindrance to peace negotiations with the Taliban and was trying to put pressure on the Pakistan Army. In turn, Pakistan Army was using the refugees as pawns to remind the United States of its essential role in the region as it seeks more foreign military aid and a dominant hand in shaping the peace talks.

The issue has already created new tensions along the Afghan-Pakistan border, where fighting has broken out several times since Pakistan tightened security after Mansoor's killing and troops tried to erect a new gate at the busy main border crossing Pamela Constable in her Pakistan uses 1.5 million Afghan refugees as pawns in dispute with U.S., published in The Washington post on June 17, 2016 stated that:^{xviii}

The Pakistan Army had now claimed that it would follow a pragmatic policy on Afghanistan and would end support to the Afghan Taliban's sanctuary inside Pakistan.^{xix} Most probably, the Pakistan Army will continue the old policy of supporting the HQN and the Quetta Shura and try to seek a friendly Afghanistan government to counter Indian influence in the region. This was part and parcel of a policy of maximizing Pakistan's influence in the region and minimizing that of India, an arch enemy. The Pakistan Army believed that the country was threatened from arch-rival India which was bent on making mischief in the region. Pakistan had no choice but to take measures to secure itself against the menace of India. This policy had long been an obsession for

Pakistan's Army. However, Pakistan Army faced a predicament because of its very narrow view of regional situation seen through the prism of national security only and missing out the complexities of global and regional politics. Thus, the Army saw the regional situation as a zero-sum game only and was also obsessed with India's enmity. It sees Indian advancements in Afghanistan as necessarily detrimental to Pakistan's national interests, so defined by the Army itself. The Army believed that India was using Afghanistan's soil to stage terrorist attacks inside Pakistan and that the US and Afghanistan government was tolerating the TTP which was involved in terrorist activities inside Pakistan. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan blame each other for supporting terrorism in their countries. Thus, the Army remained convinced that development and support of proxy forces like the HQN and Quetta Shura was in Pakistan's best interests. Pakistan was playing a double game like India and Afghanistan. It was unlikely to stop playing this game due to the Army's perceived national interests. Pakistan's relations with both Afghanistan and the US will remain strained. The Army mindset insists on continuation of the policy as it sees Pakistan under perpetual threat from arch enemy India. Perceptions matter as it shapes reality and in the Army thinking Indian aggression is a constant factor. The situation is complex because there is some truth in allegations of Indian interference inside Pakistan, Afghanistan was indeed a staging area for Indian interference in Baluchistan in support of the insurgency in the province. India had also supported the MQM terrorism in Karachi in the last decades which had all but destroyed the peace of the city. However, due to the weakness of Pakistan's foreign policy establishment it couldn't convince the world on the blatant Indian interference in supporting terrorism in the country. The Army considered itself as perhaps one of the best institutional fighting forces in the world that can certainly take on India in any fight for regional influence.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan had become a waste basket cause and an example of bad planning and poor governance. The Ashraf Ghani government in Afghanistan was a grave failure. Corruption, ineffective governance, and incapacity are the norm and not the exception in Afghanistan. Although the same can be said of the Nawaz government also. But Pakistan is no banana republic. Given its large nuclear arsenal, it is one of the strongest military powers in the world. Developments on the ground suggest that fighting, in some shape or form. Meanwhile, after successful military operation in Pakistan the TTP command had fled the country and amassed in neighboring Afghanistan. The TTP was under Afghan state and warlord patronage. While

Afghanistan Ambassador Zakhilwal's latest admission that the TTP was based out of a part of Afghanistan over which the state has no jurisdiction is a sobering reminder of the limits of state capacity, neither United States nor Afghanistan was willing to seriously take on the TTP hunkering down in Afghan provinces.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan were going nowhere. Pakistan broke with past policies and shared intelligence and made overtures to Afghanistan which wasn't reciprocated by the Afghan side. Kabul will also have to scale up ongoing operations against TTP militants sheltered by the Afghan state.^{xx} Meanwhile, the war raged on in Afghanistan. Seemingly, the Taliban about to make a final push to capture Kandahar and Kunduz. The IS was also infiltrating in the east of Afghanistan which threatened to submerge the entire region, not only Afghanistan, in further turbulence and conflict.^{xxi} Last year, the Taliban captured a provincial capital for the first time since their hardline Islamist government was toppled by a U.S.-led invasion in 2001.^{xxii}

Today, Afghanistan was weak and unstable as result of bad governance, government corruption and the prolonged conflicts. It was threatened with further instability because of threats from the IS and a resurgent Taliban. The instability in Afghanistan can threaten Pakistan as well.

Meanwhile, CPEC was threatened by the nexus of India and Afghanistan against Pakistan which was now simultaneously fighting on two external fronts. Pakistan's foreign policy needed a serious rethink now. It was dangerous for Pakistan to continue supporting the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani Network because it will keep Afghanistan destabilized. And an unstable Afghanistan means unstable Pakistan which had obvious implications for CPEC.

Earlier, on May 21, 2016, a U.S. drone strike killed the leader of the Afghan Taliban, Mullah Mansour in Baluchistan, Pakistan. Many in the US were convinced that the drone strike was evidence of Pakistan's longstanding support for terrorist groups. General Raheel expressed Pakistan's serious concerns over the drone strike. He denounced "such acts of sovereignty violations" as "detrimental to relations and counter-productive for the ongoing peace process." He reiterated that US drone attacks were regrettable and must stop as they were a threat to the sovereignty and security of the country. The COAS further said border management with Afghanistan was also improving, and now the responsibility lies with Afghanistan as there are fewer check posts on the other side."^{xxiii} On June 6, 2016 the Army again stated that because of the drone strike, the trust between Pakistan and the United States had been affected and that the

drone strike had also affected Pakistan's sovereignty. The Afghan reconciliation process had also been impacted in a negative way due to the drone strike on May 21. xxiv The leadership resolved to protect the country's core national interests and effectively counter negative external influence.xxv Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar said some countries were conspiring against the CPEC, but vowed that no world power would be able to sabotage the project.xxvi

On July 23, 2016 two explosions rocked a peaceful demonstration in Kabul in which 80 were killed. The Islamic State claimed responsibility. The attack puts further pressure on President Ashraf Ghani's struggling government. As it tries to build momentum by introducing reforms, Ghani's coalition government had struggled with infighting and meeting deadlines to hold parliamentary elections. xxvii Meanwhile, the 14-year war against the Taliban in the countryside is as bloody as ever. While the Taliban is the dominant insurgent force in the central Asia country, IS has been establishing a presence. Earlier, U.S. President Barack Obama announced on July 6 that he would drawdown of the 9,800 troops supporting the Afghan country because of the precarious security situation, including the emerging threat from IS.

In 2015 and first half of 2016, 38 Americans, both civilian and military, have died in the country. Then President Obama had noted the United States was no longer engaged in a major ground war as it was in 2009 when he took over with plans to end American involvement, but he said, "Afghanistan ... remains one of the poorest countries in the world. It is going to continue to take time for them to build up military capacity that we sometimes take for granted. And given the enormous challenges they face, the Afghan people will need the partnership of the world, led by the United States, for many years to come."^{xxviii} In July 2016 Afghan President Ashraf Ghani had announced a major assault against fighters loyal to the IS group, who over the past year captured positions along Afghanistan's eastern border with Pakistan, mainly in Nangarhar province. That goal to uproot IS from Afghanistan had taken on new urgency in the wake of a deadly suicide bombing of a protest march in Kabul that killed at least 80 people. The IS had claimed responsibility for the attack, the first IS attack in the Afghan capital and one of the deadliest ever to hit Kabul.^{xxix} In July 2016 the Taliban forces had dominated the battlefield and the IS group has been building a foothold — and that has meant mounting losses among Afghan troops. Casualty numbers are not officially released, but according to figures provided by military officials, at least 5,000 troops were killed in 2014, rising to more than 6,000 in 2015.

Deaths were still higher in 2016. President Obama's directives, issued in June 2016, enabled the U.S. military to work alongside Afghan forces in the field on offensive missions against insurgents, though still in a non-combat role. Since 2014, their role was confined to battles in which the Taliban directly threatened U.S. and NATO forces. In a further acknowledgement of the deteriorating security situation, President Obama this month pledged to keep 8,400 troops in the country through 2017. Afghanistan's government and military also received a boost at NATO's summit in Warsaw this month, when the alliance agreed to fund Afghan forces through 2020.

In 2016, the Taliban had stepped up the fight, deploying more men and weapons than in previous years and expanding to new parts of the country, spreading Afghan forces thin. Their temporary seizure of Kunduz city and several districts unnerved the Afghan population. Meanwhile, there were internal leadership squabbles following the killing of leader Mullah Akhtar Masood in a U.S. drone strike in May 2016. Masood's replacement, the conservative cleric Haibatullah Akhundzada, was a weak leader with limited access to funding. The Taliban's strategy under Akhundzada had not yet become clear.

In July 2016 Afghanistan plans for a military offensive in coordination with U.S. troops against the IS have become more urgent as the country marked Sunday a national day of mourning for 80 people killed and 230 injured in Kabul's worst attack in 15 years. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani recently announced a major assault in the Nangarhar province along the country's eastern border with Pakistan. Then President Obama issued a directive in June allowing the U.S. military to work with Afghan forces on non-combat missions. About 9,800 U.S. troops are in Afghanistan. Obama pledged this month to keep at least 8,400 troops in the country through 2017, which delayed plans to drop to 5,500 by the end of this year.

The military situation is deteriorating. While official casualty totals aren't released, military officials said 5,000 Afghan troops were killed in 2014, more than 6,000 were killed in 2015 and the pace is running 20% higher this year.^{xxx}

Afghanistan's security situation was described as "precarious" by United States President Obama on July 6, 2016. He had announced that he will draw down troops to 8,400 by the end of his administration, a remarkable change from the initial target of 5,500. Now, there are around 9,800 soldiers deployed to fight supporting the Afghanistan government in its struggle against

the Taliban, Haqqani Network (HQN), al Qaeda and the Islamic State. Also, President Obama's allowed more aggressive U.S. military action in support of Afghan combat operations against the Taliban. The decision was welcomed by Afghanistan.^{xxxii}

Present Situation

Afghan forces had struggled against a resurgent Taliban in the past years. It had lost territory and suffering record casualties, while American strategy on the conflict was mostly considered stagnant here. The Taliban now controlled vast tracts of the Afghan countryside and threatens several cities. The commander of American and NATO forces in the country had asked for thousands of more troops to be deployed in the country to assist Afghan forces. The new Trump administration was reviewing its options in Afghanistan in the face of a resurgent Taliban.

Lately the international community had expressed increasing concerns about the deterioration of security in Afghanistan since large numbers of international security forces withdrew from the country in 2014, and its interest in benefiting from a reconstructed Afghanistan. Last year, the Taliban controlled up to 70 districts (out of the country's 398), unexpectedly even including Kunduz for a brief period. The Taliban's 2016 "Spring Offensive" – a series of attacks the group launches each year after the end of winter – included a major bombing in Kabul in April, which killed and injured more than 400 people. In June, security guards at the Canadian embassy in Kabul were attacked; in July, the Taliban drove a truckload of explosives into a foreign military facility; in August, militants stormed the campus of the American University of Afghanistan in Kabul.^{xxxiii}

In early January 2017, the Marine Corps Times reported that Afghan forces seek to rebuild, following an exhausting 2016 fighting season; 33 districts, which are spread across 16 Afghan provinces are under insurgent control whilst 258 are under government control and nearly 120 districts remain "contested".^{xxxiiii}

On February 9, 2017, General John W. Nicholson, Jr. told Congress that NATO and allied forces in Afghanistan are facing a "stalemate" and that he needed a few thousand additional troops to more effectively train and advise Afghan soldiers. Additionally, he also asserted that Russia was trying to "legitimize" the Taliban by creating the "false narrative" that the militant organization has been fighting the Islamic State and that Afghan forces have not, he asserted Russia's goal,

was “to undermine the United States and NATO” in Afghanistan. However, he said that the area in which Islamic State fighters operate in Afghanistan had been greatly reduced. A U.S. Special Forces soldier was severely wounded that day when the base he was at was attacked in Helmand province, raising the number of U.S. troops injured in combat nationwide so far, this year to at least 6, Nicholson indicated the soldier was wounded in Sangin. The Military Times reported that on February 26, 2017, a USAF airstrike that killed the Taliban leadership commander Mullah Abdul Salam in Kunduz province in a joint operation with Afghan security forces. The airstrike marked a renewed strategy by U.S. forces under the Trump administration to remove the Taliban leadership/commanders from the battlefield. The Obama administration strategy had focused much of its efforts in pushing reconciliation between the Taliban and the central government of Afghanistan; although in June 2016, to turn back the tide of Taliban gains, President Obama changed the rules of engagement to give U.S. commanders more flexibility to provide airstrikes and ground support to struggling Afghan forces, if those efforts were perceived to provide “strategic effects.” It made a concerted effort to kill high profile al-Qaeda and Haqqani terrorists-groups officially designated as terrorist organizations by the U.S. State Department-while attempting to draw down U.S. and NATO forces in the region, having a tangible success. In April 2017, the Washington Post reported that Captain Bill Salvin, a spokesman for NATO's mission to Afghanistan that Afghan and international forces had reduced IS controlled territory in Afghanistan by two-thirds and killed around half their fighters in the previous 2 years. Since the beginning of 2017, 460 airstrikes against terrorists, with drone strikes alone killing more than 200 IS militants. The affiliate has an estimated 600-800 fighters in two eastern Afghan provinces.^{xxxiv} The IS was also trying to get a foothold in northern Afghanistan, where it aims to link up with Central Asian, Chechen and Chinese Uighur militants. But it had largely been eliminated from southern and western Afghanistan by the Afghan Taliban and military operations conducted by Afghan and US/NATO forces. Estimates about IS's numerical strength inside Afghanistan vary, ranging from 1,000 to 5,000.^{xxxv}

On April 13, 2017, the United States dropped a bomb with an explosive force equal to 11 tons of TNT on a cave complex used by the Afghanistan branch of the IS. The bomb is officially called a GBU-43 or Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB), the origin of its nickname as the “mother of all bombs.” Weighing more than 21,000 lbs., the weapon is the largest non-nuclear bomb ever used in combat.

President Trump called the mission “another very, very successful mission.” Former Afghan president Hamid Karzai tweeted his anger at the strike, posting in a series of tweets that he “vehemently” opposed the U.S.’s action.^{xxxvi}

Previously, the IS had announced the establishment of its Khorasan branch - an old name for Afghanistan and surrounding areas - in January 2015. It was the first time that IS had officially spread outside the Arab world. It was the first major militant group to directly challenge the Afghan Taliban's dominance over the local insurgency.

However, experts say it has struggled to build a wide political base and the indigenous support it expected. It has steadily lost territory and fighters to US air strikes and an assault by Afghan forces on the ground. Estimates about IS's numerical strength inside Afghanistan vary, ranging from several hundred to a few thousand fighters. US forces say their number has been cut in half since early 2016 due to military operations. The MOAB strike followed the death of a US special forces soldier fighting IS in Nangarharin early April 2017. The bombing was part of an intense air campaign against the IS, with American airstrikes in Afghanistan averaging as many as 10 a day in the first two weeks of April. Initial information indicated that 36 militants had been killed and three large caves destroyed in the bombing in Nangarhar Province. However, Attaullah Khogyani, a spokesman for the provincial governor’s office, said 82 militants had been killed. The IS’s regional affiliate in Afghanistan, largely made of former members of the Pakistani Taliban, was rapidly expanding in eastern Afghanistan during much of 2015 and 2016. In March 2016, American military officials estimated that the group had 2,000 to 3,000 fighters across 11 districts. After multiple operations and extensive airstrikes, that number has been reduced to about 700 fighters across three districts, officials say. The efforts involved several ground operations by Afghan soldiers and commandos advised by American military special forces. But they were also accompanied by an intense air campaign that included B-52 bombers last year, staples of the early part of the war that had not been used for many years. The IS had claimed responsibility for several suicide bombings in urban centers, most recently at the gates of the presidential palace in Kabul on Wednesday, an attack that killed at least five people. In the past, urban attacks were often the work of the Haqqani network, a brutal arm of the Taliban. In a sign of the complexity of the war, Afghan and American officials have expressed concern that there might be an overlap in the enabling networks used by the Haqqani group and the Islamic State

for bombings in cities. “One of the things we are concerned about, and the reason we think the entire world needs to be focused on Afghanistan, is the potential for convergence among the various terrorist groups in this area,” General Nicholson said.^{xxxvii}

U.S President Donald Trump’s national security adviser H.R McMaster visited Kabul on April 16, 2017.^{xxxviii} Gen. H. R. McMaster seemed to take a “tougher line” on Pakistan, which has been accused of “using the Taliban as a proxy force and giving its leaders sanctuary”. Many analysts, as well as some coalition partners, had been critical of the United States’ “uphill struggle to persuade Pakistan to crack down on the Afghan Taliban leadership, which has used Pakistan as a base for its battles in Afghanistan”.

³⁹ General McMaster said:⁴⁰

What is necessary at this point is to consolidate gains and to deal with what is a big security problem now... Taliban fighters who refused the Afghan government’s call for peace will have to be defeated on battlefields, and that the United States was committed to give the Afghan state, the Afghan security forces, the strength they need. As all of us have hoped for many, many years — we have hoped that Pakistani leaders will understand that it is in their interest to go after these groups less selectively than they have in the past.... The best way to pursue their interests in Afghanistan and elsewhere is through the use of diplomacy, and not through the use of proxies that engage in violence.

Analysts had long questioned the American consideration of Pakistan as an ally, as the country’s Army was accused of assisting Taliban pains to disrupt objectives of the United States. Davood Moradian, the director of the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies, argued that:⁴¹

Many people in Afghanistan are wondering about the nature of relations between the United States and Pakistan, particularly the fact that everyone recognizes the principal role of Pakistan in supporting Taliban and other terrorist groups.... the new administration realized that the prior “appeasement policy” with Pakistan had not worked and needed to be reconsidered.

