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EDITORIAL

Illusions about Modi and Hindutva

Prakash Karat a well known Indian political leader says that under the Modi government, the RSS and its outfits are increasingly asserting the Hindutva agenda. The latest has been the campaign to “reconvert” those who have left the Hindu fold. According to the RSS chief, Mohan Bhagwat, this is not conversion but a ‘ghar wapsi’ and in his words, the return of ‘maal’ stolen by a thief. Along with this, the RSS outfits have embarked on an aggressive campaign to threaten anyone who espouses “non-Hindu” values. There are attacks on a Hindi film ‘PK’ which has made fun of Godmen who hoodwink the people. Writers of books which question obscurantist and reactionary social practices are also targeted such as the Tamil writer Perumal Murugan. The Hindu Mahasabha has begun a campaign to glorify Nathuram Godse and wants to put up statues in his honour.

The growing assertiveness of the Hindutva forces and the brazen targeting of the minorities have begun to cause concern even among the big business and corporates. The corporate media which represent their views has written editorials calling upon Prime Minister Narendra Modi to put an end to this communal propaganda. The Times of India editorial stated that these activities are “putting the government’s reform agenda at risk”. Therefore, “The prime minister must end this debate unequivocally”. The Hindustan Times editorial stated: “The fruits of development that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has promised will take some time to kick in, but we have reasons to be concerned about the deteriorating social climate in the meanwhile”. The editorial demanded that “The Modi government must act decisively to stop the celebration of Nathuram Godse”.

The Narendra Modi and the BJP in government has gone to the extent to undermine Christmas by declaring it as a ‘good governance day’ and instructing government employees to attend office on that day, ignoring the fact that it is a gazetted holiday. It is the government which issued circulars to schools to organise activities on that day and see that students attend them. This was a petty way to display their disdain for the religious beliefs and festivals of non-Hindus.

ISIS Threat

The entire Middle East is at war right now, and the Obama administration's strategic incoherence is aiding and abetting the chaos.

Since its occupation of Mosul and parts of northern Iraq last June, the ISIS (aka ISIL) has emerged as the most dreadful terrorist organization in the world. Al Qaeda and its ilk seem to have receded to the background. Now ISIS is not only the most organized terror outfit, but is also the most powerful insurgent group in the world. The ISIS proclamation of statehood in territories it has occupied across Syria and Iraq (larger than the area of France) is only comparable to what the Taliban did in 1996 in Afghanistan, in modern history.

Taj Hashmi says that far from being a “Sunni jihadist group”, ISIS is yet another creation of botched up U.S. foreign policy in the Muslim World. *Attributing anything Islamic to the group is utterly ridiculous. It would be like saying American invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, and illegal detention of “illegal combatants” at Guantanamo Bay is attributable to Christianity.* Nevertheless, ISIS is an enigma, a by-product of the Saudi-Iranian proxy war, and last but not least, an integral part of Washington’s false flag operation in the Muslim World.

Its popularity among jihadist ideology-motivated Muslim youths is phenomenal. Being disillusioned with their top leaders for negotiating peace with American and Afghan governments, some Afghan Taliban fighters have joined the group. *A news report in a Bangladeshi daily (Bangladesh Pratidin, March 24, 2015) reveals that several Islamist groups in Bangladesh, India, Myanmar and Pakistan are also getting organized to fight for their own “Islamic State” in South Asia. Now it seems ISIS is everywhere.*

Although ISIS hates democracy and secularism, and seem to be on a killing spree, eliminating Shiites, liberal Muslims, Christians and Western hostages, its controlling Iraqi territories is not all bad news for America. This possibly legitimizes American boots on the ground, which would signal another windfall for its Military-Industrial Complex. Then again, proxy wars and false flag operations sometimes backfire.

Pakistan and Saudi War in Yemen

The Saudi television channel Al Arabiya announced on Thursday that, in addition to at least 150,000 Saudi soldiers, *military forces from Egypt, Pakistan, Jordan and Sudan* were preparing take part in the ground invasion. Saudi Arabia has already begun massing soldiers and heavy artillery on its southern border with Yemen.

The imminent intervention of ground forces drawn from countries throughout the region may well transform the civil war into a region-wide openly sectarian war pitting forces aligned with the Saudi Sunni monarchy against forces associated with the Shiite-dominated government of Iran.

Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif pledge that Pakistan would protect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia at all costs has come under heavy criticism from both the political and security quarters. This has generated an intense debate in Pakistan. Many Pakistanis feel that deployment of Pakistani forces in Yemen is not in the national interest of Pakistan. However, if there be direct territorial threat to Saudi Arabia, the government could then consider sending troops to Saudi Arabia only as second line forces. Saudi Arabia must accept the burden in the front line should a situation so develop, the chances of that, however, remain rather remote.

Let us also be mindful of an important and overriding factor that as of today there is no direct immediate threat to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Pakistan security forces are stretched to limit by their deployment in FATA region fighting Talibans, fighting extremists in Karachi yet trying to maintain a strategic balance with India. Besides resource limitations, Pakistan cannot afford to alienate its sizeable Shia population in an environment where sectarian violence has great potential to destabilize the state.

If Pakistan does feel compelled to blunder into an Arab civil war, the internal divisions within, the sectarian factor and the resultant strategic military imbalance so created shall have horrendous consequences. *Providing military support within the Saudi territorial limits in defensive role with guarantee that*

Pakistan troops will not be part of the “Coalition” could be a reasonable option

As of now the only solution will be a UN mediation to have a consensus reached on power-sharing, which is what Iran and Russia are aiming at. But if the Saudis press ahead, there is going to be trouble ahead. And for a UN role, US will have to take Russian help. That will be a bitter pill to swallow for Washington.

Afghanistan and Pakistan

December’s tragedy of murdering over one hundred school children by Taliban in Peshawar has reinforced the Pakistani government’s resolve against terrorism. Pakistan is actively cooperating with its neighbors, particularly Afghanistan in its efforts to counter terrorism. There is certainly a strong momentum in bilateral contacts with Afghanistan. Pakistan’s political and military leadership is regularly engaging Afghan counterpart. The military leaders and various institutions are better connected today than before. Afghan cadets are now being trained in Pakistani military institutions and cross-border cooperation is expanding between the two countries with the shared objective of eliminating terrorism from the region. If this positive trend continues, hopefully enduring foundation of Pakistan –Afghanistan co-operation will auger well for peace and stability in the region.