Ronald Neumann, David Petraeus and Earl Anthony Wayne, in their essay “An Afghanistan Strategy for Trump”, published on April 16, 2017 argued that:⁴²

Afghanistan is America's longest-standing commitment in the post-9/11 struggle against terrorism and remains a frontline state in that effort. In February, the commanding U.S. general in Afghanistan testified that some twenty terrorist groups are operating in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, the "highest concentration" in the world. Despite massive investments by the United States and its allies, Afghanistan still faces a vigorous Taliban insurgency with safe havens in neighboring Pakistan, as well as serious governance and development challenges. The Trump administration is wisely taking a careful look at the U.S. approach, including the request by the U.S. commander to add troops. ...The surge and subsequent drawdown have been criticized for setting unrealistic timetables to end the U.S. presence, for not effectively countering pernicious Afghan corruption, for not building Afghan security forces with all the capabilities needed to hold the Taliban in check, and for not having the right programs, staffing patterns or policies to produce more capable Afghan partners. A widely-heard criticism is that the United States ended up fighting the war one year at a time, rather than with a long-term plan. Yet, in 2017, the United States still has a strong coalition of international partners who are willing to provide military and development assistance. The U.S.-Afghan Strategic Partnership Agreement and Bilateral Security Agreement provide a foundation for multiyear commitments. The government of President Ashraf Ghani is much more committed to reform and good governance than the previous Karzai government, and both he and his governing partner, Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah, seem genuinely committed to a positive partnership with the United States and others in the international coalition, especially on counterterrorism. In general, Afghan security forces have been willing to fight hard against the Taliban. Also, the international situation is more dangerous than ever, with ISIS and other extremists looking for places to operate. The Trump administration can present a strategy that plans for its four-year term, and beyond, to help strengthen Afghan partners militarily, politically and economically, and to assure that the Taliban does not effectively win on the battlefield. A key task is to help the Afghan government strengthen its legitimacy in the eyes of a worried and pessimistic population, by reducing corruption, creating economic opportunity and fighting effectively against its foes. Improved government performance will also sustain the support from international partners. A credible anticorruption plan is essential. Additionally, the U.S. strategy will need to explain how to engage regional actors, especially Pakistan, to diminish support for the Taliban and other extremists.... Many American-Afghanistan watchers stress the need to find paths to a

political solution that ends the fighting and brings elements of the Taliban and the government together. Few argue that a purely military defeat of the Taliban is possible; however, and the how and when of any negotiated solution, or the potential U.S. role in that process, remain to be defined. Most observers do not expect the Taliban to be ready to engage in any negotiations, if they think they are gaining inside Afghanistan....Afghan president Ashraf Ghani is much more serious about improving government performance and the justice system than was his predecessor, Hamid Karzai. Ghani is renowned for his detailed efforts to redesign government programs, launch anticorruption efforts and oversee government work, with the aim of making them more efficient and effective. While Ghani is criticized by some for micromanagement, the big challenges have come from factional fighting between Ghani and his former rival and now government chief executive, Abdullah Abdullah. The struggles between them and their teams have slowed appointments, reforms and government decision making significantly over the last two years. ...The basic political challenge is for the Afghan government to be seen by the Afghan people as increasingly legitimate and effective. The means delivering more security, jobs and public services, while reducing corruption, and having a credible way forward on elections.....The new U.S. strategy will need to conceptualize how to create a regional environment more supportive of Afghan partners and which promotes an end to the fighting. There is widespread agreement that Pakistan's role is vital, and that it has largely been negative because of Pakistan's direct or indirect support for the Taliban. A number of U.S. observers argue that until Pakistan and the Taliban conclude that the battlefield momentum has shifted decisively against their interests, the prospects for a negotiated peace process will remain dim. Some argue that Pakistan must be pressured to play a less nefarious role. The United States has tried for years to encourage Pakistan to stop allowing Taliban leaders, financiers and fighters to have sanctuary inside its borders. How to handle Pakistan will likely be one of the most challenging issues in the strategic review. The range of options proposed will likely include imposing sanctions and reducing military assistance, but some will likely argue in favor of persuasion, given U.S. dependence on Pakistan for access to Afghanistan.There are also regional economic initiatives, including trans-Afghanistan energy and trade corridors, that the United States could use to encourage to build momentum for a peaceful solution.

Undoubtedly, CPEC provided a golden opportunity to resolve the conflict in Afghanistan. The United States must now become a part of the initiative for the sake of regional peace and security.

The prospect of improved relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan are dim because of India. There is a long bitter history of Pakistan -Afghan relations whose roots go back to centuries. Afghanistan has an identity problem with Pakistan. The two countries have a whole border that Afghanistan does not officially recognize and has had irredentist claims in the past. Both the two countries are now providing sanctuaries to terrorists and insurgents operating against the other. For the past four decades, Afghanistan has seen nothing but conflict and strife in which Pakistan has been both a part of the problem as well as the solution.

On April 16, 2017 Afghan Ambassador to Pakistan Omar Zakhilwal yesterday hinted that a joint operation against TTP leader Mullah Fazlullah could be possible in near future, as he expressed hope for improvement in Pak Afghan relations this year. Afghanistan could never allow India to use its soil against Pakistan, terming such an impression to be an insult to the whole Afghan nation. He expressed the hope that the relations between Islamabad and Kabul would see an improvement despite the current chill in bilateral ties.⁴³ To a question about handing over of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan leader Mullah Fazlullah to Pakistan, who is hiding somewhere in Afghanistan, he said that he was not a lame duck which the Afghan authorities could hand over to Pakistan. But he said that a joint operation against Fazlullah could be possible.

He, however, demanded of Islamabad to also act against those militants who were openly roaming around in Pakistan and were engaged in the terrorist attack of heinous nature in Afghanistan. The Afghan ambassador also said that trade between the two countries was adversely affected by these border closures and claimed that bilateral trade had sharply declined over the past five years from \$5 billion to \$1.5 billion. Now, Iran had captured the vacuum created in the trade to the border tension, he added.⁴⁴

Given the deteriorating security situation. Pakistan, India and Afghanistan have problems that are intertwined and need to be redressed through a fundamental change in relations. Given their historic nature, it is not going to be easy and required a lot of prudence, wisdom and patience. With the support of both China and the United States it was a doable though. Meanwhile, it was time to rethink Pakistan's foreign policy and move on from an Indian-centric

worldview. Easier said than done, however. The Indian attitudes towards Afghanistan were hampering this rethink in many ways. The Indian stance on Afghanistan was simplistic, at best. It was premised in the belief that Taliban was being used by Pakistan to control Afghanistan, which then as in the past, would become “strategic depth” for anti-Indian Jihadis to operate from. Pakistan, which now has forces to deploy heavily on its borders with Afghanistan, can then focus its entire attention on “low intensity conflict” against India. The United States should pressurize Pakistan further by stepping up pressures through drone strikes on Taliban safe havens. Pakistan wanted to make Afghanistan a client state. China appeared to believe that it can insulate its Muslim majority Xinjiang Province bordering Afghanistan from Islamic radicalism by getting a Government dependent on its friend Pakistan installed in Kabul. Meanwhile, Iran would prefer to see American forces leave Afghanistan. India should undertake a closely coordinated diplomatic effort with the Afghan Government to see that their mutual concerns about the Pakistan/Taliban/Haqqani nexus are addressed.

An editorial entitled “Mother of all bombs” published in Dawn April 15, 2017 stated:⁴⁵

Under Donald Trump, the US seems to be entering into a new era in its history of militarism. On Thursday, the Trump administration created another first by dropping the most powerful non-nuclear bomb in the US arsenal – rather nauseatingly named the Mother of All Bombs (MOAB) – in the Nangarhar province of Afghanistan bordering Pakistan. The official target has been declared to be a ‘system of tunnels and caves’ used by IS terrorists. The US has declared that the attack killed at least 36 IS members. As far as official claims go, no civilian deaths were reported. Going by this latest incident, Trump seems to be interested in escalating US involvement in world conflicts – and that too by using new and potentially devastating weapons. In the aftermath of the Thursday bombing, the Afghan government will find it even more difficult to stick to claims of sovereignty post troop withdrawal by the US. And, with US Commander in Afghanistan General Nicholson having asked for a few thousand more troops, the likelihood of peace talks with Afghan Taliban succeeding is slim. Already, the Afghan Taliban and the US are both not attending the 11-country talks on Afghan peace that started in Moscow on Friday. The talks were being seen as an attempt by Russia to play the role of a key broker, but Thursday’s bombing could be another reminder that the US remains a critical stakeholder in Afghanistan. If the Afghan government has prioritized a path of peace, then the US bombings go

against that agenda since any further weakening of the Afghan government is likely to worsen the conflict in the country. The US military and administration have chosen a dangerous path. It is still easy to remember that it was US intervention that plunged Afghanistan, Iraq and the broader Middle East into unending civil wars and destruction. To many, the missile strikes in Syria and dropping the MOAB in Afghanistan are both part of the push to show Trump as a 'tough' American president. The reality, however, is that more bombings are just a continuation of US militarism in the world. They can hardly be expected to offer hope to a people and country ravaged by war. Instead, all the bomb confirms is that the Trump presidency is not the opening of a new chapter in American history, but rather a continuation of the same one.

The Afghanistan conflict had been going on for more than 15 years with no end in sight. Matters were further complicated with the Russian support of Taliban. New global politics had dictated strange bedfellows something unimaginable in the past. Given the desire of Russia to regain influence in the Central Asian region, the Russian-Taliban nexus had developed at the cost of the United States and its Western allies. Russia had acknowledged political ties with the Taliban. It had for years branded the US effort in Afghanistan as a failure.

In March, head of US European Command and Supreme Allied Commander Europe Gen. Curtis Scaparrotti accused Moscow of "perhaps" supplying Taliban with weapons, at a United States Congress hearing. Iran's support for the Taliban risks adding another front to tensions with the United States after Trump the very recently ordered a missile strike on an airbase in Syria.

Meanwhile, NATO had carried out 460 airstrikes against terrorists since the start of the year, with drone strikes alone killing more than 200 IS militants. At present, there were around 13,000 United States and NATO troops were in Afghanistan and the top US commander was pushing for several thousand more.

In the past, Russia had generally supported the Afghan government and United States -led military campaign, but it had always criticized the coalition for its alleged failure to prevent a massive increase in opium production, much of which is smuggled to the West via Russia.⁴⁶

The Future

The future of Afghanistan appeared dark for myriad reasons. The United States simply cannot defeat the IS and the Taliban in Afghanistan. The Taliban are very resilient and have support in

the local Pashtun Afghani population. It was advisable that the United States enter a peace deal with the Taliban and empower them in the eastern parts of the country where the Pashtuns are in a majority. The longest war in American history must end now. Pakistan can play a useful role in the peace deal. Varghese K. George, in his article “Military strategy alone won’t solve Afghan crisis” published in the Hindu on April 17, 2017 which gave the thoughts of Nisha Biswal, former Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, who argued that:⁴⁷

There are some indications that there is a willingness (of the Trump administration) to increase the level of troops in Afghanistan. That would be welcome. But a security strategy that is not paired with a diplomatic and economy strategy has limitations. I would urge there must be a comprehensive strategy, working with the countries in the region, as the durable way forward. ... Pakistan, Russia, China and Central Asian countries were all stakeholders in Afghanistan. You have multiple stakes at play. We have to show American leadership in forging that partnership.

The United States believed that the standstill in the Afghanistan military conflict could be broken using more military force. This was not a prudent policy at all. Biswal was correct in her advice that the United States now must lead the regional powers in enacting a new partnership. The United States policy on Afghanistan must combine a military strategy with a diplomatic and economic plan, as advised by Biswal above. The United States must partner with Pakistan and China to bring peace to Afghanistan and the best approach would be to bring the country into the CPEC initiative immediately.

China Interests in Afghanistan

China’s relations with Afghanistan are steadily growing. China has so far contributed in the way of development assistance, investment projects, and in its more recent and less typical contribution to peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. China increased its contributions to Afghanistan’s development significantly in the last two to three years: it provided roughly \$240 million in development assistance and aid between 2001 and 2013, and around \$80 million in 2014 alone. During the visit of Abdullah Abdullah (the government’s chief executive) to China in May, both countries signed an agreement on technical cooperation (worth around \$76 million) and on non-emergency humanitarian aid. China’s contribution may still be insignificant compared to that of the US or Europe, and far from that of the largest donor of Afghanistan in the region – India, which has provided roughly \$2 billion to date -, yet its

increase signifies China's will to stay in the country for good. So far, a planned \$3 billion lease of the Aynak copper mine in 2008 by a consortium of Chinese state-owned companies never launched due to security issues and disagreement over the terms. Ever since, China remains reluctant to make large investments in Afghanistan, but this might change if security improves.⁴⁸

Further untapped natural resources in Afghanistan are supposed to be worth \$1 trillion, according to a US report from 2010. In particular, Afghanistan has been a source of the gemstone lapis lazulus, which reportedly generated roughly \$125 million trade value in 2014. But the mining of the stone has led to a conflict in recent years between local security forces and the Taliban as they gained more control over the country. Mining had the potential to generate copious amounts of revenue and growth for Afghanistan if the country could establish capacities to impose legal mining. China indeed might have an interest in improving Afghanistan's institutional capacities to ensure the security needed to pursue further investment. China's OBOR initiative was almost cut out for Afghanistan's need of infrastructure on the one hand and potential vast natural resources on the other. The country could become a core part of China's trade and investment network, and Beijing has already sent out a signal that points towards more cooperation. During Afghanistan's leader Abdullah's visit to China, both countries signed a memorandum of understanding on the OBOR initiative.

There are also signs that China's security stance towards Afghanistan is changing. China has always remained reluctant to engage in security issues that carry too great a risk of going wrong. This has been the case in Afghanistan too, where China would have been meddling in what the United States and ISAF were doing. Also, China needed to be concerned about becoming a target of terrorist groups such as the Taliban, who might have links with Islamic independence groups in Xinjiang. So far, China's role in matters of security is even smaller than in development assistance.

Beijing has been slowly and gradually increasing its security relations with Afghanistan since Afghan President Ashraf Ghani came into power in 2014. In February, the chief of the Chinese army, Fang Fenghui, announced roughly \$70 million of military aid to support the Afghan government's anti-terrorism efforts. Chinese president Xi Jinping reiterated China's commitment during the visit of Abdullah in May. At the beginning of July, the Afghan forces received the first batch of Chinese military equipment.

China is also involved in multilateral and regional efforts to approach Afghanistan's problems, ranging from tackling security and institutional capacities to improving border control, fighting criminal networks, and counterterrorism. For example, the so-called Heart of Asia process, initiated in 2011, engages countries including China to encourage regional security and economic cooperation in and around Afghanistan. China is also a leading member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a group that promotes regional cooperation on economics, politics, and security. Afghanistan has had full observer status since 2012, and has asked for China's support to become a full member in early 2016. Such formats engage Afghanistan's neighbors in the country's development, but would still need larger common efforts to change the situation on the ground significantly.⁴⁹

In addition, China is now setting up an anti-terrorism alliance with Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan, to tackle the threat of terrorism and extremism. The four countries agreed on establishing a "four-country mechanism" to share intelligence and training. China's participation in such an alliance reflects Beijing's growing worries about an eruption of insecurity that could endanger its security of its border province Xinjiang, and possibly also its investments in the Central Asian region. Tensions have increased notably between Beijing and its Muslim Uyghur minority in the Western province Xinjiang, some of whom have formed an opposition movement. Therefore, Beijing is concerned about possible links between its Muslim minorities and the Taliban, as well as other Islamist groups in Afghanistan.

China is also working to create an Afghan peace process and has been holding talks in Islamabad since early 2016 along with Afghanistan, the US, and Pakistan (the Quadrilateral Coordination Group). While the Taliban are refusing to negotiate so far, it is important to keep the effort alive, not least because it reduces mistrust between Afghanistan and Pakistan. In July, a delegation of Taliban negotiators visited China, apparently to report on the situation in Afghanistan from their perspective. The Afghan government expressed concern about China providing "a platform to those groups that are responsible for the killing of the people of Afghanistan." While China might make some progress towards a peace process with the Taliban, the actual danger of such bilateral meetings is that they might undermine the efforts of the quadrilateral group.

So far, China has evolved into a notable though not yet major player in Afghanistan in the areas of investment, economic and humanitarian assistance. Beijing remains reluctant to consider a

security role in Afghanistan, but has made major diplomatic efforts to promote the Afghan peace process. Although the outcome remains to be seen, China's role as a mediator and confidence-builder may be crucial, as it appears that only Beijing's constant pressure has kept its long-time ally Pakistan relatively peacefully engaged.

But what Afghanistan needs is long-term and sustainable support – and China would be able to provide it, be it in the frame of its OBOR scheme or other initiatives. There may also be several areas of common interest for China to explore with other countries that are present in Afghanistan already, such as the US or European countries. This could include joint infrastructure projects, and training and professionalization for Afghans. China has already taken the first steps in exploring this option: China and Germany announced recently their cooperation in third countries, notably in Afghanistan. Both countries agreed to establish a disaster management office and to cooperate on training Afghan personnel in the mining sector.

The Uyghur Issue

China was concerned about Uyghur separatist tendencies in their western frontier region of Xinjiang who were suspected to have ties to the Afghan Taliban in the northwestern belt of Pakistan. The Xinjiang region is the traditional home of Muslim Uighurs who speak a Turkic language, and China has blamed a series of attacks on Islamist separatists it says seek to establish an independent state there called East Turkestan. Chinese authorities point to the existence of terrorist group called the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). However, exiled Uighur groups and human rights activists say the government's own repressive policies in Xinjiang have provoked unrest, something Beijing denies. They have expressed doubt there exists a coherent extremist movement as China claims. Recently, Islamic militants in China had expanded their fight against the government and had developed links with terrorist groups in the northern Pakistan-Afghanistan border regions. As expected, Pakistan was certainly doing its best to eliminate anti-China elements from its territory. China had made substantial investment commitments in Afghanistan and was playing a role in the mediation of peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. Meanwhile, there was a disconnect between United States and China as 's interests in Afghanistan remained largely tied to the Uyghur issue. China's policies toward its Uyghur population had long raised human rights concerns in the United States which had frustrated China in bilateral discussions. The U.S. has also hesitated to expand

counterterrorism cooperation with China for fear that China would use its newfound capabilities to persecute the Uyghur population.

Since the 9/11 attacks, China has claimed to be the victim of a sustained terrorist campaign by "religious extremists," who it has said have links to the Taliban and al Qaeda. In support of this claim, it has cited a string of violent incidents targeting Chinese civilians over the last year, including the killing of 29 people by a knife-wielding gang in Kunming in this past March. The government has used these episodes to justify a religious crackdown on the predominantly Muslim Uighur ethnic minority in Xinjiang.

The disclosure that some of China's citizens are looking to connect with IS echoes fears expressed by other nations that combatants trained in Iraq and Syria might return to their countries and launch attacks at home. The Global Times, a state-run newspaper in China, quoted an unnamed anti-terrorism official as saying that militants from Xinjiang "not only want to get training in terrorist techniques, but also to expand their connections in international terrorist organizations through actual combat to gain support for escalation of terrorist activities in China."

Many scholars have heavily criticized China's earlier claims of links between Uighur terrorist groups like the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and "hostile foreign forces." Much earlier, James Millward, a Georgetown University professor specializing in Chinese and Central Asian history, argued in a 2004 study that the Chinese government's characterization of the threat posed by organized Xinjiang militants "contains much inaccurate, questionable, or contradictory reporting and slanted conclusions reflecting ulterior agendas."

Previously, China's former special envoy to the Middle East declared that roughly 100 Chinese combatants were training or fighting in the Middle East. While China's latest assertion about links between its citizens and international Muslim extremist organizations remains yet unsubstantiated. China's government clearly intends to signal that it will not tolerate opposition to its policies in Xinjiang. But if the government continues to reject any form of dialogue between disenfranchised Uighur communities in Xinjiang and itself, the threats it claims to face could become even greater than it already fears.⁵⁰

Much earlier, in 2014 China began a campaign to purge the Internet of content it says promotes terror and violence, enlisting the aid of major websites, state media said, as the country moves to damp violence in its restive far west.⁵¹ A suicide bombing killed 39 people at a market in Xinjiang's capital of Urumqi. 29 people were stabbed to death at a train station in the southwestern city of Kunming. The government aims to stop circulation in China of terror-related materials made overseas, remove such information from the Internet, punish websites that break the rules and urge Internet firms to "uphold their responsibilities", Xinhua said. China already exercises tight control over the Internet, with the cooperation of the country's Internet companies.