Pakistan is located at the crossroad of three of the most important regions in the world — the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia. Due to its strategic location, Pakistan has the potential to become the hub of regional trade, transport, and economic integration. Middle East and Central Asia have huge piles of energy resources and other natural resources with a rather small population. South Asia is energy deficient but rich in human resources.

A network of oil and gas pipelines in the region along with an electricity grid to South Asia and China would make Pakistan the hub for regional cooperation. Pakistan is proactively pursuing numerous regional trade and transportation initiatives when these projects are completed it shall fulfill the energy needs of Pakistan, India and even beyond.

Karachi Clean up

In the wake of Peshawar carnage National Action Plan (NAP) was approved by all political parties and security institutions of Pakistan to combat both terrorism and extremism within Pakistan. After FATA bordering Afghanistan, Karachi was the logical place for the military to take firm action and .consequently a daring Ranger's crackdown in Karachi was the game changer. The public views the GHQ (General Headquarters of army) as being more assertive and predominant in an extremely volatile situation arising out of political incompetence, insensitivity to public concern, and above all, patronage of rampant crime by political elites. GHQ sponsored initiative in Waziristan and Karachi has been highly appreciated and people of Pakistan are beginning to see some light at the end of the tunnel

The Rangers action has revealed the ugly face of MQM (an ethnic political party) remotely controlled by its supremo Altaf Hussain who had run away from law to take refuge in the United Kingdom. The ensuing claims by the government, allegations by the PPP maverick Zulfiqar Mirza, and a statement by death-row convict Sault Mirza, has exposed how major political parties of Pakistan are involved in organized crime. For years, politicians cried foul at the deteriorating law and order in Karachi and demanded firm action, but most exhibited little eagerness to go after the root causes, apparently because of their own financial stakes in the status quo.

After a long time though, the Pakistani civilian and military leadership appears to be relentless in their pursuit of criminal and terror syndicates. They need to take this to its logical conclusion, without fear and favour.

Coalitions of Convenience

Ikram Sehgal

Pakistan is inching toward an acknowledgement of its participation in the Saudi-led, American-backed military intervention in the civil war in Yemen. A fateful moment arises for India's regional interests.

It is hard to ignore Saudi generosity during times of need and the deep-felt urge of most able-bodied Pakistanis to volunteer safeguarding the territorial integrity of the holy lands against aggression from any quarter but Pakistan finds itself in a bind over the mode and manner of how to assist the Saudis. Given the ongoing unfinished fight to eradicate terrorism from its roots, with its resources badly over-stretched, would Pakistan be able to spare troops to join such a coalition? Providing material support within the Saudi territorial limits with guarantee that Pakistan troops will not be part of the "Coalition" could be a reasonable option

Separating the permutations and combinations of allies and foes in the Middle East given any country or sub-region is mind-boggling. Beset with multiple crises ourselves, mostly of our own making, we are desperately attempting to blunder into another complication, one that could severely exacerbate the fragile existing fault lines in our society, a potential "Pakistan Spring".

Festering for some time, working out who is in alliance with who in the civil war in Yemen is almost impossible. The Houthi rebels (supported by army units loyal to former President Ali Saleh) seized the capital Sanaa before moving onto capture other parts of the country. Reportedly given material support by Iran, the Houthi rebels of the Zaidi Shia sect operated till recently in their own Northern Yemen region bordering Saudi Arabia. Their "Iranian connection" alarmed the Saudis about the emerging threat to their sovereignty. With intermittent hostilities with the Houthis along the Yemeni border starting in 2009, the Saudis suffered several hundred casualties in a brief flare-up several months ago. Given the threat of an Iranian-supported regime controlling the southern edge of the Saudi Arabian peninsula, Arab nations are determined to roll-back the Houthi success and reinstate incumbent President Hadi who fled even his temporary haven in the port city of Aden. Aircraft from half a dozen Arab countries rendered Sanaa airport unusable and targeted Houthi

concentrations in many other cities in the past week, causing substantial collateral damage. Not physically taking part, the US is providing real-time intelligence for the planning of coordinated and accurate air strikes.

Meeting in Sharm Al Sheikh, Heads of 22 nations of the Arab League agreed upon a “Joint Arab Military Force”, six countries volunteering participation. A prime beneficiary of Saudi financial aid, Egypt immediately pledged substantial air, sea and land forces, the proposed 40000 strong force will take time to become operational, Egypt seems to have forgotten its decade-long horrible experience in the 1960s in Yemen (with the Houthis as Royalists fighting the Egyptian-supported Republicans) as its own “Vietnam”, losing over 15000 dead out of an expeditionary force touching at one time 50000 soldiers and airmen. After a decade of slaughter Nasser agreed to sign a peace treaty and the whole Egyptian contingent was withdrawn. Hell-bent on destroying Iran’s nuclear capacity and with a vested interest in keeping the present Egyptian regime led by President Gen Sisi secure, Israel has become a de-facto but silent member of the so-called “Sunni Coalition”. Conversely Israel clandestinely supported the Royalists against the Egyptians in the 60s.

Suffering dramatic reverses at the hands of the Islamic State (IS) or “Daesh”, US training teams re-grouped and re-trained Iraq’s forces on a fast-track basis. In a contradiction, Iranian militia with the Iraqi forces attempting to re-take Tikrit are protesting US involvement in airstrikes against Daesh concentrations. Proxies supported by Turkey and Jordan are already combating Iranian proxies supporting Syria’s Assad Regime. Inbuilt tensions are threatening to tear apart the “coalitions of convenience” formed an ad hoc basis to fight the forces of disorder on the one hand and of order in the other in Iraq, Syria, Libya and Yemen.

Pakistan is in a Catch-22 situation, damned if it joins the Saudi-led so-called “Sunni Coalition” and damned if it does not. Add the generosity of the Saudis during times of our need and the deep-felt urge of most able-bodied Pakistanis to volunteer safeguarding the territorial integrity of the holy lands against aggression from any quarter and we find ourselves in a bind over the mode and manner of how to assist the Saudis. Given our ongoing unfinished fight to eradicate terrorism from its roots, with our resources already badly over-stretched, would we be able to spare troops to join such a coalition? It would be wrong morally to be (or seem to be) part of the so-called “Sunni Coalition”, not

only would this jeopardize our friendly ties with our western neighbour Iran, but the perception of taking sides in a possible Shia-Sunni divide would trigger an apocalypse within the country. Barely beneath the surface, could the faultiness be exploited to the hilt by the terrorists (and others) to exacerbate sectarian divisions.