Beijing says most suspects in recent cases had been spurred by terror video and audio products to carry out attacks. China faces a serious challenge cleaning the web of such content, as the volume of materials released by the ETIM has increased dramatically, the report added.

"These materials, which propagate jihad, terrorism and religious extremism, have been spread incessantly in China," the statement said. "They have had a strong instigation effect and are extremely harmful."

It is unclear how broadly the government will define terror-related content.

Websites aimed at ethnic Uighurs, Tibetans and Mongols have been banned in the past following government accusations that they spread separatism, although rights groups say they simply provide a forum for discussion about issues like discrimination.

In the past, China viewed Afghanistan as an extension of its Uyghur concerns which limited its willingness to cooperate in Afghanistan. China was concerned about any support for the Uyghur in the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderland regions and would like the eradication of any Uyghur militants in the region.

However, CPEC could change all that if coordinated properly. Expanding China's direct interests in Afghanistan would open new avenues for United States-China cooperation there. It would motivate both sides to boost coordination on Afghan security, while shifting the focus of this cooperation away from the fraught issues of counterterrorism and China's domestic concerns..⁵² Andrew Small, an expert on China-Pakistan relations at the German Marshall Fund in Washington, argued that China's recent offer to assist mediate talks with the Taliban in

Afghanistan was a real departure from decades when Beijing's official policy has been that of “non-interference in the politics of other countries”. Now, in Afghanistan, China had become a stakeholder and wasn't just a bystander anymore. ⁵³ Given Pakistan's “complicated” relationship with the Afghan Taliban, China will have to exert its influence on Pakistan to guarantee stability in Afghanistan. Finally, China was “easing into its role as a great power.” And, indeed, it's using Pakistan as a corridor”. ⁵⁴

China will increasingly play a greater role in Afghanistan's future since it was part and parcel of the OBOR initiative. For China OBOR was a very serious global venture and it included Afghanistan.

India Factor

India and Pakistan were historic enemies and their relations were extremely strained now. The foremost external challenge of Pakistan was perceived to be India. The nation sacrificed to build a nuclear arsenal which were the ultimate weapons meant to safeguard national security. The role of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal is to also provide a deterrence effect. Unlike others, Pakistan's nuclear strategic nuclear posture was India specific and meant for augmenting national self-esteem. Pakistan's nuclear doctrine of a minimum credible deterrent was designed to dissuade India from attacking Pakistan. Given the considerable superiority of India's conventional weapons, the nuclear arsenal was even more important for Pakistan's defense. It was the ultimate effort to deny India an opportunity for launching an aggression against Pakistan. Thus, the nuclear arsenal was for defensive purposes only and was widely recognized as such.

It is important to note that Pakistan's nuclear arsenal was developed in a historical context which was centered on India. This context needs to be understood clearly to comprehend the current strategic situation. The perception that India is a formidable enemy is widespread in Pakistan including its military. However, Pakistan's military leadership believed that the nation was facing an existential threat from India. The civilian leadership is less convinced. Historically, India had indeed been Pakistan's arch rival and the two countries had fought several wars. It is widely believed that the loss of East Pakistan (Now Bangladesh) in 1971 was the primary reason for Pakistan's secret nuclear weapons program then. Later, India acquired a nuclear capability and Pakistan responded. Kashmir remained a lingering dispute between the two neighbors. Kashmir

being a territorial issue was difficult to solve because of its very nature. Given the political uncertainty in both India and Pakistan, the Kashmir conflict was not going to be solved soon.

More importantly, such was the level of distrust between India and Pakistan that a grave territorial matter like Kashmir couldn't be solved easily. There are other disputes with India: Siachen, Sir Creek and support of terrorism. India is supporting the on-going insurgency in Baluchistan by assisting the Baluchistan Liberation Army fighting cadres in neighboring Afghanistan. India accused Pakistan of supporting the Lashkar-i Taiba (LeT) involved in the 2008 Mumbai terrorist incident. In sum relations are sour. However, some improvement has been made in Pakistan-India relations mainly in the business and the trade sectors. Overall, relations between the two nuclear neighbors remain frosty. No breakthrough in relations is imminent. Suffice to state here the nature of continuing rivalry with India had made Pakistan very cautious about its national security and safety of the motherland.

Today, Pakistan possessed a formidable nuclear arsenal which included some 100 nuclear weapons and an advanced ballistic missile capacity. Pakistan's strategic nuclear posture is clearly formulated around a threat framework emanating from India. Continuing tensions with India are pushing Pakistan in making some additions to its fissile production facilities and its nuclear warhead deployment capabilities. It has developed cruise missiles for carrying nuclear warheads and even small tactical nuclear weapons.

Given the considerable attention, Pakistan was on the path of making significant qualitative and quantitative improvements to its nuclear arsenal. Some Western scholars give the impression that Pakistan was a weak state, even a failing state, and was therefore incapable of handling its nuclear arsenal. Some in the United States are very worried about Pakistan's nuclear capacity. There are many reports about Pakistan increasing production of nuclear weapons. The general perception is that this is a very negative development in the volatile region. However, the Obama Administration continued to also express confidence in controls over Pakistan's nuclear weapons.

In the past during the Musharraf era, the ongoing efforts of the Pakistani military to improve

security of its nuclear weapons had included some cooperation with the United States. Ironically, the two countries have entered a period of mutual distrust and suspicion in recent times. United States is continuing surveillance of Pakistan's nuclear weapons from the air as well as space. Obviously, the Pakistani military establishment is very anxious about the safety of its nuclear weapons and is doing whatever is humanly possible towards this end. This is acknowledged by many, including arch rival India. Meanwhile, the American media has continued to express concerns about the safety of these weapons.

Notwithstanding security concerns about Pakistani nuclear warheads, they are placed under strict command and control systems where operational security is a high priority. Safeguarding the nuclear arsenal from external threats is a national responsibility taken very seriously by Pakistan military. The country's formidable Strategic Command organization has a three-tier structure: National Command Authority, Strategic Plans Division, and Strategic Forces Commands. About 20,000 people are involved in the production deployment and service maintenance of these nuclear warheads and the related deployment vehicles. Pakistan military is doing whatever it takes to preserve the credibility of its nuclear deterrence.

Meanwhile, Pakistan has taken steps to protect its nuclear assets from external threats. The nuclear weapons have been dispersed sufficiently. The military is moving nuclear weapons more frequently around the country through its road network. Pakistan is also pursuing a second-strike capability by utilizing concealment measure for its nuclear warheads, deploying air defenses around strategic assets, and constructing deeply buried storage and launch facilities.

However, it is easy saying this action is problematic for obvious reasons. Pakistan has indeed weakened from within not only because of a weak economy and poor governance, but also a weakened society given to intolerance, extremism and violence. It was an irony that Pakistan is one of the strongest nations in the world as far as military might be concerned yet considerably weak as far as societal and economic development indicators are concerned. Pakistan has achieved a lot in the military field and needs to consolidate its technical accomplishments in building an awesome nuclear arsenal quickly enough. Meanwhile, Pakistan's leadership had failed to make the nation strong and united to face the terrorism challenges. The national

leadership was too much focused on the acquisition of a military edge over India considered as a mortal enemy of Pakistan.

Pakistan's tense relations with its Indian and Afghan neighbors are unlikely to abate. Pakistan and India seem likely to continue their rhetorical barbs and border skirmishes. While both nuclear-armed powers seek to avoid a deepening conflict, another major terrorist attack could however loosen Indian restraint. Pakistan's suspicions about Afghanistan may grow in 2017 should further Taliban military gains force the Kabul government to turn more to India for its security needs. Under a new American administration, the long partnership with Pakistan may become more transparently transactional and carry more sticks than carrots.⁵⁵

There are tensions between China and India although in the 1950s the two had subscribed to the same set of core ideals. The "Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence" that emerged then concerned respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty; non-aggression; non-interference in another state's internal affairs; equality and cooperation for mutual benefit; and peaceful coexistence. Later, relations were strained and the two fought a brief war in the NEFA region in 1962. There have been minor border incidents since then. Significantly, China and India have a considerable longstanding unresolved territorial dispute with each other.⁵⁶

The sheer nationalism and national pride of their leaderships will prevent them from becoming friends any time soon. Pakistan would be very glad if that was so.

Pakistan looked up to China to back it against its giant enemy on the East.

Kulbhushan Jhadav Affair

On April 10, 2017, a former Indian Navy officer national Kulbhushan Yadav was given the death sentence by a by an its Field General Court Martial under provisions of the Pakistan Army Act and the Official Secrets Act. Jhadav can appeal the death sentence to Pakistan's Supreme Court within 60 days. H was convicted for espionage, anti-state activities, role in terror incidents and sabotage in the country. Yadav was taken into custody by Pakistani agencies in March 2016 in Balochistan. Diplomatic ties between India and Pakistan plunged following Jadav's conviction, with external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj warning Islamabad of "consequences" if Jadav's death sentence was carried out.⁵⁷

Jhadav had admitted before the court that he worked for the Indian intelligence agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). He was involved in several clandestine activities to create instability in Karachi and Balochistan areas. During the trial, he was provided the services of a defending officer, as per law. India responded to this verdict by calling Pakistan's High Commissioner Abdul Basit to the Ministry of External Affairs and gave him a demarche saying that the court proceedings that led to the death sentence of Jhadav were “farcical” and it would consider it as “premeditated murder”. It also said that the ministry had “repeatedly sought” consular access to Jhadav but was not permitted by the Pakistani authorities.⁵⁸ A day after India called conviction of Yadav in Pakistan a ‘farcical trial’, the United Nations declined to take a position on the death sentence handed to the self-confessed Indian spy. India denied Yadav was working for RAW but admits that he is a retired naval officer.⁵⁹

India was expected to be take up the matter when the US National Security Advisor McMaster visits India to meet PM Narendra Modi, Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj, and his Indian counterpart Ajit Doval. Doval was said to be preparing to raise the matter with his counterpart. The United Nations have already made it clear that it will not intervene in the matter, The Indian government has been arguing it was difficult for India to verify Pakistan’s claims that Jhadav, a serving Indian Naval officer on an alleged spying mission entered Pakistan with original Indian passport.

Pakistan too was in no hurry to execute him and was likely to put him as a bargain to seek advantage in bigger negotiations.⁶⁰

As expected, Indian reaction was immediate and intense. There was fierce criticism of the verdict in the Indian media. Defense Minister Khawaja Asif quickly announced that the death sentence against Jhadav will not and cannot be carried out quickly. Meanwhile, it was reported that a retired Pakistani military officer in Nepal had disappeared which suggested that the spy wars between India and Pakistan had intensified. Certainly, the issue had to be handled calmly for the sake of normal relations between India and Pakistan. Meanwhile, Nawaz Sharif played it cool, addressing an Air Force passing-out parade, said: “Cooperation rather than conflict and shared prosperity instead of suspicion are the hallmarks of our policy.” National Security Adviser and former Army general Nasser Khan Janjua, too, said India and Pakistan “cannot be enemies forever and must engage in dialogue to resolve disputes.” But Modi is heavily into populism

based on hatred of Muslims and will not budge, especially as global politics is veering toward a new cold war between the U.S. and China in South and Southeast Asia. Helplessly, the Pakistan-India spy war will go on, hurting the future of the people living in the region.⁶¹

An editorial “Reducing Pak-India tensions” published in Dawn, April 13th, 2017 argued that for four years now, Nawaz Sharif had expounded the same message of regional integration, trade and prosperity, but he had been incapable of convincing either India or the security establishment here. The National Security Adviser too has been “ineffective, notwithstanding the occasional willingness to speak candidly”.⁶² Meanwhile, Pakistan still did not have a foreign minister and the defense minister was “effectively irrelevant” because he had to foremost responsibility to tackle the electricity crisis as he was the minister of the power sector and that was his main portfolio. The teams advising the Premier in the domains of both national security and foreign policy are ad hoc. From that “self-created position of weakness, it is unlikely Mr. Sharif will have much success in implementing the vision he so often articulates”.⁶³

To complicate matters, Lt Col (retd) Muhammad Habib Zahir went missing from Nepal on April 6. The Foreign Office on Thursday hinted at the involvement of Indian intelligence agencies behind the abduction of a retired Pakistani colonel in Nepal. The media was abuzz with speculation that India’s Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) has abducted the retired lieutenant colonel as a retaliatory act to the conviction of Kulbhushan Jhadav. Observers believe India could use the abducted Pakistani retired army officer as a bargaining chip for the RAW agent.⁶⁴

Indian Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj said India would go to any extent to ensure safety for Jhadav, calling Pakistan’s verdict ‘premeditated murder’. India would not leave any stone unturned to ensure safe release of Jhadav. Pakistan Defense Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif on April 13, 2017 informed the Senate that due process was followed in the trial of the serving Indian naval officer, who has 60 days to appeal the verdict.⁶⁵

On April 13, 2017, the Pakistan Army’s corps commanders agreed during a meeting at the army GHQ that there would be no concessions made in Jhadav’s death penalty because the man was convicted of serious offences against the state of Pakistan. The Foreign Office has also made it clear that there was irrefutable evidence against Jhadav and his role in terrorist activities as well as financing those activities on the soil of Pakistan. For a man who was

initially disowned by his own countrymen, Jhadav had suddenly become somewhat of a cause celebre. Why else would 13 requests for consular access be made by the Indian diplomatic mission here if there was no connection between Jhadav and his handlers? Foreign Office spokesman Nafees Zakaria had explained that though New Delhi and Islamabad have a bilateral agreement on consular access it is Pakistan's prerogative to refuse the same in the name of Article VI of the accord.

Meanwhile, media reported that there were 27 Pakistanis arrested for espionage

Most of the spies caught by the intelligence agencies have been apprehended from either military sensitive locations or in border towns.⁶⁶ On April 14, 2017 India decided to put on hold all bilateral exchanges with Pakistan in reaction to the Jhadav affair. The Indian government called off talks between the two neighboring countries on maritime security which was scheduled to be held on April 17. India officially told Pakistan that it was not ready to host a delegation from Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA). Both Pakistan and India had earlier approved dialogue between PMSA and the Indian Coast Guard in a bid to break the deadlock caused by a militant attack on an Indian military base in Uri in September last year.⁶⁷ According to the Indian Defense Ministry, it was not the time to discuss security with Pakistan when it had awarded the death sentence to Jhadav. The only engagement that Pakistan and India have had until now this year has been the 113th meeting of the Permanent Indus Commission talks for which an Indian delegation visited Islamabad in March this year.⁶⁸

An editorial "No concessions on terror" published in The Express Tribune, April 15, 2017 argued that:⁶⁹

As Pakistan stiffened its stance on the death sentence handed out to Indian spy Kulbhushan Jhadav in the wake of threats by officials in New Delhi that the move would carry severe repercussions for Islamabad, there are mounting suspicions that hostile agencies are behind the recent abduction of a retired Pakistani serviceman in Nepal. Aggravating already fraught relations between India and Pakistan is the appearance of wild speculation in the Indian media about the alleged link between Jhadav's case and the disappearance of Pakistani ex-serviceman Habib Zahir. Indian media outlets have claimed that Zahir had been part of the team that captured Jhadav. The truth, however, is that Zahir retired from military service several years before Jhadav's arrest. What is becoming increasingly clear is that the Research and Analysis

Wing or some such hostile agency may have entrapped him and kept him in its custody for leverage in the Jhadav case. Instead of relying on legal and diplomatic measures, New Delhi appears to be working on some hidden fronts as usual.

On April 14, 2017, Prime Minister's Adviser on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz shared with media the state's charge sheet against Indian spy Kulbhushan Jhadav and a timeline of his trial. Aziz told a press conference that Jhadav had been held responsible for the following terrorist activities in Pakistan:

Sponsored and directed IED and grenade attacks in Gwadar and Turbat; directed attacks on a radar station and civilian boats in the sea opposite to Jiwani Port; funded subversive secessionist and terrorist elements through hawala/hundi for subverting Pakistani youth against the country, especially in Balochistan; sponsored explosions of gas pipelines and electric pylons in Sibi and Sui areas in Balochistan; sponsored IED explosions in Quetta in 2015, causing massive damage to life and property; sponsored attack on Hazaras in Quetta and Shias en route to and back from Iran; and abetted attacks through anti-state elements against LEAs, FC and FWO in areas of Turbat, Punjgur, Gawadar, Pasni and Jiwani during 2014-15, killing and injuring many civilians and soldiers.

On the occasion, Aziz also asked why Jhadav had been carrying official documents under an alias at the time of his arrest. "I would like to ask India why he [Jhadav] was using a fake identity and masquerading as a Muslim," Aziz asked. "Why would an innocent man possess two passports — one with a Hindu name and other with a Muslim name," he asked.

Reassuring critics that steps had been taken to ensure transparency during the trial of the Indian spy under Pakistan's laws and the Pakistan Army Act, Aziz also provided a timeline of the trial and proceedings against Jhadav.

Confessional video statement of Kulbhushan Jhadav: March 25, 2016; initial FIR in Counter-Terrorism Department Quetta: April 8, 2016; initial interrogation: May 2, 2016. Detailed interrogation: May 22, 2016; JIT constituted: July 12, 2016; confessional statement under Section 164 of CrPC: July 22, 2016; recording of summary of evidence: September 24, 2016; 1st proceeding: September 21, 2016; 2nd proceeding: October 19, 2016; 3rd proceeding: November 29, 2016; 4th proceeding: February 12, 2017; and death sentence endorsed: April 10, 2017.