The Pakistan Govt has denied the sending of troops to join the Coalition; a ministerial-level evaluation team will “assess the situation on the ground”. *Those wishing us ill, including some of our politicians, would certainly like the Army to jump into the fray and be cut to size.* Fools rush in where angels fear to tread. Providing material support within the Saudi territorial limits, the guarantee must be that our troops will not be part of the “Coalition”, only engaging the hostiles if and when they come across the international border.

One Mechanized Brigade was detached from Pakistan’s “Main Task Force” (Mechanised Division) at Tabuk and placed at Nagran on the Yemen border during “Operation Desert Storm”, the first Gulf War (1991). This freed Saudi troops for operations in Iraq and Kuwait. *A principle was established, that Pakistani troops would defend the Kingdom, but would not cross the border. Neither did Egyptian Forces but even than Egypt got its entire debt of US\$ 12-15 billion written off, Pakistan got a pittance in comparison.* A similar arrangement could be done with a mandate on the already established principle of not crossing the international border. Hostile artillery fire and threatening posture of Scud Missiles across the border must be exceptions for neutralizing. Another option would pre-position a skeleton force with weapons, vehicles and equipment for a Mechanised Division. With imminent danger of Houthi rebels (or anyone else for that matter) transgressing into Saudi territory this force can be beefed up by air within hours by troops already earmarked. Our mission must be clearly defined as separate from the proposed “Joint Arab Military Force” and out of their command structure. Fortunately the naming of the force as “Arab” gives us a face-saving “out”.

Instead of prolonging the conflict which could cause us endless domestic grief, our historical ties with the “proxy” antagonists in Yemen can facilitate bringing peace into the strife-ridden nation. Both Pakistan and Turkey, President Erdogan’s recent comments about Iran notwithstanding, can play a great role in defusing the situation. Ours should be a “coalition of convenience” to contain further conflict and facilitate peace in Yemen.

No ghar, so no ghar wapsi

(No home so no home coming)

Kancha Ilaiah

Modi's fundamentalist Hindu government at the Centre coupled with the RSS/Sangh Parivar's threats of re-conversion, Christians may be forced to choose between God/Jesus and reservation. Most of them, in our view, would choose the first option.

The Sangh Parivar is conducting the so-called “ghar wapsi” programmes all over the country. According to a newspaper report, about 8,000 people have been brought back to “ghar” from Christianity in newly formed Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. The reconversion of some Dalit Christians in Kerala is also widely reported. Nobody knows when the Dalits left the Hindu “ghar”. Where is this “ghar”, which they left? And where is it that they are returning to now?

The Sangh Parivar launched the conversion campaign to create a fear psychosis among the evangelical Christians because they have been converting Dalits and Adivasis. Though the Sangh Parivar tried this programme with poor Muslims at Agra, they know that now Islam does not have an open conversion practice. But the moment one embraces Islam, his/her caste and cultural identity changes very quickly. Since Islam believes in one identity, after a generation or two, those who were converted into Islam would not know what know their caste.

On the contrary, in Christianity, the caste roots remain even after generations. For example, the most ancient Catholic Christians of Kerala, Mangalore and Goa would know their caste roots. But among Indian Muslims, such clear identities are non-existent.

The classical Catholicism of India is identified with Brahmins and Shudra upper castes like Nairs and Menons in Kerala and Kammas and Reddys in Andhra Pradesh. There are several Goan and Mangalorian Catholics, who claim their ancestry to Saraswatha and Konkani Brahmins. This is not to contend that

there are no Dalit/OBC/ tribal converts into Catholicism. But they, too, are aware of their caste roots.

Several upper caste Catholics not only claim their Brahminic ancestry, but that they share the nationalism of the kind that the Hindutva forces are claiming as some of them agree that Bharat is a Hindu Rashtra. Top Christian political leaders, who have been sharing political power with upper castes in Kerala, Goa and Delhi, come from this kind of Christian cultural background. These are the ones who turned Jesus into Brahma and Mary into Bharat Mata. They have huge properties and businesses. They are the ones who established world-class English Medium schools and colleges and educated the children of top five per cent of Indian rich and upper caste in their schools and colleges.

Deen Dayal Upadhyaya, Syama Prasad Mookerjee, L.K. Advani, Arun Shourie, Arun Jaitley and even intellectuals like Swapan Dasgupta, Chandan Mitra (both of them got their education from La Martiniere, Kolkata and St. Stephen's College, Delhi University) are a product of these schools and colleges.

Can the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh bring Christians back into the Hindu ghar? Those Brahmins, who converted to Christianity long back, do have a ghar in Hinduism even now. If the RSS can get them back into Hinduism, then it can probably shake the Vatican too.

The real intention of the RSS is to terrorise the Dalits, Adivasis and the OBCs, who have been converting into several evangelical Christian denominations that have no centralised structure. After B.R. Ambedkar opened the lock of conversion at Nagpur in 1956, to Buddhism, the right to convert to a religion that they find useful or even beneficial has become a respectable spiritual and democratic right. Though Ambedkar expected Dalits to convert to Buddhism most of them, across the country, preferred Christianity. Hardly any tribal or an OBC converted to Buddhism. This worries the RSS most.

The most significant issue is that the historical untouchables and the oppressed OBCs found a "spiritual home" in Christianity. The only thing they lost after conversion was the right to reservation.

Now with an NDA government at the Centre coupled with the Sangh Parivar's threats of re-conversion, Christians may be forced to choose between God/Jesus and reservation. Most of them, in my view, would choose the first option.

The RSS ideologues know that this will become a global issue dislocating Narendra Modi's development agenda. But the RSS, as an organisation, has never preferred economic development of all including SC/ST/OBCs; rather it has always opted for sustaining Hinduism with Varna dharma as its core. It never gave an open call for spiritual reform, which includes abolition of idol worship, caste and untouchability. The higher form of that reform should be of total man-woman equality, an issue with which all religions are still struggling.

This definitely requires a re-codification of Hindu scriptures, particularly the Rig Veda and the Bhagavad Gita and formulating one Hindu book for constant reference. Their so-called slogan of "one culture" does not mean anything if there is no common scripture, which only talks about universal spiritual principles of God and human relationship, without alluring caste/Varna to anyone.