Elaborating on these steps, the adviser said Jhadav's confessional statement had been recorded before a magistrate under Section 164 of the CrPC, whereas the proceedings had been conducted under the Law of Evidence. Jhadav was also appointed 'a qualified legal officer to defend him in court proceedings', Aziz said. Witnesses recorded their statements under oath in front of the accused, who could question them, Aziz added. "It should be clear from these details that Kulbhushan Jhadav was tried under the law of the land in a fully transparent manner," Aziz said.⁷⁰

Indian external affairs minister V. K. Singh had reiterated that the Indian government was considering all steps to get access to Jhadav. The case of Kulbhushan Jhadav continues to remain at a boiling point. While India has postponed talks between the coast guards, Pakistan is apparently compiling a new dossier for the international community on the Indian national accused of being a RAW spy. While Pakistan has not yet given a copy of the judgement, it will apparently be part of a new dossier on Jhadav, which will be handed over to the United Nations and ambassadors in Islamabad, Pakistani newspaper The Nation reported. The new dossier was to be based on the early testimonial as well as statements given in front of the court by Jhadav. Pakistan had collected "fresh evidences on Indian involvement inside Pakistan to spread anarchy and militancy, sources stated," according to the report. Meanwhile, external affairs minister V. K. Singh reiterated that the Indian government was considering all steps to get access to Jhadav. "Pakistan government has denied consular access to Jhadav despite India trying for 13 times. We are trying everything to get access to Jhadav," he told reporters. Meanwhile, there has not been any statements from India or Pakistan on April 15, 2017 about the retired Pakistan army soldier, who reportedly went missing near the India-Nepal border two days before Jhadav's death sentence was publicly revealed. Pakistan officials had pointed fingers at India saying that he had been "lured" by foreign intelligence agencies, but Indian diplomats – in Delhi and in Islamabad – have told the media that they don't have any information.⁷¹

Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leader Pravin Togadia said on April 14, 2017 that "India should bomb Pakistan to secure the release of ex-navy officer Kulbhushan Jhadav and carpet bomb Kashmiri "jihadis" to stop the spread of militancy...Our government should show similar resolve of India First by bombing Pakistan, which is barely 800 km from New Delhi and securing the Indian soldier's release,".⁷²

Meanwhile, the law-enforcement authorities of Azad Kashmir, Pakistan claimed to have arrested three Indian intelligence agents for alleged anti-state activities on April 13, 2017. The charges levelled against the three “Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) recruits” included bombing a police station in the region. The three have been booked under the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) and Explosives Act.⁷³

Meanwhile, Pakistan’s defense minister has tried to assure that the death sentence of Jhadav was not carried out without due process. He has made an appeal for amnesty to the president. The Indian media had most predictably hit the roof. Mohammad Waseem, in his article. “Political temperature on the rise, The News, April 16, aptly stated that:⁷⁴

Diplomacy in a political environment characterized by vitriol of the worst kind emanating from the two sides of the spectrum is bound to suffer. On a larger scale, the world opinion has yet to give its final verdict. The disappearance of a retired Pakistan Army colonel in Nepal near the border with India has further complicated the situation. A military analyst said on TV that this development could lead to the production of a dead body from Pakistan in exchange for a dead body from India. The upshot is that Indo-Pakistan relations have suddenly taken a plunge. At the other end, Lyari don Uzair Baloch’s confession about his links with Iran’s secret agency has led to a rise in the political temperature on the Western side of the border. Pakistan seems to be in the midst of domestic and diplomatic crises, which do not point to a stable condition of political and international relations. What is needed is a mature handling of the situation. That, in turn, requires an understanding of the destabilizing potential of the persistence of conflicts within the country as well as within the region. One can only hope for a deft handling of the issues at hand whereby peace and harmony, instead of tension and confusion, emerge as milestones of political strategy at home and foreign policy abroad.

On April 16, 2017 Pakistan has prepared a dossier on Kulbhushan Jhadav's involvement in espionage which will be handed over to foreign envoys in Pakistan. The dossier will also be sent to the UN and other institutions. Sources said details about Indian interference in Pakistan, Jhadav's involvement in sabotage and subversive activities in Pakistan were added in the dossier. Talking to state-run media, Foreign Office spokesman Nafees Zakaria said India was involved in spreading terrorism in Pakistan. He said India was also involved in terror financing activities in the country. To a question, he said barbaric activities against innocent Kashmiris in the Indian-

held Kashmir had been exposed. To another question regarding Col (r) Habib Zahir, he said the Nepalese government was cooperating with Pakistan in this matter.⁷⁵

India was looking to mount yet another diplomatic offensive to save Jadhav and the government was awaiting a response from Pakistan over its demand for a copy of the charge sheet against Jadhav as it mulled options to secure his release. The government was contemplating a move like the one it launched last year after the Uri attack to "isolate" Pakistan. As a first step, India blocked maritime security dialogue between the two countries. This was the first move by the Indian government to raise the stakes for Pakistan after the Jhadav sentencing as it suggested that the two countries could be returning to the situation which prevailed in the immediate aftermath of the Uri attack last year in which 19 Indian soldiers were killed. Pakistan had consistently maintained that the two governments need to start the comprehensive bilateral dialogue, as announced in December 2015, to resolve outstanding issues. The maritime talks, coupled with meetings mandated by Indus Waters Treaty, were a small beginning by both the countries to move on after the bitter exchanges over Uri. The Indian government was also likely to review its attempts in the past few months to encourage people to people contacts with Pakistan.⁷⁶

Are India and Pakistan heading towards possibly the nastiest crisis in South Asia since the Mumbai terrorist incident of 2008? By Barkha Dutt, in her article "Pakistan's move to execute alleged Indian 'spy' may be a ploy to sabotage the prime minister", The Washington Post, April 16, 2017 maintained that:⁷⁷

In any case, whether Jadhav is a spy is moot. What is beyond dispute is that the Pakistan Army's declaration of a death sentence for him via a clandestine court-martial breaks with all standard practice; it is almost an open invitation to escalation from India. Shockingly, the announcement of Jadhav's death sentence this past week was made by the Pakistan Army and not the government's foreign office. The sentencing seemed to take the Nawaz Sharif-led civilian government entirely by surprise, even as Indians were convulsed with rage. Pakistan's foreign minister Sartaj Aziz said last year that there was no "conclusive evidence" against Jadhav. So the sudden announcement appears to be as much about Nawaz vs. the Pakistani Army as it is about India vs. Pakistan. With Pakistan's military stripping away the veneer of authority from its civilian prime minister, the aim could be to further weaken him and ensure that he is unable to steer the wheel in the direction of a dialogue with India...If Nawaz is allowed to finish

his term next year, it will be only the second time in Pakistan's history that an elected civilian government would have completed its five-year tenure. But while that may make Pakistan appear that it is in a post-coup era, the country remains a military democracy, where there is more power in the barracks than the ballot....the surprise secret trial of Jadhav and the shock announcement look like another opportunity for the Pakistan Army to upend a prime minister who is already vulnerable, as Nawaz Sharif is facing an impending court verdict against his family members in the Panama papers scandal. On a recent trip to Pakistan, I was told that he was trying to resuscitate the gasping India-Pakistan dialogue and that a back channel had opened up between the national security advisers of the two countries. The Jadhav death sentence ends all of that; India has scrapped scheduled maritime talks with Pakistan as tensions spiral. And as the prime minister's authority stands diminished, that could be precisely what the Pakistan military wanted... "The timing and manner of announcement of the Jadhav decision indicates that it is either a bargaining chip to exchange someone in India's custody or is meant to deter the country's civilian prime minister from any new initiatives to mend fences with India," Like all seasoned practitioners of statecraft, he knows that Pakistan is unlikely to take things to a dangerous precipice with India over the arrest of a spy; the motive lies elsewhere. Another explanation: Pakistan wants to use Jadhav as leverage to counter the aggressive global push by Delhi to isolate Islamabad as the perpetrator of state-sponsored terrorism. But the Narendra Modi government has never gone by the conventional playbook on Pakistan. From dropping in to visit Nawaz Sharif on his birthday to surgical strikes across the line of control, the Indian prime minister has followed his own script of shock and awe on Pakistan, in both friendship and hostility. Pakistan's move on the tactical chessboard may prove to be a gambit gone wrong if India decides to play back in kind.

Indian-Pakistani relations weren't going well even before the Jhadav affair. India's dialogue process with Pakistan has been stalled since the attack on the Pathankot air force base in January 2016. Last month, India sent its officials to the meeting of the Permanent Indus Commission in Islamabad. During the meeting, World Bank officials had mooted that water resources secretaries could meet in Washington from April 10 -13 to find a resolution over the dispute mechanism. India, however, had conveyed its reluctance to accept those dates in March.

Indian interference in the affairs of Karachi wasn't just baseless Pakistani propaganda, it was a fact. Uzair Jan Baloch, the notorious dacoit of Karachi's Lyari, was arrested in January 2016 in Pakistan after a period of hiding outside the country. He will face a military court for "espionage activities, providing secret information regarding Army installations and officials to foreign agents (Iranian intelligence officers) which is a violation of the Official Secret Act 1923."

A symbol of the criminalization of Karachi politics, Baloch belongs to the family of Rehman Dakait, the underworld boss of Karachi who was politically embedded in the Muhajir-Sindhi conflict that played out between the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). Uzair has confessed to an Iranian "connection" in the Baloch nationalist movement in restive Balochistan; hence implying an Indian "connection" as well. Lest one forgets, Iran has accused Pakistan of aiding Iranian Baloch who often target Tehran's soldiers. Abdolmalik Rigi, who was hanged in an Iranian jail in 2010, was educated on the sly in Saudi-funded Madrassa Banuria in Karachi before he joined the killer Jundallah with Al Qaeda in Pakistan and began attacking inside Iran.

The "Indian connection" finally reduced MQM to a shell of its former glory in Karachi. The PPP too has been weakened by the ongoing military operation in the metropolis against its extortionists. Pakistan sees an "Indian hand" in the uprising in its Balochistan province.⁷⁸

There was apprehension that the matter had to be calmly tackled otherwise it would blow up in to a new crisis between the two estranged seigneurs. Clearly, Pakistan was unable to move towards any dialogue with India on any issue, including spy wars. Meanwhile, Pakistan had decided in principle not to accept any pressure on the issue.⁷⁹ Most probably the Jhadav affair would be settled with a deal of some sorts between India and Pakistan. Some concessions will be given by India in exchange of the spy being handing over to them in due time. It was just a matter of time when the trade took place. Pakistan did not want to escalate the already tense situation further. Despite the bravado, a deal would be made and Jhadav would be freed soon.

India and the CPEC Imitative

India was adamantly opposed to the CPEC imitative and had expressed its concern to China several times. India protested to China over CPEC as it goes through Gilgit-Baltistan region claimed by it. The CPEC was connected to the Karakoram Highway, the world-class 1,300km

highway at an elevation of 4,693 meters. The Gilgit-Baltistan is part of Pakistan and covers 85,793 sq km but is treated as a separate geographical entity. It has a regional assembly and an elected chief minister. The area was divided in 1970 into two: Mirpur-Muzaffarabad (Azad Kashmir) and the Federally Administered Gilgit-Baltistan. Previously, Gilgit-Baltistan was referred to as the Northern Areas. In 1963, Pakistan allegedly ceded the Shaksgam Valley of Gilgit-Baltistan to China in a 1963 border agreement. The area is significant to both Pakistan and China as the CPEC passed through the region.

Meanwhile, there was a move to make Gilgit-Baltistan into a province of Pakistan which would require a constitutional amendment. Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh are four provinces of Pakistan. Last year, the then Indian foreign ministry's official spokesperson Vikas Swarup, responding to a question regarding reports that Pakistan is making Gilgit-Baltistan its province, said the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir, which includes areas currently under Pakistan control, is an integral part of India. India had maintained that entire area was its integral part by its accession in 1947.⁸⁰

Very recently, India on March 9, 2017 said that it is opposed to OBOR initiative since the CPEC passes through the Indian territory. "We are all for promoting connectivity... but on the OBOR, our position is that since the so-called CPEC forms a part of OBOR, and it passes through Indian territory, that is where our difficulty lies," External Affairs Ministry Spokesman Gopal Baglay said. He was non-committal on India's presence at a conference on OBOR, which China is hosting in May.⁸¹ India also protested to China over the CPEC as it supposedly impacts the Indian Ocean which ways considered as vital to India's security interests. However, despite concerns from India, OBOR initiative had received a broad support from the international community.⁸²

Meanwhile, majority of mainstream political parties and pro-freedom groups in India-held Kashmir have so far not found a connection between the CPEC and the Kashmir dispute. Mehboob Mufti, the chief minister of India-held Kashmir, has recently suggested building of a corridor between South Asia and Central Asia with Kashmir as its nucleus. She points out that "taking advantage of its geographical location, Jammu and Kashmir could become a nucleus towards forging a new economic alliance in the region".⁸³ The prominent pro-freedom leader of Hurriyat Conference, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, believed that Kashmir can become a gateway to

Central Asia. In a recent interview, he said that in terms of larger economic activity everybody wanted to be part of the CPEC. He found the project as an opportunity for the region to become part of the ancient Silk Route, even before the resolution of the Kashmir issue. “Kashmir can be a gateway for India as well. I am sure India will also want to be a part of the CPEC. Coming year is going to be very interesting as economic and political equations are going to be changed.” However, no one is giving any blueprint for such a plan, especially when India is continuously opposing the CPEC. India was also not happy over holding of elections in Gilgit-Baltistan by Pakistan, claiming that it is against the disputed nature of the region. Though China has always supported Pakistan over the Kashmir dispute, it wants Pakistan and India to resolve this issue through dialogue. Mostly people in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan believed that if India joins the CPEC it will benefit both countries, especially people in the occupied valley. Yasin Malik of the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front was the first to oppose any change in the status of Gilgit-Baltistan. He has written a letter to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, reminding him that any change in the status of the region would lead India to consolidate its hold on the held Kashmir.

In a reply, Prime Minister Sharif told Yasin Malik that his concerns and suggestions were valuable and they were being examined with care. He made it unambiguously clear that Pakistan was fully aware of the “sensitivities” attached to Gilgit-Baltistan about Jammu and Kashmir dispute.⁸⁴

Some observers in occupied Kashmir believe making Kashmir an entry point to the CPEC may only benefit India. But at the same time, they believe that inclusion of India in the mega project can pave the way for resolution of its dispute with Pakistan. If India decides to join the CPEC or even find a way to connect the occupied valley with it, the politics of the region would take a new turn. This would lead to increasing engagement between the two sides and help connect people through economic interests. Such a decision would prove to be a game-changer for the region. It would reduce political tension in South Asia and initiate a new chapter of economic development in the region.⁸⁵

Pakistan was apprehensive of rising Indian influence in Afghanistan which could threaten CPEC. Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan had soured lately. President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani’s had constantly accused Pakistan of sponsoring and sheltering Taliban leaders. Pakistan,

meanwhile, has taken offense at India's rising influence in Afghanistan. Narendra Modi, India's prime minister, opened Afghanistan's new parliament building in December. On June 4, 2016, he had inaugurated a restored dam near the western city of Herat. India financed both structures. In May 2016 Modi and Ghani, along with Rohani, Iran's president, struck a partnership to develop Iran's Chabahar port. The port was in the Sistan-Balochistan province on Iran's southeastern coast and is of great strategic utility and will give India sea-land access route to Afghanistan bypassing Pakistan.

The port project will compete with Pakistan's China-backed port in Gwadar, just 170km east of Chabahar. The Pakistan Army viewed the Chabahar development as a security threat to Pakistan. India recently approved a \$150 million development plan to begin building up the investment zone stipulated by the initial agreement last May. Though India seems sluggish, both Japan and India have profit-driven interests for the port's development. Satellite imagery does show progress at Chabahar, despite delays, and oil port Bandar Abbas is in serious need of capacity relief to handle oil flows.⁸⁶

Iran factor

Iran was the first country to recognize Pakistan as a sovereign state with the Shah of Iran being the first Head of State to visit Pakistan. The relationship between Iran and Pakistan however, changed with the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979.

Post Iran-Revolution saw the emergence of a strong Shia regime based on religion that practically remodeled Iran as an Islamic theocratic republic. The United States designated Iran as a State Sponsor of Terrorism in 1984. Iran continued to provide lethal support to groups targeting United States forces. Before the revolution, relationships between the Iran and Saudi Arabia were on warm. However, post revolution Iran relationship turned sore quickly as Iran was exporting its Islamic revolution and supported Shia rebellions in the Gulf region. Relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran had an obvious impact on the relationship between Islamabad and Tehran owing to Pakistan's closeness with Saudi Arabia.

Meanwhile, the Saudi-based Muslim World League opened offices in every region inhabited by Muslims, and the Saudi ministry of religion printed and distributed Wahhabi translations of the Quran, Wahhabi doctrinal texts and the writings of modern thinkers whom the Saudis found

congenial, such as Sayyid Abul-A'la Maududi and Qutb, to Muslim communities throughout the Middle East, Africa, Indonesia, the United States and Europe. In all these places, they funded the building of Saudi-style mosques with Wahhabi preachers and established madrassahs that provided free education for the poor. Saudi Arabia supported many madrassahs in Pakistan also. Iran was also doing the same in Pakistan. Pakistan-Iran relationship was strained owing to these developments. Plus, the closeness between Nawaz Sharif's family with Saudi Arabia was viewed by Iran with suspicion. However, Sharif had emphasized upon maintaining good relationships with Iran among as part of the foreign policy.

Meanwhile Iran had been quietly helping the Taliban for several years, as a hedge in case the militants regain power in Kabul.⁸⁷

Pakistan and Iran have supported different camps post-cold war. The Gulf States along with Pakistan actively supported US and its allies trying to effectively curtail Soviet influence in Central Asia, especially Afghanistan. The United States and Pakistan were partners in the 1980s in the Afghan jihad against the "Evil Empire". The United States had then encouraged Islamic groups from all over the world to come to Afghanistan to fight the Soviet Union. The United States had then provided \$3 billion for building up these Islamic groups. Iran on the other hand had a history of good relationship with Russia. A country India too was also close to.

Much earlier, in 2013, Pakistan had joined the international sanctions against Iran under the aegis of its Premier Nawaz Sharif, in direct conflict with his stated foreign policy. With Iran, Pakistan signed nine bilateral cooperation agreements in May 2014 when Nawaz Sharif visited Tehran. These included provisions for countering terrorism and enhancing border security. In 2015, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif twice visited Pakistan. The purpose was to set off agreed projects as well as get a head start on other security, economic and cultural relations between the two countries. Pakistan through its offensives via Zarb-e-Azab is focused on dealing with the security position within its borders to be able to help in the take off for CPEC. Iran was disturbed by Islamabad's closeness to Riyadh. By the same coin, Islamabad was perturbed by Tehran's closeness to Delhi. Pakistan claimed that India was using Afghan soil to support the Baluch nationalist insurgency in Pakistan's Baluchistan province and TTP militants inside Afghanistan, Iranian cooperation with India in Afghanistan proved to a major aggravation in Pakistani-Iranian ties. Both Iran and Pakistan need to understand that for a peaceful region, their

cooperation and commitment to attain the goal is important. Both need to address the concerns felt by both in all sincerity. The CPEC project could offer huge economic benefits not only to China but also to Afghanistan, Iran and even India. The countries must cooperate to take advantage of CPEC for the advancement of regional peace and security. China welcomed Iranian cooperation on CPEC. Iran had been involved in a trade corridor deal, which includes India and Afghanistan, and also desired stronger relations with Pakistan. China had also placed importance on resolving outstanding issues bilaterally and Iran's involvement in CPEC allows for greater prospects to establish and repair relations with Pakistan bilaterally. Previously, there were several points of contention between the Pakistan and Iran which included dispute over pricing in the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline as well as cross-border skirmishes on the Sistan-Baluchistan and Balochistan border. Both Iranian and Chinese interests can potentially converge on the CPEC project. While China devoted equal significance to its relations with Saudi Arabia, an arrangement that permit Iran to benefit economically and could as well challenge the regional hegemony of Saudi Arabia, served Iran's interest.⁸⁸

China and Iran have improved relations lately. Sino-Iranian trade increased from \$4 billion in 2003 to \$52 billion in 2014, and Tehran hopes to boost that figure to \$600 billion over the next decade.⁸⁹ Pakistan has invited Iran to participate in the CPEC and there are plans to connect Chabahar to Gwadar.