Hinduism today is a caste-based, idol-worshipping religion. It is like pre-Jesus Judaism and pre-Muhammad Arab religions. There cannot be one "ghar" in such a religion. That is the reason why even the Supreme Court could not define Hinduism as a religion like Buddhism, Christianity or Islam. The apex court's three-judge bench in 1995 had held that "Hindutva/Hinduism is a way of life".

The RSS encouraged massive idol worship and "Baba-ism" ever since it was established. Idol worship and caste segregation co-exist. Each caste has its own idol god/goddess in the villages and towns. No prophet could bring about religious oneness without abolishing idol worship. Since the RSS is opposed to abolishing idol worship and caste, it cannot save Hinduism in the long run. They know where it is heading. They know where it has headed in Indonesia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Today's political power at Delhi cannot alter that direction; only a massive religious reform can.

A few Dalits or tribals might say that they got reconverted from Christianity. But they all keep reading Bible in their homes and keep praying to Jehovah and Jesus in their hearts. Even if the RSS keeps a watch on their homes, how can

RSS men stop people from praying to Jesus in their heart? It was Jesus, who told them that your house (ghar) is your body and you are your soul. An RSS man can take an idol of Ram to him/her and they might pretend to worship that particular idol. But it was again Jesus who told them that pretentious worship is no worship and no idol is God. Their real prayer is within them.

I do not think when the Chinese Communist government with military support have failed in eliminating conversions in China, the RSS and its government at Delhi would succeed. The BJP must know that China is on the course to become “world’s most Christian nation” within 15 years. Evangelism is an Asian phenomenon. More than anybody Mr Modi must understand this and check the RSS or lose all credibility.

Kancha Ilaiah (5 October 1952) is the chairman of the political science department at Osmania University. A social activist and is a member of the Dalit Freedom Network. He is a major figure in the movement against the Hindu Castes. He has authored many books: Why I am not a Hindu, Post-Hindu India: A Discourse in Dalit-Bahujan and many more.

Karen Armstrong: “There is nothing in Islam that is more violent than Christianity”

Lizette Thoof

From being a Catholic nun, Karen Armstrong is now what could best be described as a "spiritual agnostic," and one of the sanest voices in comparative religion. Her treatment of the subject is among the most balanced and fair.

The terrorist attacks in Paris rendered her new book “Fields of Blood. Religion and the History of Violence” suddenly and tragically very urgent. In over five hundred pages Karen Armstrong, once a nun and the respected author of bestsellers like A History of God and The Case for God, answers the question whether religion is the principal cause of violence. Here is a conversation about Islam and terrorists, Western responsibility and the world in which we live.

It is not a merry book, Karen Armstrong’s newest: blood flows freely over the pages, metaphorically speaking. In detail she describes the violence that has always been inextricably associated with the development of nation states and cultures. But it is a necessary book, a kind of reality check. For it is high time we realize how much each and every civilization is rooted in submission and exploitation, including ours. High time to hear this voice.

Karen Armstrong enters the hotel lobby with a firm pace – a small, elegant woman with a blonde lock of hair that keeps falling in front of her eyes. And a ready laugh, despite the gloomy subject. Let’s start with the million dollar question.

Is there any difference between Jesus and Muhammad in terms of violence – or in other words, how do you explain that most terrorism now is inspired by the Islam?

“Terrorism has nothing to do with Muhammad, any more than the Crusades had anything to do with Jesus. There is nothing in Islam that is more violent than

Christianity. All religions have been violent, including Christianity. There was nothing in the Muslim world like anti-Semitism: that is an import of the modern period. They got it from us. The missionaries brought it over. And then came the state of Israel. Judaism has become violent in the modern world, thanks to the nation state.”

But then what is the cause of Muslim terrorism? In the book you write that Muslims have been introduced to modernity in a more abrupt way...

“When George Bush and Tony Blair went into Iraq they thought that modernity would take everyone into democracy straight away. That is not necessarily the case. It worked for us, because democracy was good for industry. Freedom, which we hear so much about at the moment, was essential to our economy as much as to anything else. For people have to have the freedom to innovate, to keep the country productive. But in those countries modernity came with colonial subjugation. There was no self-determination. In Egypt there were seventeen general elections between 1922 and 1952, all won by the Wafd Party, which was only allowed by the British to rule five times. Democracy was a bad joke.

Secularism was introduced by these army officers, with great violence: the clergy had their stipends confiscated, they were shot down, and they were tortured to death. The Shah shot hundred unarmed demonstrators in a holy shrine in Iran because they didn’t want to wear western clothes. And we in the West have consistently supported rulers like Saddam Hussein who denied their people any freedom of expression. All this has helped to push the Islam into violence. When people are attacked, they invariably become extreme. But only a tiny proportion of them actually agree with terrorism: 93% answered ‘no’ to the question in the Gallup poll whether the 9/11 attacks were justified. And the reasons they gave were entirely religious. The seven percent who said ‘yes’ – the reasons they gave were entirely political.

My message is not that religion has nothing to do with violence. It has always been implicated in it, and trying to take religion out of politics and warfare would have been like taking the gin out of the cocktail. It is inextricably intertwined. Until 1700 nobody thought of separating religion; it permeated the whole of life. And still people who have not had our particular modernization find that an arbitrary distinction. Because matters like justice, the plight of the

poor, suffering – these are political questions. And they’re matters of sacred import.

So Jesus would have had no time for people who said their prayers and neglected the plight of the needy or the oppressed. But we sort of separated it off. That separation was important for us, and in many ways it was good for religion, because it freed it from the violence of government.”

Reading the book I realized: what a river of blood and tears is running through our world history.

“And misery and oppression, and injustice. Great injustice and we are still unjust. Because we talk about our Enlightenment as if the Messiah came down... And it was great, it was very important for us. But look at the Founding Fathers of the United States, who said that all men are created equal: they had no problem owning African slaves. Liberty was only ever for Europeans. And it still is like that, because of the greed for oil. We give huge support to the Saudis, who give their people no human rights.”

There’s this blogger Raif Badawi threatened with cane beatings every Friday... (In the meantime Badawi’s case is under revision, ed.)

“We don’t mind about him as long as we get our oil. There is Amnesty International, yes, but we have to keep reminding people. We have to be consistent.”

Wasn’t it depressing for you to write this book?

“Yes, but there is also the other part. People like Confucius talking about the Golden Rule, Jesus, Paul who tries to... people keep trying. And we need to create an alternative voice that is as strong, that is based on reality but also on justice.”

And now we need to do that without religion?

“Well we can... Your country is secular but the Unites States aren’t secular. When I lecture there and talk to people the response is quite different: they don’t want to do without religion. They’re said to be the second most religious

country in the world, after India. But do create a secular form of it, seeing the sanctity of every human being. Each human being is precious, inviolable and must not be tampered with. Whether that interferes with our economy or not.”

So you are saying that religion is a scapegoat?

“We’re piling all the violence of the 21st Century on the back of religion, sending it away, saying we have nothing to do with religion. While we still have to deal with the political situation. The supermarket attack in Paris was about Palestine, about Isis. It had nothing to do with anti-Semitism; many of them are Semites themselves. But they attempt to conquer Palestine and we’re not talking about that. We’re implicated and we don’t know what to do with it.

It would be naive to think we’ll ever have a world without war. But I wrote this book because I am filled with a sense of dread as to where we’re going. We have created bombs that can wipe out the world, and it is accepted in international law that if your nation is threatened it is acceptable to fire off a nuclear weapon, even if that will certainly mean the destruction of your own nation. This is a suicidal death wish. So similarly the suicide bomber that goes in knowing that he or she will die is a primitive form of that.

You write, surprisingly, that the Shariah has been an impulse for peace...?

“We demonize the Shariah. But why they’re so keen on it in the Muslim world, is because traditionally it was a counterbalance to the tyranny of the state. It was the law of God but it was saying that nobody has the right to tell anybody what to do. Because each person is sovereign and responsible to God alone. No government could rule by that, but they had to acknowledge that this was the word of God. They have developed their own version of the Shariah. But the passion for it was not one for cutting off hands.”

And shutting up women?

“The women thing is a problem worldwide. One of the hallmarks of modernity has been the emancipation of women. And so when people are angry about modernity and modernisation they go back and... You have it in Christianity too; you’ve got Christians in the Southern States of the US who say that women

should stay in the home. The Catholic Church say women can't be priests. And similarly in Judaism too.

And one of the things in the Muslim world is that rulers are often floundering, they don't have much popular support. If they make draconian rulings that keep women under control, they please the men.

But the Muslim feminists will transform Islam. From the inside.”

Lisette Thooft is a journalist. For more information: www.lisettethooft.nl. This is an abridged version of the article.

Islamophobia Rising in India

Alan Potter

Barack Obama recently visited India, where he was received with open arms by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a lavish Republic Day celebration. But with Western countries badly needing to heal their rift with the Muslim world, the timing was not fortuitous.

In recent weeks, after all, the Indian government has been behind a number of anti-Muslim outbursts and renewed clashes with Pakistan.

On January 1, for example, the government blocked 30 popular websites in order to prevent publication by “jihadi activists.” The next day, reports came out of Modi’s home state of Gujarat of anti-terror drills involving mock terrorists dressed in traditional Muslim clothing.

Just a few days later, the government announced the discovery of a small ship along the Indian coast full of “suspected terrorists” from Pakistan, though there was no real evidence that the boat’s passengers were anything other than run-of-the-mill smugglers. On the same day, the government put all airports on high alert for potential hijackings due to unnamed intelligence reports.

Throughout this time, confrontations between Indian and Pakistani military forces increased, including an incident on January 1 in which Indian forces killed five Pakistanis.

Of course, Modi has a history of stoking communal violence against Muslims. In 2002, while chief minister of Gujarat, Modi was accused of failing to stop and perhaps even encouraging viciously bloody anti-Muslim riots. *The U.S. government later banned him from entering the United States because of his involvement in the riots. His party, the BJP, is traditionally based on a Hindu nationalist, anti-Islamic platform.*

But over time, Modi has tried to shed some of this negative reputation by rebranding himself as an economic technocrat and modernizer.

Gujarat became the prototype for attracting foreign direct investment under his leadership. And his 2014 campaign for prime minister was based on an economic program of growth and, to a lesser degree, liberalization. Because of this, pundits around the world began to overlook his past and, perhaps more importantly, the past of his party. The question now is whether we're beginning to see Modi and the BJP turn back to their traditional Hindu nationalist policies — and if so, why?

Modi is often characterized as a typical politician (if a particularly shrewd one), more interested in polls than ideals. Because of this, the logic goes, he will not stoke Hindu-Muslim violence as prime minister — the backlash would be too great, and it wouldn't provide the same kind of benefits that it did at the state level.

By the same logic, however, if Modi is unable to produce the economic gains he promised, then he might return to stoking communal violence. A sputtering economy, in other words, could prompt Modi to “wag the dog” by encouraging Hindu violence against Muslims and thus placating his Hindu nationalist base.

However, the present increase in anti-Muslim rhetoric coming from the government does not appear to be a function of a failing economy or a drop in Modi's popularity. The Indian economy has shown signs of life after a particularly tumultuous first half of 2014. Furthermore, the BJP performed well in recent state elections in Jharkhand and, to a lesser degree, in Jammu and Kashmir.

Nor does the increase in anti-Muslim rhetoric seem to result from an upsurge in confrontation along the Pakistan border. Those tensions are more likely to be the result of Indian rhetoric and actions than a cause of them, particularly as initial reports indicate that India has been the aggressor in recent clashes.

Another possibility is that the BJP is pushing the issue and Modi is simply trying to keep up.

After all, it's not Modi so much as other members of the BJP that have most pushed the envelope in recent weeks. A government minister, for example, recently asked her supporters at a rally to choose between children of the Hindu God Ram and “bastards.” Modi stated that he didn't approve of the comments,

but he didn't sack her either. Another BJP member of parliament recently praised the killer of Gandhi, who was a Hindu nationalist.

Additionally, the RSS — a right-wing paramilitary politically allied to the BJP — has been accused of forcibly converting entire Muslim and Christian villages to Hinduism.

If Modi is unable or unwilling to rein in his party's instrumental use of Hindu nationalism, then this will portend trouble for nearly all aspects of Indian society. Religious minorities, specifically Muslims, will be in danger of mass violence and persecution. Additionally, India's standing in the international community could drop precipitously.

But while Modi's own role in the unfolding drama remains unclear, it was disappointing that on January 14 — just before Obama's highly publicized visit to India — a U.S. court dismissed a case against Modi for his role in the 2002 Gujarat riots.

If the new anti-Muslim rhetoric is coming from the BJP, then there's still hope that Modi can rein in the extremists. If it's coming from Modi himself, though, then the trend will likely worsen, as his own party will certainly not oppose him in on the issue. And the opposition, particularly the Indian National Congress, is in complete disarray after the last national election.