Pakistan and the Issue of Iran-Saudi Arabia Rivalry

Pakistan was trying its best to balance relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. It was caught in the proxy war and intense struggle for power and influence between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Saudi Arabia was Shia and Iran was Sunni. There was rivalry between the two countries because each desired leadership of the Muslims. Iran was the leader of the Shia sect and Saudi Arabia had a very special place in the Islamic world because of the mosques in Makkah and Madinah- the two holiest sites in Islam. Pakistan was predominantly Sunni and was naturally tilted towards Saudi Arabia. Historically Pakistan had been a strong and close ally of Saudi Arabia, Iran's rival. However current politics had created tension in Pakistan because of the intense rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The Shia-Sunni rivalry is old and goes back centuries. Iran assumes itself to be the leader of the world Shias and the promotion of their interests is a foundation of the Islamic republic's

ideology. Similarly, Saudi Arabia is the custodian of the two holiest mosques and is a bastion of Sunni Islam. Recently, the rivalry had taken an ugly turn. The Shia cleric Nimr al Nimr was among the 47 execution on January 2, 2016. Nimr's execution had resulted in Shia protests in several countries of the region. He was a fierce critic of the Saudi rulers and had once even advocated the establishment of a separate Shia state in the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia which had a large Shia population. Iran had quickly promised revenge for the execution and so did the Shia Houthis in Yemen.⁹⁰ After the execution of Nimr protesters in Tehran responded by torching part of the Saudi Embassy. On January 3, 2016, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir announced Saudi Arabia was severing ties with Iran. Bahrain had also announced it will sever ties with Iran. Both Bahrain and Saudi Arabia were close U.S. allies.⁹¹ Sudan and the UAE also joined in though the UAE's action was limited to downgrading diplomatic relations. What does this all mean? These executions signal Saudi Arabia's increasing anxiety over instability. The Saudi monarchy faced challenges from several directions, including economy. The Kingdom faced a high deficit of \$98 billion in 2015 and a drop in foreign exchange reserves from \$728 billion to \$640 billion.⁹²

Iran and Saudi Arabia are rivals for influence in the region and are engaged in a proxy war stretching across the region, they are increasingly competitive over the leadership of Islam itself. Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shia Iran's rivalry goes back centuries to the rivalry of Shia and Sunni Islam. In the contemporary period the Saudi Kingdom was an important Western ally and was supported by successive Western governments. Saudi Arabia had vast oil wealth and was a reliable customer of Western goods, including military equipment. The Saudi-Iran row is going to get worse very soon. How can the tension be reduced to avoid a real crisis in the making? Is a sectarian conflict going to get worse now? Who is to be blamed for the recent problems? An editorial in the Independent stated:⁹³

Yet it is a fact that Saudi Arabia is the source of most of the recent problems between the two sects...The latest round of provocations from the Saudis stems from the successful conclusion of talks to limit and monitor Iran's development of its nuclear capacity. The melting of the pack ice between the West and Tehran, in which this agreement was the first and most crucial step, was taken badly in Riyadh, and the ratcheting up of tensions stems from that event. The pitiless war waged by a Saudi-led coalition against Shia Houthi rebels in Yemen is only its most brutal

manifestation.... But the Saudis need to be made aware that if they are to survive, they must mend their ways. In particular, the bloody provocations initiated by King Salman since his enthronement one year ago must cease.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia was also commanding an Arab coalition in Yemen against Houthi rebels supported by Iran. Nearly 6,000 people had been killed since the Saudi-led coalition began bombing Yemen in March 2015, about half of them civilians.⁹⁴ Undoubtedly, the war was an ill-conceived adventure of the Saudis and the Gulf States. After all, their strategic partner and strong ally Pakistan did not join the coalition to the utter surprise and dismay of their Gulf Arab brothers. The war in Yemen has caused large destruction in the country and had had resulted in grave human rights violations, as per international watchdog agencies and the United Nations. Tragically, it has ravaged the poorest Arab country, even further.

Others blame Iran for the troubles and point out the Iranian fingerprints over many incidents of terrorism. For example, the Hezbollah had conducted an attack on the United States Air Force personnel in 1995 in which 19 Americans were killed. The Hezbollah group in Saudi Arabia was connected to the parent Hezbollah in Lebanon.⁹⁵ Iran supports the Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Simon Henderson, had argued in his policy brief “Saudi-Iranian Diplomatic Crisis Threatens U.S. Policy” published on January 4, 2016 that the US needed “to move quickly to prevent a full-scale diplomatic confrontation with military dimensions” United States appeared to its Gulf allies of “indecision and unwillingness to confront Iran, as well as ineffectiveness”.⁹⁶ In December 2015 Saudi Arabia had announced the formation of a grand coalition of Muslim states to fight IS. The Saudi move “fits U.S. thinking that a Sunni Muslim force is the best way of confronting and ultimately destroying IS. With United States, logistical and intelligence support”.⁹⁷

Saudi Arabia had been assisting fighters trying to overthrow the Assad regime in Syria. But now the U.S.-Saudi bilateral relationship was under “considerable strain and perhaps reconsideration, at least in Riyadh”.⁹⁸ The US “must act swiftly to defuse the tension in the Gulf. Deterring Iranian troublemaking more openly and vigorously should reassure Saudi Arabia of Washington's support -- even if this support is sometimes mixed with criticism -- against the Islamic State and the challenge represented by Iran”.⁹⁹ Boot argued that:¹⁰⁰

And of course there has been no real U.S. pushback against Iran for its support for the Assad regime in Syria which is guilty of crimes against humanity — the kind of crimes that United Nations Ambassador Samantha Power has spent her career denouncing. Nor does the U.S. inflict any kind of cost on Iran for holding five Americans hostage, or for the rather hostile habit that Ayatollah Khomeini and other Iranian leaders have of regularly chanting “Death to America.” Whenever Iran acts up, the U.S. looks the other way. This is particularly egregious given the fact that Iran has not actually received its sanctions relief yet. Soon — possibly in a matter of weeks — Iran will get access to over \$100 billion in frozen oil assets. Until that happens all of the leverage is on the American side. Iran should be on its best behavior until it gets its payoff for signing the nuclear deal. But that’s not the way Tehran sees it. The Iranian regime knows that President Obama is so desperate to implement the JCPOA that Iran can get away with murder and not suffer any consequences. So that is precisely what Iran is doing. This is creating a very dangerous precedent for the future. The devastating loss of American credibility means that a future president, even if he or she is so inclined, will have a hard time restoring our deterrent power and convincing Iran not to secretly pursue its nuclear ambitions. It also means that the value of American security guarantees continues to erode, which helps to explain why allies such as Saudi Arabia are pushing back against the Iranian threat in their own crude fashion, e.g., by bombing Houthi rebels in Yemen and by executing a Shiite rabble rouser. In sum, it means that the Middle East (and indeed the rest of the world) will continue to become more dangerous and more hostile to American interests — hard as that may be to believe.

To just blame Iran for the regional troubles, as the Trump Administration was prone to do, was naïve and uncalled for. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia both must be blamed for the troubles. Saudi Arabia is a medieval kingdom trampling human rights and Iran is a theocratic state also trampling human rights. The Shia government has persecuted Sunni Baluchis bordering Afghanistan and Pakistan. Over the decades, the Islam regime in Iran has also persecuted the Kurds bordering Turkey. Iran has also supported Shia proxies in various places like Lebanon, Iraq, Bahrain and Pakistan. In Pakistan, it has supported the Shia Tehrani Nifas-i Fiqah-i Jafria (TNFJ) which has opposed Sunni majority interpretation of Islam. On the other hand, the Saudi rulers have supported the extremist Sunni entities fighting the Shia extremists. The proxy war has lasted for decades.

In sum, neither of the two are any models of good governance, rule of law, or upholders of human rights. Meanwhile, the US is seemingly reluctant to intervene despite calls for taking sides with the Saudi against the Iranian regime. It is best to engage with both to defuse tensions. The United States, along with Turkey and Pakistan, should act quietly behind the scenes to defuse tension. It would be inappropriate for the new Trump Administration to come out openly against Iran or to even openly support the Saudis. A cautious approach is required. In sum, the proper role of the United States and Pakistan would be to stay neutral officially and to try facilitating a rapprochement between the two rivals through back channel diplomacy. Pakistan's famous Army chief, who retired some months back General Raheel Sharif was now going to head the 39 Muslim nation alliance headed by Saudi Arabia. However, Iran remained apprehensive about this development and had indicated its concerns to Pakistan very recently. The biggest challenge to Pakistan was to balance between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Refusal to have boots on ground in Yemen as per Saudi request was a commendable effort on Pakistan's part, in an effort to maintain an equilibrium.

The US Factor

Relations between the United States and Pakistan have been strained. Ties between the countries have long been uneasy and complex. US-led NATO troops have been at war in Afghanistan since 2001, after the ousting of the Taliban regime for refusing to hand over Osama bin Laden following the 9/11 attacks in the United States. The US has around 8,400 troops in the country with about another 5,000 from NATO allies, as efforts to negotiate a lasting peace settlement between Kabul and the Taliban have repeatedly fallen through. Pakistan was constantly accused of harboring militants carrying out attacks in neighboring Afghanistan and India, and the United States had constantly demanded it act. Pakistan had consistently denied using proxy forces to influence foreign policy objectives. The US and India are convinced that through considerably weakening of the Taliban in Afghanistan they can dictate the terms of an eventual settlement. Pakistan was convinced that the only path to peace in Afghanistan was through Islamabad.

Other than the constant issue of Afghanistan, the United States was apprehensive of Pakistan's rapid buildup of its nuclear arsenal, especially the recent entry of tactical nuclear weapons. From the Pakistani perspective, the buildup was a natural development against an ever-growing powerful mortal enemy. There was no sinister design in Pakistan's defense imperatives other

than protecting itself from its arch rival, India. Pakistanis recalled with horror how India intervened in East Pakistan in December 1971 and the eastern wing of the country broke away from Pakistan to become Bangladesh. That won't happen again was the resolve of the Pakistanis. Pakistan's enmity with a powerful India has forced it to stress deployment of its nuclear arsenal. The reason for the development of the tactical nuclear weapons was also the giant size of India's nuclear and conventional military strength. However, with a successful solution of the Kashmir dispute a scale-down was possible. Thus, the Pakistani government welcomed the recent overture of the United States to broker peace between itself and its greatest enemy on the east. Regarding United States, the Pakistan Army is apprehensive of the continued presence in Afghanistan and the region and would like the American troops to leave as soon as possible, which doesn't seem to be happening. Some are worried that the US and India are conspiring to weaken the institution and thereby hope to somehow neutralize Pakistan's prided nuclear arsenal. They view that the attempts are serious and the only institution to thwart the conspiracy against Pakistan is the Army. The Pakistan Army was convinced that it was the strongest institution in the country and has sacrificed a lot to preserve the country. Thus, the narrative of the Army puts itself against all odds valiantly fighting for the glory of Pakistan. Obviously, the viewpoint is lopsided but recent weaknesses of the Nawaz Government have added to the popularity of the Army. In these circumstances, the Army isn't in any mood to give concessions to either the US or Afghanistan. Most importantly, the Army dreads any military role of India inside Afghanistan because it will enable it to exert the maximum pressure on Pakistan in strategic terms and threaten Pakistan's CPEC project. But the problem in the Pakistan Army thinking is that it cannot comprehend the complexities of international and global politics and was unable to see beyond its own narrowly defined paradigm of national security where India loomed as an existential threat.

On July 9, 2016, an airstrike in Afghanistan had killed Khalifa Omer Mansour, the mastermind of the of the TTP attack in Peshawar school in 2014 in which 130 children had died. Mansour had led one of the deadliest factions of the TTP and had claimed an attack in a university in KPK that had killed 21 this year. The group's leadership was based in Afghanistan and Pakistan had demanded action against it. The Afghanistan government had denied the presence of the TTP militants on its soil. The airstrike had fulfilled a Pakistani demand that the United States act

against the TTP sitting in Afghanistan. The airstrike will have a positive impact on US-Pakistan relations and may help ease tensions between the US and Pakistan.¹⁰¹

Meanwhile, Pakistan's relations with the United States were also strained. Very recently, a United States congressional panel had demanded cutting off all US assistance to Pakistan to persuade Islamabad to act against the Afghan Taliban, and has also criticized important developments in Pakistan-US relations. A brief analysis of the current state of Pakistan-US relations were the principal areas of contention and uncertainty. Vital US interests related to links between Pakistan and indigenous American terrorism, "Islamist" militancy in Pakistan, policies toward the Afghan insurgency, Pakistan's relations with its historic rival India, and allegations on Pakistan's premier intelligence agency ISI were stated. Ongoing terrorism concerns and the US foreign assistance programs for Pakistan were recommended to close with an analysis of current US-Pakistan relations.

Vital US interests are seen to be at stake in its engagement with Pakistan. This has led US Congress to undertake an intensive scrutiny of the bilateral relationship, and sparked much congressional questioning of the wisdom of providing significant US foreign assistance to Pakistan that they believe may not have the intention and to be an effective US partner. Although Obama administration officials and most senior congressional leaders consistently recognize Pakistan as a crucial ally in US-led counterterrorism and counterinsurgency efforts, long-held doubts by some US Congressmen's views about Pakistan's commitment to core US interests have deepened over the course of time. Congressman Matt Salmon, Chairman, Asia and Pacific Subcommittee of House Foreign Affairs Committee, remarked that Pakistan should be treated as a foe, and insulted the Pakistani military and intelligence services as seen to be intentionally failing to distinguish among Islamist extremist groups, maintaining links to Afghan insurgent, and anti-India militant organizations operating from Pakistani territory as a means of forwarding Pakistani's perceived security interests.

US-Pakistan relations were running a clearly negative course marked by levels of mutual distrust and resentment that are likely to catalyze a new set of assumptions for future ties. The tenor of criticism from congressmen has been increasingly negative. These included allegations that Pakistan was providing a haven to Afghan Taliban groups to launch operations into Afghanistan.

Congress members had issued some of the strongest criticisms of Pakistan as a US ally seen in decades. There appears to be growing misperception among some US Congressmen that US military aid has done little to stem religious-based militancy in Pakistan. The last few years were by far the most tumultuous in a decade of tense and mistrustful relations between Pakistan and the United States. In Washington, several members of Congress have demanded for sidelining Pakistan and giving India a larger stake in Afghanistan. Others object that it is important to carefully consider that Pakistan cannot just be ignored.¹⁰²

Seemingly, the United States Congress was losing patience with Pakistan. A problem of Pakistan policy in United States was the turf battles and the internal politics of the country. Seemingly, the Republican party was more opposed to Pakistan than the Democratic party.

In case of Pakistan the US relations are managed in layers from White House, Department of Defense, CIA to the State Department — most of these institutions that are almost always not onboard on their strategy towards Pakistan. The effects of this contradiction in the United States policy was evident when at one point the Congress was making a move to put Pakistan under sanctions, the State Department was pushing Pakistan to do more, while on the contrary the Pentagon praised the efforts of the Pakistan Army in fighting terrorism. It almost appeared that Pakistan was slowly becoming a policy mess of the US internal politics. And this won't be the first time any country has gone through this.¹⁰³

In June 2016, the United States announced that because Pakistan was allegedly lying about shutting down some key Islamic terrorist groups (like the HQN, al Qaeda and several that operate against India) in Pakistan, over \$300 million in American aid was being withheld. Now the United States threatens to cut all aid and impose sanctions if Pakistan does not act. The main sore point here is continued Pakistani support for the Afghan Taliban (and their Baluchistan sanctuary), various Islamic terror groups that concentrate on India (with bases throughout Pakistan but especially in the north, near the border with Indian Kashmir) and the HQN.¹⁰⁴

The “blame-the-Pakistanis” game reached a crescendo in the summer of 2016 when the Taliban activity in Afghanistan picked up and made territorial gains against the Kabul government. The anti-Pakistan sentiment was shared by members of Congress who called a set of congressional hearings in which people such Zalmay Khalilzad testified and called for ending all serious relations with Islamabad, turning it into “a second North Korea” to force that it cooperates in

Afghanistan. “This hearing will give members the opportunity to learn more about Pakistan’s longstanding ties to terrorist groups and allow for more informed reassessment of US foreign policy vis-a-vis Islamabad,” said Congressman Ted Poe, a Republican chairman of a Congress sub-committee, who had summoned the hearings to “determine whether Pakistan is America’s friend or foe.” If the Taliban forces gain more territory, as they are expected to do, the pressure on Pakistan will increase. 105 Ted Poe “in his article “Pakistan’s Safe Havens for Terrorists”, published on the GOP site stated on July 19, 2016 that:106

“Islamabad’s connection to terrorist groups is so close that in 2011 Admiral Mike Mullen, then chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff testified before the Senate that “the Haqqani network acts as a veritable arm of Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence agency...The laundry list of evidences of Pakistan’s support for terrorists goes on and on. We all remember where al-Qaeda’s leader and America’s most wanted terrorist Osama bin Laden was found: in Pakistan, of course.... Each year we say that Pakistan is at the crossroads and needs to decide whether it is going to fight terrorists or fight on our side. In fact, just two months ago the State Department’s Ambassador Richard Olson, used this very line. But the United States has been using this line for the last 15 years. Enough is enough. Pakistan is playing us. They are trying to have it both ways. They want our money and they keep supporting terrorists who target Americans..... The reality is that Pakistan has chosen sides. And it isn’t ours. It is time to change our policy towards Pakistan. We do not need to pay Pakistan to betray us.”

Anti-Pakistan feelings in Congress were pervasive. It was extremely rare to hear pro-Pakistan remarks at congressional hearings.107The mistrust was assiduously nurtured by Indian lobbyists in Washington, and Pakistan has only just reawakened to the need for lobbyists to promote and advance the country’s causes and positions.108

Meanwhile, the Pakistan Army had very recently expressed its extreme displeasure at the working of the Nawaz government in the foreign policy realm. However, the problem wasn’t the Nawaz Government but the aggressive policies of the Army itself and the way it formulated foreign policy. The simplistic nature of the army worldview wasn’t keeping up with changing realities in the region and beyond. The worldview miserably failed to capture the complexities of global politics.

An earlier editorial on July 22, 2016 in Dawn had correctly pointed out that:109

Why is Pakistan's foreign policy adrift and the country seemingly once again on a path towards regional and international isolation? Ever since, it has been one setback after another — for the political government and for foreign policy. Indeed, the more the military leadership asserted control, the worse the overall foreign policy situation appeared to become. Was it a cause or effect? The military leadership would claim that its interventions were necessitated by a deteriorating international climate; critics would contend that those interventions helped worsen the international climate the country today faces. Who is to blame perhaps matters less at present than how to recover the situation. As the Senate debate has indicated, the PML-N government has allies in parliament who both want the government to reassert itself in the foreign policy domain and are willing to help it with advice and debate.... But the drift towards unaccountable and undemocratic institutions making opaque decisions about this country's national security and its relationship with the outside world needs to be reversed.

Earlier, Pakistani policy makers and legislators had stood puzzled over the way the United States had lately conducted its relationship with Islamabad and very harsh criticism was now emanating from within the U.S. Congress about Pakistan's efforts to promote peace in Afghanistan. There was now also an increased concern in both US and India over the CPEC in Pakistan and the establishment of a so-called China-Pakistan military axis. 110

The Pakistan Army was inclined to believe that Richard Haass, president of the Council on Foreign Relations was right in his assessment that the US was although still the most significant nation in the world but was reducing now and as Carol Lee put it very recent major global developments also included China reasserting its power.111 These developments would be looked at favorably by the Pakistan military. The aggressiveness of the Army was backed on the assumption that China would come to Pakistan's help if it got into any serious trouble with the United States.