Modi has only recently begun to shed his nationalist reputation, and the international community is watching closely.

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Scorning the Prophet goes beyond free speech – it's an act of violence

The Paris murders aside, the law has a duty to protect us all from insult and abuse

Abdal Hakim Murad

Muslims believe in every jot and tittle of the Second Commandment. We are to make no graven images of any living thing, irrespective of whether such images might or might not lure the unwary into idolatry. Orthodox Judaism and many Protestant churches have been similarly direct in following this biblical injunction.

And yet, for such a major item of the Ten Commandments and for all of Islamic art's historic capacity to thrive without making pictures, image-making does not carry a statutory penalty in Islamic law. It is for a Muslim judge to determine the exact nature of the offence, and to decide what ought to be done.

Unlike some other commandments, notably those against murder, adultery and theft, the Second is treated as a somewhat marginal issue in the classical manuals of Islamic ethics and law. Making pictures of people is forbidden, certainly, but it is hardly as wicked as missing a prayer, or neglecting the welfare of parents.

Still, this little-known byway of Muslim morality has become the lightning rod for a major European crisis. The disgraceful Paris murders seem to extremists on all sides to prove the inherent inability of Muslims to respect the ambient values of non-Muslim cultures.

The patient mainstream, of course, sees through this easily enough: the murders were the acts of criminals with troubled pasts and little religious knowledge, and have been condemned by a rare show of unity among Muslim leaders in France and worldwide.

So it would be easy to dismiss this as yet another tragic case of fringe elements trampling on the teachings of the mosques. Globally, Muslims admit that such lawlessness is an increasing worry. No significant Muslim scholar supports the radicals in Iraq and Syria, but some young people simply pay no heed. In an age of individualism, angry minds tend to ignore established religious leaders.

But there is more at stake here. Charlie Hebdo, like the Danish magazine *Jyllands-Posten* several years ago, did not simply publish images of the Prophet. That, on its own, would probably have occasioned little comment. The difficulty lay in the evident intention to mock, deride and wound. To portray the Prophet naked, or with a bomb in his turban, was not the simple manufacturing of a graven image. It was received, and rightly so, as a deliberate insult to an already maligned and vulnerable community.

Mosque burnings and a raft of legal disadvantages are increasingly a fact of life for Muslims in Europe. I recently visited a Swedish mosque which has logged almost 300 separate attacks; on one occasion it was burnt to the ground. In this fearful and tense environment, the French cartoons were scarcely a piece of harmless jocundity appearing in a vacuum.

Scorn towards despised minorities is a hazardous business. During the days of Nazi terror, cartoons supplied a key weapon of anti-Jewish polemic. To laugh at the Prophet, the repository of all that Muslims revere and find precious, to reduce him to the level of the scabrous and comedic, is something very different from “free speech” as usually understood. It is a violent act surely conscious of its capacity to cause distress, ratchet up prejudice and damage social cohesion.

It is because of such risks, as well as out of a sense of due civility, that the British legislators who in 2008 abolished the common law offence of blasphemy, have replaced it with a range of legal restraints on forms of hate speech or offensive images. In 2010, to take one example, an atheist activist was convicted for distributing anti-Christian images in the prayer room at Liverpool Airport. The deeply distressed airport chaplain took him to court, and won easily.

The English legal tradition recognises not only the right to free speech, but the right to protection from agonising insult, slander and abuse. In the case of

vulnerable minorities that legal concern seems particularly appropriate. It is also in line with the tolerant and courteous national character.

It is for the many Muslims who now populate the Inns of Court to discover whether these legal precepts can in practice be used to protect non-Christians from abuse. A series of complex cases would trigger an overdue national and perhaps Europe-wide discussion on the right to protection from hate speech. Not all the lawsuits would succeed, but the community would have shown that it is determined to enjoy the protection of our country's laws.

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Is 'India's Daughter' A Victim Of Corporate Media War?

Vidya Bhushan Rawat

A few days ago our finance minister and the legal brain of the current government Mr Arun Jaitley spoke in a conference and said that 'you cannot ban anything in the current age of information'. 'How can any government ban anything when the flow of information is so far and vast he said'? It is not more than a month when the government was seen hiding itself in the war cries of nationalism and arrogance of 'we will see' and 'India's reputation is being targeted'. It look childish when our lawmakers speak such a language in Parliament where a number of politicians are sitting who have publically supported khap Panchayats as well as killings and rapes too for political purposes. A video online on the India times' website reported that some of the supporters of a rabble rousing BJP MP's supporter openly asking to rape even the 'dead women from Muslim community' and it shamefully does not outrage us. When Hindutva lunatics are roaming free and seeking revenge, the 'conscious keeper' of this country, in the 'Times Now' does not feel comfortable to carry a campaign against it. Our 'conscience' does not wake up when Maya Kodnanai and all the accused from Gujarat have been released by the 'courts' and when Teesta Setalwad face charges because she fought against the communal violence and the political which was party to it.

It is strange that 'Times of India' which has always stood for 'freedom of expression' and has not shied away from publishing naked and titillating photographs of 'famous' people including film stars to the extent of even violating their privacies, is campaigning this time, through a megalomaniac called Arnab Gosami who think that except 'him' none think for India and none has a right to claim propriety on Indian nationalism except him. Women activists have given a call to boycott him but I would say all the politicians and activists should boycott Arnab and his 'Times Now'. It is a channel of the corporate, for the corporate and by the 'Corporate', which massages the Indian egos through tainted ugly nationalism. Sadly, when we want public opinion to develop against the mindset, which the rapists are having, the Times of India has come for the rescue of such a minds I always say that India has enough laws

but it does not have the capacity to introspect. It is simply living in denial mode and Arnab Goswami and Times of India are exploiting that mindset in India.