Pakistan and the United States have long had uneasy relations. The United States media continuously blamed Pakistani for allowing Taliban bases inside its territory.

Jonathan Marshall in his article “Afghanistan: President Obama’s Vietnam”, published in Consortium Newson on July 24, 2016 **argued that Afghanistan would become President Obama’s Vietnam because, the** “Highly motivated Taliban forces are particularly tough to beat because they get refreshed and resupplied from bases in Pakistan, **where their leaders**

reside. One of the key lessons of the Vietnam War was the near impossibility of defeating a determined insurgency that enjoys neighboring sanctuaries.”¹¹² Ties have been strained recently over allegations that Pakistan’s counterterrorism operations focus only on militants linked to the anti-state Pakistani Taliban, and spare sanctuaries linked to Afghan militants, including the HQN terrorist group. Very recently, the U.S Congress stopped the Obama administration from subsidizing the sale of eight F-16 fighter planes to Pakistan, citing lack of cooperation in combating terrorist networks. Concerns often expressed in Kabul and echoed during the Congressional hearing that Pakistan was supporting the Taliban.¹¹³

Reiterating its call on Pakistan to stop terrorism from spreading roots on its own soil, the United States has reiterated that Islamabad must target all terrorist groups, particularly those that have their eyes set on its neighbors.

However, the US also had acknowledged that Pakistan was indeed taking steps to counter terrorist violence, particularly focused on groups that threaten Pakistani stability. The US State Department noted that Pakistan was waging “a serious and sustained campaign” against violent extremism and had suffered greatly from terrorism.

It noted that the Pakistani military had made progress in shutting down terrorist safe havens through Zarb-e-Azb and other operations, and had restored government control to parts of Pakistan that had been used as terrorist sanctuaries for years.

While appreciating Pakistan’s efforts, the US also pointed out that it must target all militant groups and close all safe havens”. On Jul6 56, 2016 Gen Raheel Sharif had directed Pakistani military commanders, intelligence agencies and law enforcement agencies to take concrete measures to deny any militant group haven or the use of Pakistani soil to launch terrorist attacks in Afghanistan.

The US had asserted several times that they it made no secret of the concern that the Afghan Taliban and the HQN continued to operate from Pakistani territory. 114

Earlier, the parliament of Pakistan was agitated by the US Congress’s criticism of the country. Senate chairman warned the US to desist from giving anti-Pakistan statements otherwise it would get the response from

Chairman Senate Raza Rabbani said that "If US keeps on giving such remarks, then US should think that it is also living in a glass house," the chairman Senate said adding that then "they would be bound to question how yesterday's jihadi became terrorists today. The chair said that Senate did not want to become a hurdle in the way of good relations between Pakistan and US but the Parliament will not allow these remarks, it was a two-way traffic. The US will have to respect Pakistan's sovereignty otherwise it will be a tit for tat. 115

The Pakistan Army was convinced that since China was now clearly resurgent in a very active way in Pakistan the two powers who don't want this are India and US. So, natural allies. Also, the Indian economy is a huge market for the USA and a source of very cheap labor both skilled and unskilled. Also, the Indian USA based diaspora is far more effective than Pakistan. So, looking at the big picture there were zero common interests between Pakistan and the US. Therefore, reigning in the HQN was now unlikely.

It was ironic that the Pakistan Army said Pakistan wants good relations with neighbors but acts otherwise and the country was isolated now. It doesn't make sense to further isolate Pakistan by antagonizing the US. The Pakistan army had the option of stopping support to HQN and Quetta Shura, and the like. The Army can indeed negotiate a deal with the US as it was willing to support Pakistan if the Army changed its obsession viz a viz enemies India and Afghanistan. Many agree with in Pakistan that regional peace through compromise was a better option for Pakistan. Complexity requires rethinking but it won't happen in Pakistan as institutions the Army mindset prevailed. The US would support a prosperous, stable and secure Pakistan as that is in its national interest, as defined by the US itself. There can yet be a convergence of interests as the Army can negotiate a mutual win win outcome. With the US, which won't happen though. The Army must think again its foreign policy paradigm. Most importantly, the Army must now discard use of strategic assets as there is serious blow back problem and we can focus on economic tools, trade, diplomacy in Afghanistan and even India, and of course Iran with Iran we join CPEC with Chabahar project and build the gas pipeline that we started so long ago but never even built it on our side, while Iranians did

The US was also angered at Pakistan on the issue of Jamaat-ud-Dawah or LeT. Earlier, Pakistan observed "Black Day" on July 20, 2016 as a sign of protest Indian atrocities in Indian held Jammu and Kashmir and to show solidarity with the Kashmiri people in their demand for their

right to self-determination. Pakistan has also raised the issue of Kashmir at the international stage with Pakistan's permanent representative to the United Nations, Maleeha Lodhi, reminding UN officials of their duty to ensure that the rights of Kashmiris are protected. Lodhi in her statement said, "Dubbing the Kashmiris, agitating for their right to self-determination, as terrorists was a travesty of truth and was further inflaming passions." This is perhaps the most important dimension of the Kashmir issue as the Indian government has repeatedly tried to delegitimize the freedom movement in Kashmir by declaring it to be a fringe movement of terrorists backed by Pakistan. 116 Pakistani leaders, including army chief Gen Raheel Sharif, made belligerent speeches. After a continued absence of political engagement, Kashmir seems to be entering a dangerous phase. 117 On July 19, 2016 Hafiz Saeed led a 'Kashmir Caravan' from Lahore to Islamabad and vowed to march towards Jammu and Kashmir "till Kashmiris get freedom". Speaking at the rally in Lahore, Saeed said in the first phase the 'Kashmir Caravan' would reach Islamabad to "wake up" the members of the National Assembly and Senate to raise their voice for the rights of Kashmiris. In the next phase, he said it would leave for Muzaffarabad and Chakothi in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir to raise voice for freedom of Kashmiris. "And in the third phase we (caravan) will march into occupied Kashmir and we will continue marching till Kashmiris get freedom," Saeed said.

The founder of the LeT who carries a \$10-million bounty on his head again demanded the Pakistan government immediately suspend "diplomatic and trade" ties with India, expel the Indian ambassador in Islamabad and recall its envoy from New Delhi. 118 Subsequently, Hafiz Saeed was court arrested in his home in Lahore and remains under detention today.

Kashmir was a matter very close to Pakistanis. Earlier, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said on July 20, 2016 that that India has two choices on Kashmir, either keep on with its aggression that has left over 45 people dead over the past 11 days or to give people of the in the disputed Himalayan valley their due rights which it had promised in the UN. In a message on Black Day to protest the atrocities of security forces in Indian-held Kashmir (IHK), Nawaz said that Pakistan stands with Kashmiris in every hour of trial adding that this relation is based not only on religion, civilization and humanity but also on blood.

"We will never leave Kashmiris alone and their case will be fought at all the diplomatic, political and human rights fora," he reiterated.

He added that Pakistan cannot keep itself aloof if such recurrent inhuman treatment was meted out to the Kashmiris in IHK noting that the entire nation is expressing solidarity with the Kashmiri people.

He said the current freedom wave in Kashmir will not subside and that when nations rise in such a way, nothing can stop them in their path towards freedom. "India has no other option but to accept its defeat before the heroic struggle," he said.¹¹⁹ Prime Minister Sharif, while addressing a public gathering here on July 22, 2016 in Azad Kashmir said: "We are waiting for the day Kashmir becomes Pakistan." Nawaz urged Kashmiris "not to forget those in held Kashmir who are sacrificing their lives to their movement for freedom. Their movement for freedom cannot be stopped and it will be successful. You are aware of how they are being beaten and killed. All our prayers are with them and we are waiting for the day Kashmir becomes Pakistan."¹²⁰

The earlier outbursts in Pakistan would cause more concern in US on the direction the country was heading. Already, Pakistan's image had suffered tremendously in the US. Sentiment in the US Congress has been building steadily over the past two years. The first clear indication of the new weariness was Congress' refusal to subsidize the proposed F-16 sale to Pakistan. This development in Pakistan would surely cause concern in United States as Pakistan Army was taking a tough posture on India.

Earlier, the halting of U.S. funding for the foreign military sale by the U.S. Congress earlier this year has led The Army to reconsider Nawaz Government's strategy of not deploying lobbyists in Washington, D.C. The Pakistan Army also had directed the Nawaz Government to take measures to improve Pakistan's standing in the United States Congress. Numerous times Pakistan had been accused of playing double games. The Obama Administration's Pakistan policy was now a major cause of frustration in the US Congress.¹²¹

Earlier, Pakistan's Afghan policy had come under harsh criticism in Washington. Pakistan Army was accused of being linked to terrorist groups. Former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad gave a damning assessment of Pakistani policy. He believed that Pakistan was the principal cause of the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. Many in Congress agreed and had advocated for an end to all U.S. financial assistance.¹²²

Anger toward Pakistan was consistently increasing in Washington, particularly in Congress, as more new voices were speaking up against Islamabad's double standards in its fight against Islamic terrorists and dealings with the United States. Since April when Congress obstructed the Obama administration's plans to spend \$430 million through the U.S. foreign military financing budget to subsidize the sale of F-16 fighter jets, there has been a continuous decline in U.S.-Pakistan relations. The Pakistan had blamed the "Indian lobby" in Washington for turning the Americans against them

There have been numerous reports about Pakistan's double standards; misuse of the American aid; widespread violation of human rights and the military's increasing influence on the democratic government. American officials have testified one after the other consistently saying that most Islamic terrorists, such as the HQN, are assisted by Pakistan Army. The mood toward Pakistan was unlikely to change in Washington in near future. It might get worse. Pakistanis insisted that Americans don't bother to understand their perspectives nor do they understand how many sacrifices the country had made in the war on terror.¹²³ Ironically, nuclearization of Indian Ocean by India goes unnoticed by US but any military purchase by Pakistan disturbs South Asian military balance. However, it was need of the hour that Pakistan Army reassess its foreign policy in the light of fast changing regional and international developments. ¹²⁴ The Pakistan Army had long been suspect of US motives in the region. General Asad Durrani, ex-chief Pakistan ISI had argued that:¹²⁵

The US did not want a settlement in Afghanistan because it wanted to keep their presence in the region and sell weapons to one side or another - sometimes to both.... Pakistan has no interest in targeting any Afghan group, especially the Taliban, because of the sympathy that the Taliban enjoys in Pakistan, but as well as in large areas of Afghanistan. If ultimately Pakistan wanted to bring all the factions to the table, which it will try to do that, it cannot burn its bridges with any of them. The fact is that the U.S. and Pakistan are not allies. Allies have the same objectives, they coordinate their approaches, they agree on certain strategies. In case of Pakistan and the U.S., in the region, in Afghanistan - nothing of that has happened. In fact, the interests of the two countries conflict with each other. So, talking of alliance is an illusion. Those people who believe in that, they delude themselves. Maybe, there's some sort of experience involved in this terminology, but the fact is that - and that what the events of the last 15 years have proven - that

there seems to be no chance for the time being that the interests of both countries in the region can be aligned....Pakistani support for the Taliban is exaggerated - highly exaggerated. I have said that we have no reason to target anyone. We will not the type of, or not undertake the type of operations that the U.S. wants from us, because we don't want to create any more enemies, we already have enough within the country and outside. So that is the reason that Pakistan does not take any action. As far as the support is concerned, the Taliban depends on the supports of their own people. If anyone thinks that for the 15 years this rag-tag militia has withstood the onslaught of the world's mightiest alliance just because a country like Pakistan has provided a little bit of support - reluctantly, covertly - then again, I think one is not understanding the nature of support that the insurgents need to achieve this objective. Pakistani support gets exaggerated or becomes a reason or... you know; Pakistani support is given as a rationale for the failure of counterinsurgency or the war imposed by the foreigners in Afghanistan....The Afghan Taliban have never been against us, they've never done anything to harm us, their fight is within Afghanistan, and whatever you know about the Afghans generally or Afghan resistance particularly, they remain inward-looking, their region lies inside their country and that has been so for the last 25-30 years.....Islamic State, the so-called, or the Daesh, as some people like to call it - well, that's also a phenomenon which is an inevitable consequence of wars that start like in Afghanistan, which gave rise to the Taliban and the Al-Qaeda, or the war in the Middle East from which Daesh emerged - now that is a phenomenon, as I just said, which is almost inevitably happens. It has happened again.

General Durrani's hawkish arguments could be taken as representative of current military thinking. Meanwhile, US officials believed that that ISI's connections with HQN were very much in place. Sirajuddin Haqqani, who leads a Taliban faction, had deep and longstanding ties to Pakistan's ISI. HQN was widely seen as one of the most violently effective parts of the insurgency, may prove more willing to take cues from Pakistan's ISI. Pakistan still believed that the Taliban can be managed.¹²⁶

The US Department of State said that "Pakistan did not take substantial action against the Afghan Taliban or HQN and had done little to deter home-grown jihadist groups such as LeT and Jaish-e-Mohammad. The Department of State noted Pakistan's unwillingness to deal with its preferred jihadist groups in the newly released Country Reports on Terrorism 2015. The report

stated that Afghanistan continued to experience “aggressive and coordinated attacks” by the Afghan Taliban, including the HQN, and other insurgent and terrorist groups. The report claimed that several attacks were conceived and launched from safe havens inside Pakistan and that it had done little to deal with jihadist groups fighting inside Afghanistan. Pakistan had not taken any significant action against the Afghan Taliban or HQN, or significantly curtail their capability to threaten United States interests in Afghanistan. Further, Pakistan had also not taken sufficient action against other externally-focused groups such as LeT and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), which continued to fundraise, operate, organize, and train inside Pakistan. Although Pakistan had banned media coverage of United Nations and United States designated terrorist organizations such as and the Falah-e-Insaniyat Foundation (FeI) and Jamaat-u-Dawah (JuD), both of which were just aliases of LeT. Pakistan failed to otherwise constrain those groups’ fundraising activities. Hafiz Saeed, the leader of LeT/JuD/FeI, who was also a UN-designated terrorist, could make frequent public appearances in support of the organization’s objectives. Also, the slow pace of trial proceedings for the accused in the 2008 Mumbai terror attack, which had been planned and executed from Pakistan. Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi, LeT’s operational planner of the Mumbai attack, had been freed from jail. Lakhvi was released from jail in April 2015 and Pakistan reports he remained under house arrest at the end of 2015. However, Pakistan has placed other terrorist leaders, such as Hafiz Saeed, under house arrest in the past, but this has done nothing to restrain their activities.¹²⁷

It was now an open secret that the Pakistan Army’s was still assisting some Jihadi entities like the LeT had now evolved into an Islamic charity, although it has been able to sustain its militant wing, even since it carried out the Mumbai attacks. While the army has stopped LeT and other groups from launching attacks into India, many LeT fighters are now openly fighting in Afghanistan alongside the Taliban or helping extremist groups from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan regain footholds in their homelands. It was not only the Army that was supporting Jihadi groups but also the Nawaz Government which had been soft on extremist groups. Some of which have close ties to the ruling party, the Pakistan Muslim League.^{128e}

The United States had now adopted a harder line against Pakistan. Congress had imposed tighter restrictions on military aid to Pakistan, citing its failure to target the HQN. Congress also prohibited Pakistan from using U.S. aid to purchase F-16 jet fighters.¹²⁹

Meanwhile, the Taliban have been on a roll for 18 months, steadily advancing across the map of Afghanistan with ever more of the country coming under their direct control or influence. The Afghan National Army (ANA) is indifferently led, poorly equipped and leaking men and materiel like a sieve. The Taliban are equipping themselves with re-purposed American equipment, either taken direct from ANA defectors or simply stolen. Economically the country has returned to a narco-regime, the poppies that have sustained it in the past enabling it to again to lead the world in opium production. The Afghan government struggles bravely to put a positive spin on anything other than a complete disaster, but any thought of peace breaking out in the foreseeable future is nothing more than fantasy.¹³⁰

Pakistan has landed itself in a difficult position by not only stating but also giving in writing in meetings of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, that it would act against those not willing to join the peace process. This is precisely what President Ashraf Ghani referred to in his speech after the tragic incident of Kabul where 64 people were killed and more than 347 injured. He asked Pakistan to honor its commitment. Pakistan, for obvious reasons, could not oblige nor will it do so soon it appears. It will continue preaching the path of reconciliation irrespective of whether the Taliban take that seriously or not. Such a course of action will not, however, absolve Pakistan of its responsibilities in the QCG.

The region around Pakistan was changing fast and there were new harsh realities to be faced but the country was destined for total isolation among its neighbors for which it has only itself to blame because of the rigid blinkered' policies the country had followed all these years and was even now reluctant to discard.¹³¹

The Pakistan Army believes that time was on its side in Afghanistan. After all, the Taliban are stronger than ever in Afghanistan. They control more territory than at any time since the original U.S. invasion in 2001. Despite 15 years of U.S. interventionism, nearly 2,500 dead U.S. soldiers, and well over a trillion dollars, Afghanistan is no closer to being a model democracy than it was before 9/11. ¹³² The Pakistan Army viewed some elements of the Taliban like HQN and Quetta Shura as an effective proxy to ensure Pakistani dominance over Afghanistan, and to limit Afghan relations with India. The Pakistan Army also doesn't believe that the Ghani Government in Kabul can survive the final evacuation of American forces. The Army would agree with Paul Ron's assessment about Afghanistan that it was a "failed" American policy and was a

“purposeless” war”. 133 He continued to argue that: “You cannot invade a country, overthrow its government, and build a new country from the ground up. It is a fool's errand and Washington has turned most Americans into fools. It's time to end this game and get back to the wise foreign policy of the founders: nonintervention in the affairs of others.” 134

M. Saeed Khalid, in his article “Who sets the agenda?”, published in *The News*, April 14, 2017, argued that:¹³⁵

Whereas Washington measured Pakistan's role through the prism of Afghanistan, Islamabad had its own optic where New Delhi and Kabul were seen collaborating to destabilize the country. The US felt that in the prevailing regional situation, the most optimistic scenario would involve Washington looking at Pakistan as a part of the solution and not the problem... There is so much the world can do to restore peace to the country. And there are no indications of that happening anytime soon. The government in India and their soul mate in Kabul are stuck in the same groove. Take out terrorism and peace will return to Kashmir and Afghanistan. The Trump administration has yet to make a policy statement on Afghanistan. The well-meaning remark by Ambassador Nikki Haley was spurned by the Indian government. India has been trying its own version of the Monroe doctrine in the Subcontinent. Kabul wishes Pakistan to deliver the Taliban at the talks, but has not decided what kind of bargain they want. The US is anxious to prevent a military victory by the Taliban in Afghanistan. Washington can sustain its presence in Afghanistan but seems willing to step up forces if the Taliban threat becomes more ominous. Hopes to see Afghanistan standing on its feet have been belied by the bickering government of ‘unity’ in Kabul. The military capability of the Afghan security forces is on the decline. Washington, New Delhi and Kabul find an easy target by blaming Pakistan for their own failures. It is futile to expect much from the two neighbors’ the US wants greater cooperation from Pakistan, it should be based on mutual interests, not on Washington permanently assigning work to Pakistan and paying compensation for services rendered. The US should lower its expectations from a country which is on its way to become the fifth largest in terms of population and is already among the world's top 10 military powers with nuclear capabilities.