The entire issue of anti woman mindset that starts from the birth of a girl has been hijacked in the jingoism of ‘nationalism’ by these media thugs and the lobby of the government which is forcing the media to create an impression as if ‘rapist’ has got a ‘platform’ to project his view point. The fact is that all court proceedings are already completed and the convicts have already been sentenced to deaths, which will need Supreme Court’s scrutiny. So, it is really not the case of trying to influence the courts, which ‘Times Now’ and many others do every day without fail. The entire ‘News hour’ is nothing but a public ‘lynching’ of the ‘opponents’ done by rabble rousers who are enjoying the support of hyper ‘upper-caste middle classes’. The way some of them carried ‘news’ of ‘government’s ‘notice’ send to BBC as if it is a very great act of the party with ‘transparency’. At the end of the day Arnab had egg on his face when BBC rescheduled the broadcast of the film four days earlier and the film, thank to Arnab Goswami and his foolishly negative campaign became a big hit on the YouTube. The question is why the ‘Times of India’ allowed its channel to carry this utterly disgraceful propaganda which ultimately hurt the ‘freedom of expression’ and creativity. I wish we had a Ramnath Goenka today who lead ‘Indian Express’ from the front and did not succumb to the dirty tricks of the government during emergency when the rest of the media in India was ‘crawling’, the ‘Indian Express’ kept the voice of the people high. Today, it pains to see the pathetic condition of the media lampooning itself and championing the cause of censorship on behalf of the government. During emergency the entire media was one even when we saw many fought openly while others surrendered yet they did not carry sinister campaign against each other. Today, media PR forgot its ethical duty and unfortunately supported such censorships, which are unwarranted in this age.

It is equally painful that the ‘Times of India’ and ‘Times now’ was picking up small issues like ‘revealing’ the name of the victim. We must understand that original name of Nirbhaya is revealed by her parents and there is nothing unusual of that. It is not for the first that a film is being made on rape victim. In 1994, Shekhar Kapoor made film ‘The Bandit Queen’ on the life of ‘Phoolan Devi’ and though there were charges of ‘commercialism’, the film was accepted by the people. The issue of not revealing the name of the rape victim comes through a ‘mindset’, which considers sexual violence as ‘end of life’ for

woman. It is important to reemphasize the fact that a woman does not become 'jinda laash' as Sushma Swaraj, now our honourable external affairs minister, claimed in Parliament in 2012. A woman neither loses her identity nor dignity just because she has been violated or raped. It is important that society changes its attitude and it won't be possible without taking the issue head on.

To make the issue as an issue of 'Indian' verses 'foreign' is simply farcical. In reality 'Times Now' can at most be compared to 'Fox News' in United States where 'loudspeakers' sensationalise the issues on daily basis. The fact is that BBC has a long-term relationship with India and has been acknowledged as more credible source of information in far rural India than the government owned Doordarshan and Aakashwani during the emergency days. We all got the tuned to BBC London to get the factual information on 'operation Blue Star' or the death of Indira Gandhi through BBC when the government radio had blanked out the entire news. The news channels in India are not doing a great service to their credibility through such disinformation campaign.

One must ask the question as how many Indian News channels allow the individual filmmakers this liberty. Let them reveal as how much money are they ready to put in for such stories, which need time and investigation. Most of them have 'slaughterhouses' in their TV studios, which is the easiest and safest way to carry their prejudiced agenda and disinformation campaign on important people's issues. So, as far as credibility and quality is concerned, BBC remains far ahead of any Indian news channel.

So, for me, it is important we defend this right of the filmmaker to make a film. No filmmaker or writer will surrender her or his right to write a story to the jailer or authorities. We take permission to follow security procedures and once they are followed, it is not the concern of the authorities as what did the accuse say or what is the script of my film or story. It will be a dangerous sign if such thing ever happens than it would be impossible to expose the corruption and break many stories that have so far come out in public domain. The judicial process is over and the fact is that the case against the accused will be more stringent with this. So, to say that attempt has been made to 'influence' the case is highly contested and untrue.

Much noise is being made on the statement of the accused Mukesh Singh in the film. I can bet that it is making mountain out of a mole. For me, that only show

what ails our society. Mukesh Singh remains unrepentant and is actually speaking what his 'lawyers' have told him. The biggest interviews of the film are outside the Tihar Jail where no 'security' is violated. They are the lawyers of the accused who have taken oath to the constitution of India and to defend it. Yes, all the accused are already sentenced and we know Supreme Court too will uphold their sentences as there is so much public outrage on the issue but what do you do with the mindset of those who are 'supposed' to 'defend' the constitution. So the most unfortunate, unethical and outrageous statement that has come out in this documentary is not really from the precincts of Tihar Jail but outside it and by the lawyers of the two accused. Indian judiciary and Bar has to think as what can it do with such people and whether they deserve to be in the profession or not.

There is no big deal about the film except the fact that it is not preachy in nature and tries to address the issue through social prism unlike most of our 'activists' who give us 'laws' to resolve a crisis which we all are facing. That the film does not have many 'experts' is better side and left many of them 'bitter' but then you cannot expect a documentary to cover and resolve all the issues that women face in India. It fall short on many account but it is not giving the accused a 'platform' to propagate their views. It has succeeded in bringing the issue back to the forefront but it fails on many counts and the biggest irony is that the filmmaker was in India for two years to make the documentary and did not have time to visit rape victims of Bhagana's Dalit families who have been sitting on Dharna. It failed to capture the imagination of Dalit victims of upper caste violence where rape is a tool to assert your caste supremacy and hundreds of such cases have been reported. The film make a case that India's youth are 'asserting' against rape violence but it is a crude joke that the same caste mind does not come forward and speak the same language when the victim is a Dalit. If Indians have woken up against rape culture, we would have seen much more politicized protests all over the country but the fact is that those rape protests though might have been spontaneous outburst but there is a fact that Hindutva element infiltrated into these movements and gave it a shape as if this culture of rape and impunity was started with the government of the day. None spoke of social violence and hidden apartheid existing in this country and the filmmaker needed no permission from Tihar to visit Jantar Mantar and speak to these victims of Jat caste violence. It would have done much better help to international community and expose the hypocrisy of the upper caste Indians as why India does not respond to the cases of rape violence Dalits in the villages

and Muslim victims during the so called communal disturbance. Why our heart does not beat or why we do not come to the street listening to painful and traumatic conditions of rape victims of Muzaffarnagar violence 2013 or those faced similar trauma in Gujarat 2002. Clear enough, a 'rape' stirs our 'conscious' when the victim is from among 'us' and accused the not like 'us'.