The strained relations between Pakistan and the United States was responsible for the blame game between the two erstwhile friends. The Pakistan Army blames the US for the nosedive in relations between the two countries. The rift between Washington and Islamabad may further

delay the sale of eight F-16s fighters to Pakistan. Islamabad desired to buy from the US eight Lockheed Martin F-16s. The US State Department approved the F-16 sale, comprising two single-seat F-16Cs and six twin-seat F-16Ds, in February. However, the deal has been opposed by some members of the US Congress because Pakistan has not done enough against insurgents and terrorist groups. The planned \$700 million U.S. sale of F-16 fighter jets to Pakistan was canceled due in part to concerns over the continued presence of the HQN on Pakistani soil. The deal fell through from Washington's refusal to provide Foreign Military Financing (FMF) support for the proposed deal.¹³⁶

With that avenue now closed, Pakistan's military will pursue the purchase of used F-16s from Jordan. The used F-16s offered by Jordan were not as good as that Pakistan originally intended to buy from the United States. This would not be the first Pakistani purchase from the Royal Jordanian Air Force (RJAF). In February 2014, Pakistan placed an order for an entire squadron of 14 (some sources say 13) F-16 A/Bs with the RJAF. Delivery of the F-16 aircraft began in April 2015.

The aircraft offered by Jordan were of inferior quality and standard in comparison to the F-16s offered by the United States. The RJAF F-16 aircraft were built in 1989/90 and underwent a major upgrade in the early 2000s. Should Pakistan decide to procure the squadron of F-16, the aircraft would likely need to undergo an additional major overhaul. However, Pakistan is looking for a quick replacement given that several older F-16 models in service with the Pakistan Air Force will need to be phased out soon. The deal was still subject to U.S. approval. Alternative aircraft from other sources are being considered like the Chinese-manufactured J-10 and the J-20 stealth fighters for future purchase and Western defense officials have told IHS Jane's that Moscow has informed Islamabad about its willingness to sell a batch of Sukhoi Su-35 fighters.¹³⁷

The Pakistan Air Force currently fields around 70 F-16 aircraft of all variants. Should the F-16 deal with Jordan go through, rather than opting for another foreign fighter aircraft, the PAF will likely purchase additional Pakistan Aeronautical Complex/Chengdu Aerospace Corporation (PAC/CAC) JF-17 Thunder combat aircraft of which it already operates around 60.¹³⁸ The tensions over the F-16 deal have added to the increasingly frayed ties between Pakistan and the United States.¹³⁹ The sale of \$952 million worth of attack helicopters, missiles and other

defense equipment to Pakistan was approved by the US earlier in April, to help the country with its counter-terrorism operation. Pakistan will receive six new medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) aircraft from the United States, under a contract announced by the US Department of Defense (DoD) on 21 April.

The contract, which was awarded the day prior to the announcement, will see Cessna Aircraft Company provide and support two Cessna 208B Grand Caravan EX and four Cessna T206H Stationair aircraft that have been modified for aeromedical evacuation. A 24-month sustainment package consisting of spares, tooling, and support equipment will be provided for each aircraft, and pilot and maintainer training will also be provided for the Pakistan Army. Valued at USD14.09 million, the contract is scheduled to be complete by 30 December 2016.¹⁴⁰

Pakistan has now contracted nine of the 15 AH-1Z helicopters that it requested. It is unclear if it will sign for the remaining platforms later, or make up the numbers with a different type.

Pakistan shall also receive nine Bell AH-1Z Viper attack helicopters by the end of September 2018, a US Department of Defense (DoD) contract notification has disclosed. The USD170.2 million contract, awarded on 4 April, is a modification to a wider award made in August 2015 that covered AH-1Z Viper helicopters for the US Marine Corps (USMC) and Pakistan, as well as UH-1Y Venom helicopters for the USMC. While the earlier award did not disclose AH-1Z numbers for Pakistan, the country had previously requested the procurement of 15 such platforms. With several nine aircraft now given, it is unclear if the remaining six requested will be contracted later, or if the Pakistan Army that will operate them will instead opt to procure other types, such as the Chinese CHAIG WZ-10 attack helicopter (three have been received for trials, and the army has also flown them operationally on counter-terrorism missions).

The original US Defense Security Co-operation Agency notification of Pakistan's request included 1,000 AGM-114 Hellfire II air-to-surface missiles for "a precision-strike, enhanced-survivability aircraft that can operate at high altitudes. By acquiring this [AH-1Z and Hellfire II] capability, Pakistan will enhance its ability to conduct operations in North Waziristan Agency [NWA], the Federally Administered Tribal Areas [FATAs], and other remote and mountainous areas in all-weather, day and night environments".

The DoD contract notification is the latest development in Pakistan's ongoing efforts to bolster and eventually replace its existing 32 AH-1F Cobra platforms. Besides the AH-1Z and WZ-10,

the country is rumored to be interested in the Russian-built Mil Mi-28NE 'Havoc' as well. Further, it was announced on 19 August 2015 that Pakistan and Russia had signed a formal agreement for the procurement of four Mi-35 'Hind' attack helicopters, with more likely to follow.¹⁴¹ Earlier, the United States had offered Pakistan some of the weapons it is leaving behind in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The weapons include F-16 armaments including 500 AMRAAM air-to-air missiles; 1,450 2,000-pound bombs; 500 JDAM Tail Kits for gravity bombs; and 1,600 Enhanced Paveway laser-guided kits. All this has cost Pakistan \$629 million.

Pakistan has also paid \$298 million for 100 harpoon anti-ship missiles, 500 sidewinder air-to-air missiles (\$95 million); and seven Phalanx Close-In Weapons System naval guns (\$80 million). Pakistan received 26 Bell 412EP utility helicopters, along with related parts and maintenance, valued at \$235 million. Pakistan was also receiving military equipment with a mix of its national funds and America's foreign military funding. These include 60 Mid-Life Update kits for F-16A/B combat aircraft (valued at \$891 million, with \$477 million of this in FMF). Pakistan had purchased 45 such kits, with all upgrades completed to date. This include 115 M-109 self-propelled howitzers (\$87 million, with \$53 million in FMF).¹⁴²

Meanwhile, India had expressed concerns to the United States over the sale of missiles and attack helicopters to Pakistan while asking them to consider the impact on India's security before firming up. However, the US assured that the deal would 'not alter' the military balance in the region.¹⁴³ Advisor to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz on June 7, 2016 asserted that Pakistan would take all possible measures to augment its defense capabilities.

"Pakistan is not oblivious to its defense requirements and upgrading its capabilities through suitable technologies without entering into an arms race," he said, adding that "our efforts for peace and friendship must not be interpreted as our weakness. We are fully capable to defend our people and territory."¹⁴⁴

The Pakistan Army in March 2017 received six new Cessna aircraft, two Cessna 208 Caravan and four Cessna T-206H from the United States, said a statement released by the US Office of Defense Representative. Earlier, in April 2016, the US Department of Defense had announced it had issued a \$14.9 million, fixed-price contract to Cessna Aircraft Company for making two Cessna 208B Grand Caravan EX aircraft and four Cessna T-206H Stationair aircraft for Pakistan. The contract included sustainment support and associated training. The statement from the

Office of Defense Representative added that the Caravan and the Stationair aircraft will strengthen Pakistan Army's air mobility by enhancing its capability to conduct medical evacuations as well as provide limited troop and equipment transport.¹⁴⁵

The biggest hindrance in the purchase of weapon systems from the US is the acute money problem Pakistan was facing now. Most probably, Pakistan would end up buying Chinese and Russian armaments.

The new President Donald Trump Administration was now likely to conduct a policy review Pakistan.

With relations between the long-term allies frayed, Pakistan should expect a reduction in aid under the new U.S. government. Any further cut in U.S. military aid, which includes direct financing and training to Pakistan's powerful army, would be an added blow to the nation's widening current account and fiscal deficits. It may also threaten the country's improved security situation following an army push against insurgents that came after more than 100 students were killed by the Pakistani Taliban in 2014.

Since 9/11, Pakistan had received billions of dollars in United States military aid but relations between the countries had long been uneasy and complex. Pakistan was constantly accused of harboring militants carrying out attacks in both Afghanistan and India. Numerously, the United States had demanded that Pakistan act. For its part, Pakistan had denied using proxy forces to influence foreign policy objectives, pointing to the thousands of its soldiers who have died battling domestic insurgent groups. "After over \$40 billion in assistance to Pakistan, helping build Pakistan's military and boost its economy, Pakistan is still seen as a country that supports jihadi groups that kill Americans, hurts American interests and refuses to change its policies," said Husain Haqqani, Pakistan's former ambassador to the U.S..¹⁴⁶

There was now support in the new Trump Administration to reduce military funding to Pakistan. President Trump had said little about Pakistan since his election victory. In December, he called Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif "a terrific guy" and offered to help resolve the country's outstanding problems, according to details of a phone conversation released by Sharif's office. Recently, Trump's fiscal 2018 budget proposal had called for "deep cuts" to foreign assistance with a 28.5 percent funding reduction for international programs, including the State Department

and the U.S. Agency for International Development. Pakistan was the sixth largest recipient of American aid.

While Pakistan's military had cracked down on militants in FATA, suffering heavy casualties in the process, the Afghan Taliban and HQN still used bases in Pakistan to launch attacks on United States-backed forces, according to General John W. Nicholson, who heads NATO forces in Afghanistan. Nicholson said the U.S. needs a "holistic review" of its policy toward Pakistan. "It's very difficult to succeed on the battlefield when your enemy enjoys external support and safe haven," Nicholson told the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee on February 9, 2017 "We need to improve the pressure applied on the Haqqanis and the Taliban on the Pakistan side of the border."¹⁴⁷

In August, the U.S. withheld \$300 million to Pakistan after then-Defense Secretary Ash Carter found he couldn't certify that enough action had been taken against the HQN. In late January, in a move interpreted as an attempt to placate the U.S., Hafiz Saeed, the alleged planner of the 2008 Mumbai attacks, was placed under house arrest in Lahore. He has denied involvement in the India attacks and has never been charged despite being detained many times. Pressure has been building to reduce United States military aid to Pakistan. Relations with the U.S. are likely to deteriorate unless Pakistan follows up its actions against Saeed with meaningful steps to combat other terrorist groups, particularly the HQN. A further cut in military aid by United States would come as an added blow to Pakistan's widening deficits. Meanwhile, Pakistan's Finance Minister Ishaq Dar said that continuity of funding would be welcomed given the cost of a recent extension of anti-terrorism operations. Pakistan suffered a spate of bombings last month which was related to a renewed push against militants. Dar said he may travel to the U.S. to meet Trump's team before a routine visit in April for meetings with the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. Defeating terrorism is a global responsibility and we are playing our due part," he said.¹⁴⁸

United States improved relations with China may prove beneficial to Pakistan. Earlier, prospects for China-US relations had worsened with Donald Trump's campaign rhetoric against China and threats to slap punitive tariffs on its exports and declare it a "currency manipulator". In justifying his unprecedented call with Taiwan's leader, Trump threatened to discard the One China policy unless China agreed to trade concessions. Tensions were further heightened when the incoming US secretary of state asserted that the US could deny China access to its claims in the South

China Sea. Since then, the Trump administration has walked back, slowly, from its most extreme positions. US Defense Secretary Mattis assured that the South China Sea disputes would have to be resolved through negotiations. In a carefully choreographed call with the Chinese president, Trump affirmed continued US adherence to the One China policy. The recent Trump-Xi summit in Mar-a-Lago was expected to determine the direction of US-China relations. Although the summit was overshadowed by the US missile strikes against Syria, there was no acrimony, and agreement was reached on a high-level security dialogue and a 100-day plan to address trade. However, uncertainty persists due to Trump's unpredictability. He will not declare China a "currency manipulator". But Trump has now linked the trade talks to China's help on North Korea.

President Xi's economic trump card may be an offer of Chinese participation in Trump's plan to restore and modernize America's aging infrastructure. China has the finance, expertise and recent experience to make a significant contribution. If Trump's plans for tax breaks are stalled, he may welcome China's contribution.

Such cooperation on infrastructure may open the door to United States participation in China's path-breaking OBOR initiative which its media has dubbed as 'Globalization 2.0'. China has invited United States participation in the project. It could be extremely lucrative for US corporations and industry. A first step in this direction may be active US participation in the CPEC project. The Asian Development Bank and the World Bank are already financing some CPEC-related projects in Pakistan. American companies are also involved as equipment suppliers for power plants and financial, technical and legal consultants in various projects.¹⁴⁹

Pakistan-United States are resilient and may yet improve soon enough. The two countries have a convergence of national interests in supporting the new Islamic military alliance in the making. Pakistan and the United States can work together to bolster the new alliance. The United States can partner with Pakistan to take initiative through quiet diplomacy and avoiding the media glare. Pakistan should quickly move to signal to Iran that further tensions will destabilize the region. Only proactive diplomacy can defuse tension now. Both Pakistan and the US cannot take sides in a historic Shia-Sunni dispute. Meanwhile, the US must have leverage and influence on Iran. It should gain this by recognizing the Islamic Republic of Iran. This is for starters. Iran must come out from its isolation now. The US recognizes many countries in the

world with which it has serious differences. The aim was to gain some leverage to influence Iran. The Iran nuclear deal was an important first step in the direction. Pakistan must seek to continue balancing the two Muslim countries for the sake of regional peace. The conflicts in Syria and Afghanistan can be ended by cooperation between the United states, Pakistan and Iran.

Notwithstanding any misconception by Saudis, the regime in Iran must be recognized as it is essential for the US to conduct diplomacy with it. The US doesn't have to tilt towards Iran at all. Just recognize that the time has come to open relations with Iran. After all, the earlier Obama administration, to its credit, worked very hard to get the nuclear deal signed recently. It is now right to take the further step and recognize the Islamic Republic. The new Trump administration must work on the goodwill achieved because of the nuclear deal.

To allay Saudi fears, the US must indirectly support the kingdom through support of the new large Muslim countries alliance the Saudis just announced. The US can, and should, move through allies like Turkey and Pakistan to support Saudi defense. The US can provide some defense equipment and training to the new alliance setup, when it is up and kicking. The point was to stay neutral and engage both discreetly. It requires quick action. Pakistan and the United States can surely partner in the new venture.

On April 17, 2017, the United States National Security Adviser Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster called on Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, marking the first high-level interaction between Pakistan and the US since the Trump administration took office.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif during the meeting apprised Gen McMaster of Pakistan's "efforts and initiatives that have resulted in a marked improvement in the overall security situation." The prime minister also told Gen McMaster that Pakistan looks forward to a "mutually beneficial partnership with the US and to working with the new US Administration, to promote peace and security in the region and beyond."¹⁵⁰

Prime Minister Sharif also conveyed Pakistan's readiness to work with the international community to explore ways in which the Afghan crisis could be resolved.

On relations with India, the prime minister reiterated his firm conviction that "sustained dialogue and meaningful engagement is the only way forward in resolving outstanding issues between India and Pakistan, including the Kashmir dispute".¹⁵¹ He welcomed President Trump's

willingness to help India and Pakistan resolve their differences, particularly on Kashmir, and noted that this could go a long way in bringing sustainable peace, security and prosperity to the region.

General McMaster conveyed American President Donald Trump's greetings and assured the premier that the new administration was “committed to strengthening bilateral relations and working with Pakistan to achieve peace and stability in Afghanistan and in the wider South Asian region”.¹⁵² There was no surprise in this meeting at all. The right noises were made by both leaders. However, McMaster’s delegation included Lisa Curtis, who US media have previously reported as his pick as senior director for South and Central Asia. Curtis, a well-known conservative expert, recently co-authored a paper calling on the US to stop treating Pakistan as an ally and instead “focus on diplomatically isolating” it if it continues to support groups that have links to international terror’.¹⁵³

Given the politics in the new Trump administration over budget cuts, the future of Pakistan’s relations with the United States was definitely going to be problematic, at least by a further cut in economic and military funding to it. Pakistan was the sixth largest recipient of American aid. Trump’s fiscal 2018 budget proposal -- entitled “America First” -- called for “deep cuts” to foreign assistance with a 28.5 percent funding reduction for international programs, including the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development.

The United States needs Pakistan in stabilizing neighboring Afghanistan. Sunil Sharon in his article “Is Pakistan close to a nuclear deal with the US?” published in Times of India, April 12, 2017 said that:¹⁵⁴

Pakistan has always held the keys to Kabul, and has played its cards expertly. The seeming about-face against the Taliban post 9-11; the double game played with the Americans, one foot in their camp, the other planted firmly in the Afghani Taliban; all of this has led to the Taliban coming to the cusp of capturing Kabul, with the Yanks receiving the same hiding that the Russkies and the Pommies haven’t as yet forgotten. The Yanks are desperate to quit Afghanistan in one piece. They are resigned to the Talibs winning Kabul. What they don’t want is the Talibs nurturing another Bin Laden, worse still a nuclear Bin Laden. Who might have loose nukes in the neighborhood. The Yanks claim to have invested over a hundred million dollars to secure Pakistan’s nukes. But how can one secure against a security guard who turns turtle. The Yanks

must have their own folks in the Strategic Plains Division and other centralized Pakistani nuclear establishments. After all, a hundred million can pay for a lot of outsized American salaries. But the Pakistanis have pulled a fast one with the deployment of their tactical nukes, the little Nasrs. No Yank can control their use, for the operational control lies with about 300 Pakistani military field commanders. One goes rogue and a dirty bomb could go off in Indianapolis in short order. No wonder Nikki Haley, a key member of Trump's foreign policy team, is now crying herself hoarse to mediate between Pakistan and India. Her express aim: Islamabad, you ditch your tacticals, India you yours. Washington's interest must always be protected. Pakistan is happy with the mediation. But not happy enough. It has left the Americans out of talks with the Afghan Taliban, cozying up instead to the Chinese and the Russkies. What is the Russian interest in Kabul? They are not even contiguous with Afghanistan any more. And the Chinese? Well, wherever the Pakistanis are, can the Chinese be far behind. And not even a leaf can fall anywhere in Asia now without the assent of the Chinese. America is alarmed. Ever the brinkman, Pakistan is up to its old tricks. One overriding purpose drives it: Treat us as India's equal. Memo from Islamabad to Washington: We know you are screwed in Afghanistan. We will get you out safely as long as we get the same nuclear deal as India has got. The Yanks seem to have got the message. Pakistani nuclear delegations visit Washington regularly now. One is there right now meeting with American experts. Nikki Haley was perhaps just the portend of things to come. Any day, you might have an announcement of a nuclear deal for Pakistan. Poor India. What has it been doing all this while. It has alienated the Russkies so much that they are now selling arms to Islamabad for the first time ever. Has India's foreign policy establishment been sleeping at the wheel? Or will they be able to pull a rabbit out of their hat? The plot thickens.

Russia-Pakistan Ties

In 2007, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov paid a three-day visit to Pakistan and discussed the prospects of economic cooperation. A few years later, in 2011, then-Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin publicly endorsed Pakistan's bid to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). That year the Kremlin also condemned the NATO strike on Salala check post in Pakistan, calling it an assault on the state's sovereignty. Moscow also helped in the expansion of Pakistan Steel Mills, technical support for the Guddu and Muzaffargarh power plants, and announced interest in Thar Coal Project.

Moreover, General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani received Colonel General Vladimir Chirkin in 2013 in Pakistan, where the two-discussed mutual defense and security cooperation. In October that same year, both countries pledged to jointly control the production and trafficking of drugs and narcotics. Defense collaboration between Russia and Pakistan got a new boost when Russia lifted its embargo on arms sales to Pakistan in 2014. It enraged India, which was opposing the sale of Mi-35 helicopters to Pakistan at the time. Later, in November, the defense ministers of both countries signed an agreement to expand defense and military ties. On December 23, 2014, Pakistan and Russia inked a much-needed energy deal, worth \$1.7 billion, that will see a liquefied natural gas (LNG) pipeline linking Karachi to Lahore. Then in June 2015, former Pakistani Chief of Army Staff General Raheel Sharif paid a three-day visit to Moscow where he was warmly received by the Kremlin; both sides held crucial military talks against the backdrop of emerging regional re-alliances.

Russian Consul General Andrey Vladimirovich Demdov, while speaking at the 65th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries on May 1, 2013, aptly stated: “The history of our bilateral relations saw both good and not so good. But irrespective of the state of the relations, both countries always felt the necessity to maintain good contacts.” This implicitly shows the maturity of Russian diplomacy and its cognizance of geopolitics and realpolitik.

The expansion of Russia-Pakistan ties will help in bringing stability and prosperity in the region. For Russia, Pakistan is significant in two dimensions. First, it serves as an outlet to the Central Asian Republics and the Kremlin would never desire instability there. Second, the strategic location of Pakistan means it can connect the Central Asian region with the Middle East and Indian Ocean — thus Russian goods can access the international market very conveniently through Pakistan. Moscow also wants to invest in Pakistan’s agriculture technology, including drip irrigation and desert farming.

Pakistan, for its part, can benefit from the Russian defense industry, as Russian military equipment is cheaper than America’s. In addition, Russia has banned agriculture imports, especially food, from Europe. Pakistan in this scenario can be a competitive source of agricultural and textile goods for Russia, which offers a \$16 billion market in the agriculture sector alone. Energy is another potential sector where Pakistan can reap huge benefits by fashioning friendly relations with the Kremlin.

The approaches of both Islamabad and Moscow seem very pragmatic in the wake of contemporary challenges. Russia is flexing its muscles again, defying the unipolar world dominated by United States for the past few decades. Moscow wants to assert its influence in the region, anticipating the departure of U.S. and NATO forces from Afghanistan and the resulting developments. By conducting joint military exercises and signing a defense pact with Pakistan, the Russians may also be signaling India to be cautious in its intimacy with United States. Moscow has been nurturing relations with India for decades, and will not let go of such a significant partnership that easily, but the move toward Pakistan will give the Indians an indication that Russia has other options in the region, too.¹⁵⁵

Russia and Pakistan are entering a new era of relations. Pakistan-Russia relations have for decades been cold given the grievances between the two nations after the Cold War era, when Moscow and Islamabad had been in rival camps. In addition to that, Russia's close ties to India, Pakistan's biggest enemy, have for decades prevented Moscow and Islamabad from finally putting their past grievances behind them and shaking hands. Russia lifted a longstanding arms embargo against Pakistan in 2014 and has been seeking closer defense ties with Islamabad ever since. This has been accelerated by India's burgeoning defense relationship with the United States and the Russian defense industry's loss of market share in India, although Moscow remains by far New Delhi's biggest military hardware supplier overall. Given the importance of the Indian market to the Russian defense industry, Moscow must walk a careful balancing act in its dealings with the two South Asia rivals and it will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.¹⁵⁶

Russian ties to Pakistan had angered India. Yet it served yet another confirmation that Pakistan had entered a new era in its foreign policy. Today, Pakistani armed forces were interested in many Russian armaments. Pakistan was considering a follow-on order of Mil Mi-35 attack helicopters, four of which it ordered in August 2015. The first Mi-35 batch is scheduled for delivery in 2017. Besides Mi-35, of interest to Pakistan was the S-400 long-range surface-to-air missile (SAM) system. Pakistan had reportedly expressed interest in the Mil Mi-28NE dedicated attack helicopter as well. Overall, Pakistan's scope of interest might be broad, but currently, its procurement is focused on the Mi-35. This is unlikely to ramp-up to bigger ticket arms in the near-term. However, if a major Russian system were to fit Pakistan's fiscal capacity, then the

prospect of a genuine long-term procurement roadmap is plausible, though what that system might be is speculation at best.¹⁵⁷

The Nawaz Sharif Government has also been warming up to Russia, China's most promising and formidable ally which, like China, has challenged the U.S. to shrink and limit its influence in the region. It's yet unclear how the Trump administration sees Pakistan's emerging friendship with Russia, as the U.S. President and his team have given conflicting opinions about Russia and its President Vladimir Putin so far. However, it's clear that growing Russia-Pakistan ties are creating serious obstacles for Moscow's relations with India.

Last year, Russia held its first-ever joint military drills with Islamabad, a move that prompted India to slam the Russian government and its growing security ties with Islamabad. Moscow also refused to back India's claims that terrorism is emanating from Pakistani soil. In addition, Moscow didn't even invite India for its trilateral Afghanistan talks with China and Pakistan earlier this year. In fact, while Russia remains India's key weapons supplier, Moscow recently started selling arms to Pakistan, something no one could predict just few years ago given the decades-long tight military and security partnership between India and Russia. But new developments in Pakistan-Russia relations indicate that the world is rapidly changing, and so are Pakistan's foreign policies and priorities.¹⁵⁸

Pakistan military is now purportedly considering purchasing several S-400 units. Pakistan's military is slated to receive four Russian-made Mi-35M attack helicopters in 2017 for a purchasing price of \$153 million. This number could increase to a total of 20.¹⁵⁹ Rebuffed by the United States, Pakistan was hedging its bets and turning to Russia for weapon supplies. Earlier in 2016, the PAF Chief paid a visit to Moscow and inspected state-of-the-art fighter jets, military equipment. He said that Pakistan and Russia needed operational exercises as both the countries will get to learn from each other's experiences which could increase air warfare capabilities. The PAF chief also met his Russian counterpart and discussed matters of mutual interest and agreed to enhance bilateral cooperation. Both the leaders also agreed to increase cooperation in the aviation industry.¹⁶⁰ Thus, in the wake of contemporary regional and international challenges Pakistan and Russia are forging closer relations. Russia may also choose to capitalize on the new developments as a suitable contingency, as its own relationship with India suffered due to the sustained loss of lucrative arms deals to United States defense corporations amid a phase of rapid

confidence-building between Washington and India. In the last two years, Pakistan and Russia have already reached significant landmarks in their bilateral relationship. The head of Russia's FSB visited Pakistan for the first time in 14 years, followed by Russia's joint training exercise with Pakistan, which went ahead despite Indian pressure to withdraw after the Uri attack. Following last year's cancellation, reports also suggest that Russian President Vladimir Putin is likely to visit Pakistan in mid-2017 to inaugurate a \$2 billion oil pipeline being constructed by a Russian firm. The visit may serve as a breakthrough and open the doors to greater military and economic cooperation between the countries.¹⁶¹

Relations between Russia and Pakistan had improved amazingly since the 1980s when they were staunch enemies and Pakistan supported the Afghan Mujahedeen fighting the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Undoubtedly the world had changed remarkably in the last few years or so.

Concluding Remark

Pakistan desires peace in the region which is badly needed for its stability, progress, and economic development. However, it is hampered from achieving its desired goals by a corrupted political system and a weak leadership. Bold leadership is missing in the country. The Army which still calls the shots in foreign and security policymaking is still myopic in its views and is obsessed with the enmity of India. Thus, Pakistan was moving closer to China and Russia as its mortal enemy- India – moved very close to the United States. For the military establishment in Pakistan it appeared to be a zero-sum game.

Pakistan must make efforts for peace with its neighbors but is challenged to do so by its own weak leadership at the helm of state affairs. However, with help from friends like United States it can make a break through. There are some indications that the new Trump Administration might be conducive to the idea. Without resolving the Kashmir lingering dispute peace in the region is impossible. Given the nature of the region's history a settlement of the Kashmir dispute is very difficult but not impossible. It was in every one's interest that the Global War against Terrorism be ended immediately as the al Qaeda's leadership has been crippled. Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omer were long dead. Previously, the US had accused Pakistan of supporting the Afghan Taliban, especially the Haqqani group and that of Mullah Omer. Things have changed now and Pakistan wasn't supporting the Haqqani group anymore. Previously, the Pakistan army is assisting some elements of the Afghan Taliban only because they are considered as strategies

assets and future Afghan power holders. Pakistan must negotiate with the US an end of Indian interference in Baluchistan and most importantly, independence of Kashmir. Only the US has the prestige and status with India that can possibly take our two countries towards an eventual solution. Pakistan needs to convince the US that it would be ready to suspend expansion of its nuclear arsenal once there is tangible progress towards a viable and permanent solution in Kashmir.

Pakistan and all neighbors desired regional peace but that was only possible with the solution to the Kashmir dispute. Nothing else will convince the powerful Pakistan military establishment to suspend the further development of the nuclear arsenals. Remember the country with the most rapid expansion of nuclear weapons is Pakistan. This is indeed ironic because Pakistan is also a country imploding from within. Pakistan's nuclear weapons cannot save it from this landslide. Bad governance and corruption is now endemic in the country. The Pakistan military leadership must realize that having such a large nuclear establishment is not helping matters at all. We are facing an unconventional war and nuclear weapons are of no use here. The primary threat is from within, as rightly acknowledged by the Army brass recently. Pakistan had suffered from militancy more than any other country in the world. The Nawaz Government must concentrate on fighting those Islamic radicals who have established themselves for foreign jihad ventures thereby acting against the national interests of the Pakistani state. This is not a war but mainly a counter-terrorism problem much like what India has witnessed in the last few decades. Meaning that it must be taken as basically police operations only. No massive use of force is necessary here. Plus, the real battle is to win over the dissatisfied local populace through economic and social development. Only here can the battle be won. This was not a conventional war but an extraordinary unconventional conflict which required the Nawaz government to use new weapons and tactics to fight and win. Pakistan's leadership had to act smart and think out of the box. Things are very different than Pakistan's experiences in previous wars with India.

Islamabad has been soaking up the benefits of its ever-growing relations with China for decades – arms sales, joint projects both military and economic, across-the-board diplomatic support, etc. But in recent years, their relations have been spurred by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a joint regional development project that has created numerous business and economic opportunities for the two allies and could significantly improve connectivity in the region.

In conclusion, Pakistan was a mess. It was facing an acute image problem. Today Pakistan was misunderstood and was therefore being unfairly treated by the United States and other Western powers for its perceived connections to global terrorism. It was more complicated state of affairs now. However, there indeed a need for a foremost reappraisal of Pakistan's domestic and foreign policies. Pakistan should strengthen its system of democracy because it was very deficient in countless ways and not functioning at all. The political paralysis was a result of these systematic faults. Islamic fundamentalist, poor governance, absence of democratic norms, intolerance in society, and inertia was the principle cause of the situation. Lack of political will to reform both state and society may be the single biggest reason for the mess. examine the deeper problem of bolstering the deficient, undemocratic decision-making structures. Due to the disinterest towards institutionalized decision-making by Pakistan's rulers it was hardly surprising that policy and decision-making of national importance remained essentially personalized and incoherent. It was this very flaw that prevented the Government of Pakistan from conducting a true national strategy. Until and unless there was an institutional decision-making process Pakistan would continue to have lack of intellectual content the country would always be faced with the crisis. Pakistan faced much larger challenges because of this poor policymaking. The country's past was haunting it now. Reckless decisions like the infamous U-turn of General Musharraf after 9/11 where Pakistan became an ally of the United States without weighing the full consequences of this abrupt departure of foreign policy. The Army's continued support of Jihadist entities like the Jaish-e-Mohammad, Haqqani network, and Quetta Shura. The main reason for this state of affairs was the personalist nature of rule in Pakistan. The civilian leaders don't follow democratic norms of decision-making. This empowered the Army even more and provided further leverage to it to influence Pakistan's decision-making. The Neither the Cabinet nor the Parliament are fulfilling their given roles assigned to them. Even the Judiciary is very deficient, especially at the lower levels. The Parliament doesn't properly fulfill its legislative and oversight Pakistan, as was the norm in the system of democracy. The Cabinet doesn't deliberate as was needed for proper administration of the state institutions. The notion of national security was primary driver of Pakistan's national interest which had given significant leverage to the military. The military itself had a deficient national security paradigm and a very narrow focus of the regional situation, let alone the global one. It was obsessed with its enmity with India, the historic rival. This doesn't

condone Indian actions in any way. The point was that the military as an institution was necessarily focused on fighting wars and winning them and not working for peace. The United States and other Western powers continued to consider Pakistan through Indian or Afghan lens. The erroneous view of Pakistan, in which security remained the paramount national interest for the United States and other powers, had exaggerated increased Pakistan's domestic political problems. India was now employing territory in Afghanistan for deploying TTP and other dissident elements against Pakistan. In clear contrast, to the criticism of Pakistan's support of some Jihadist entities who had external focus, there wasn't any disapproval by United States and other Western powers regarding India's its brutal repression of the Kashmiri independence movement and its policies towards Pakistan. Indian interference in Pakistan's internal affairs and support of Baluch insurgents, MQM and TTP was well-documented but remained ignored by the United States and other Western powers. On the contrary, there were powerful voices in the United States that were coming up with legislation punishing Pakistan. The reason for this biased approach was obvious. The United states had tilted towards India in very significant manner because of perceived commercial gains and other economic interests. The two countries had grown remarkably closes in the last few years or so. The United States now considered India as a strategic partner and the nefarious role of India in destabilizing Pakistan was conveniently ignored. After all, the TTP and these ant-Pakistan groups based in Afghanistan and operating from Afghanistan's territory weren't a targeting the United States nor other Western powers. Hence, a blind eye to their nefarious activities. To expect Pakistan to turn direction at once was simply expecting too much. This wasn't going to happen any time soon. However, a peace deal between India and Pakistan and a solution to the Kashmir dispute can possibly turn things around in the desired direction. Here the United States can play a key role.

The CPEC is a game changer and opens trade between the Central Asia and the Middle East, Africa and Europe. Its major purpose is for China to increase its trade with these regions by improving and simplifying logistics and transportation. Currently imports into Europe from China account for about \$450 billion which has room to grow in a \$7 trillion market. As trade increases along this corridor, it would be foolish if Pakistan did not develop its own national strategy to cooperatively capitalize and cash in some of the economic opportunities presented. The CPEC provides an unprecedented opportunity to Pakistan as it fulfills its geostrategic potential as the gateway of trade between Central Asia to the Middle East, Africa and Europe.

It is ideally situated to become the most significant maritime trade hub between the Europe and Asia. A regional hub provides many opportunities other than logistics and transportation including legal, financial,

The CPEC is a game-changing opportunity for Pakistan. Global pundits are looking at the multi-trillion dollar investments being made by China and saying that its effective utilization is key to the success of this vision. Similarly, for Pakistan, if we do not evolve a vision of how we use this improved infrastructure and realignment of global trade in this region for our benefit, and execute on it effectively we are in danger of being left behind. Indeed, it will be a shame if we do not rise to the opportunity and fashion national consensus on an inclusive strategy that leverages this project to propel a major part of our population, and not just a few families, into the economy of the 21st century.¹⁶²

Meanwhile, purposeful and sustainable reform is badly needed in Pakistan. Pakistan can only come out of this vicious cycle through a major reappraisal of its domestic foreign and policies. An excellent advice was given in a very recent editorial in Newsweek Pakistan which had argued:¹⁶³

Pakistan can yet do more to shift out of its frozen military strategy of hanging its entire foreign policy on hatred of India. It can break out of its current regional and global isolation by adopting the posture of its friend China and invite India to join the trading corridor China is building in the country. It can also revive the snagged gas pipeline project with Iran by inviting India back into it, also offering it the trade route India wants to Afghanistan and Central Asia through its territory.

Undoubtedly, Pakistan's current policy of permanent Indian enmity and conflict was going nowhere. Pakistan was a security state because of this approach. The Pakistan military was adamant in confronting and was still supporting some jihadist elements like the LeT, HQN, and Quetta Shura for its own purposes. Clearly, a change in direction was required now. Given the complexity of the regional situation, more robust diplomacy was urgently to get Pakistan out of the current morass and crisis. However, the Nawaz government wasn't up to the task and was failing to protect Pakistan's vital national interests. Plus, it faced an immense image problem because of the Panama Papers issue and the April 20, 2017 Supreme Court judgement.

Pakistan was faced with horrendous situation inside the country as rapid population growth was fueling a massive rural to urban migration, strain on the cities, and massive environmental degradation. People were suffering from poor environment, lack of social services and neglect of state institutions to respond to the situation in any coherent manner. Bad governance was the norm, not the exception in state institutions. The poverty gap was striking and was widening in many areas of the country. Pakistan was deficient in governance matters as public services were inadequate and there was immense poverty in the country. The Human Development Index (HDI) was extremely low in Pakistan. The country was expected to improve on the economic front thanks to CPEC initiative but the sheer negligence of the ruling establishment to tackle the issue of social justice and enlightened Islam will draw it back from reaching its true potential. The anarchy unleashed by Islamic fundamentalist must be checked in Pakistan before it engulfs the whole region in further chaos. Much depends on timely action taken by the ruling establishment of Pakistan to get its own act together to achieve the true prospects of economic development presented to the country by the CPEC initiative. Bad governance is still the norm in Pakistan and not the exception. Badly needed reform measures still await the nation. The nation is poorer because of its poor leadership, both military and civilian. It is hoped that a turnaround maybe yet happen as a new civilian leadership replaces the current lot. Pakistan has enormous potential in its youth but lacks leadership to make full use of the potential. The leadership is bickering among itself, complacent and corrupt. Too bad for the country. There was also a bright side to the country's dismal picture, however. Pakistan can indeed have a great future, and be on the road of success and sustainable peace. Pakistanis are the most resilient nation. Pakistan's can indeed position itself in the region as a massive trade corridor that will catapult this country to economic prosperity and a symbol of geostrategic integration. Pakistan as the regional trade, industrial, and economic hub will be in a position of strength and the world will endeavor to improve relations with Pakistan. Pakistan believes in cooperation, instead of competition. Pakistan is carving out a trajectory of progress for the region by way of economics, which the world needs to recognize and acknowledge. Pakistan faced an existential crisis of a daunting magnitude. The primary threat was from within the country.

Much depends on the future leadership of the country not only at the governmental level but also at the societal level, especially the intellectual level. It was hoped that Pakistan would indeed

make the best of the golden opportunity made available by the CPEC project and turn around the country towards a path of economic development, prosperity for all, peace and national security.

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