Blood relations and caste identities are most important in India so someone may be criminal for 'others' but become my 'hero' if the caste matches. Your brother cannot do anything. My husband is the best one. My father is the best one in the world are the often-repeated excuses when the criminals are saved. The statement of the wife of accuse Mukesh Singh reflect the 'dilemma' of an Indian woman who is framed in the perception of 'my husband is my God'. 'What will I do, if my husband is no more', she says. And then pure generalization as what happened to 'others' and that this is not the 'only' case and why her husband is being targeted. Sadly, this is the problem as I mentioned with this 'cultural' society where all the 'wrongs' are 'done' by 'others'. This is acute because this woman without any fault of her will now face ostracization and isolation of an absolutely Hippocratic society where the punishment is much severe. So, Mukesh Singh will get whatever punishment for his act but his wife is getting much harsher punishment and we do not know how people will behave with her and the children? A society based on prejudices will not treat them kindly for sure. That is why this issue is much larger and just does not revolve around poor as being described. We have seen the wives of senior officers and Ministers whose husband were caught and sentenced for 'murder' and rape standing with their husbands and accusing the women. This culture of male impunity in society needs a big assault from the right thinking people.

At the end a lot have been spoken about this film and how it failed on many things. Our leaders were 'saddened' that Tihar Jail was 'breached' and it provided the convict a platform to justify his 'act'. Lawyers have written that they 'oppose' ban but it 'violate' Indian law and administration. Arnab Goswami is already angry with it and many other things. After watching it, I can say, if the producer director had not used the Tihar footage and instead of added to Sushma Swaraj's not only 'Jindalash' speech in Parliament but also her famous of 'tonsuring' her head and living like a 'widow' if Sonia was made Prime Minister of India once UPA came to power in 2004, the film would have exposed the mindset and the political class that we have. India have all the great

laws in existence but it does not have a will power to fight against this patriarchal Brahmanical structure which is the root of violence against women. We live on constant denial and are blaming the people from outside to defame us. Don't we know that after the Nirbhaya incident countries world over issued particular guidelines for their female citizens regarding safety measures and precautions to be taken in India? Why didn't we get offended when media was shouting and exposing each thing in 2012? The fact is we are now in 2014 and a different government at the centre whose leaders used all the protest movement and projected as if those problems are created by that particular government. Arvind Kejriwal too used the opportunity to further his political agenda and in the din of righteousness we ignored the bigger issue. It is not that we did not expose the duplicity of the political class when they were shedding crocodile tears while the people from Bhagana, sitting on the protest against the rape committed by upper caste youths, were waiting and waiting but the same political class irrespective of parties did not bother to raise their issues and visit them. BBC's film failed to expose India's caste impunity, which rapes women at their whims and fancies to assert its supremacy in India's villages. It is sad that our activists and human rights 'champion' did not have time to narrate things when they critique the film, instead the farce of nationalism and technicalities of the matter are being raised and that shows the hollowness of the protests and the human rights movement itself which keep quiet on the violence against Dalit women and make it just a plain gender issue. India will never answer that. *BBC documentary failed us in that but nevertheless it is a milestone as it still exposes Indian society and its hypocrisy in dealing with the issue.*

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Paradigm shift in regional scenario

Asif Haroon Raja

Pakistan and Afghanistan have traditionally had a complicated relationship characterized by mutual suspicion. Northern Alliance heavy Afghan regime under Hamid Karzai had remained heavily tilted towards India and had not only given high preference to India in her internal and external matters but also had adopted a hostile policy towards Pakistan. With the blessing of Washington, Karzai had given full liberty of action to India to emerge as the key country in Afghanistan and to fill up the security vacuum after withdrawal of ISAF. After signing strategic partnership agreement with India, Karzai allowed Indian military to train Afghan Army officers in their military institutions and meet Afghanistan's defence needs. India took advantage of it and besides consolidating her hold in Afghanistan; she made full use of Afghan soil to foment insurgencies in FATA and Balochistan. India was content that this arrangement would continue under weak unity regime as well because of Dr. Abdullah. In 2014, a stage was being set to induct Indian military into Afghanistan.

The US-India-Karzai led Afghan regime remained a close-knit team and remained focused towards destabilization of Pakistan. Equilibrium between the three strategic partners remained steadfast for 13 years, but with Ashraf Ghani taking over power, and the US military quitting Afghanistan after failing to defeat the Taliban, the balance got disturbed and gave birth to new equation in November 2014. Pakistan, which remained the whipping boy all these years, has replaced the most favoured India. Suspicion and distrust piled up for over a decade has been replaced with goodwill, cooperation and sharing. Blame-game has almost ceased and the gap in trust bridged in the wake of ominous threats from the Taliban and other armed militant groups. China, Kabul and Washington seem to have put their faith in Gen Raheel Sharif and see him as the sole silver lining in the otherwise dark horizon. The trio is looking towards Pakistan Army to help in defeating terrorism and bringing peace in war torn region.

Pakistan has long been blamed for harbouring and abetting Haqqani network (HN) in its cross-border terrorism. Pakistan military had its own socio-political-security compulsions to maintain a difference between good and bad Taliban

and to target anti-Pakistan militants only. These compulsions restrained Pakistan from launching a military operation in North Waziristan (NW). The concerns were however pushed aside after the gruesome attack on Army Public School in Peshawar on December 16, 2016.

A change in the outlook of new National Unity Regime under President Ashraf Ghani and CEO Dr. Abdullah and also in the thinking of Washington towards Pakistan has occurred essentially because of the across-the-board military operation in NW in which all militant groups based in NW were targeted. Uprooting of HN and Gul Bahadur groups from NW and comprehensive briefings given by Gen Raheel Sharif in GHQ to visiting President Ghani and his military team led by ANA chief Gen Sher M. Karimi, to ISAF Commander Gen Campbell, to US military officials in Pentagon and to British top officials made the difference.

The other reason of extension of whole-hearted cooperation by Kabul is Pakistan's declared stance that it has no favourites and that it would fully support Afghan led/owned reconciliation process. One more reason is Pakistan's relatively better clout over Taliban and its critical support in a patch up. More so, it has been accepted by all and sundry that Pak Army is the only one which can fight and win battles against ideologically motivated militants.

In order to reciprocate Pakistan's laudable efforts in war on terror, while the US declared Mullah Fazlullah as the global terrorist, ANA launched an operation in Kunar against Fazlullah's men. Five culprits having linkage with Peshawar incident have been arrested on the pointing of ISI. ANA managed to destroy some hideouts and inflicted casualties on TTP men but in the process lost over fifty soldiers. CIA operated drones are at times targeting militant hideouts in inaccessible areas in Shawal Range and along Pak-Afghan border.

Both the US and China look positively and receptively towards the fast growing relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan and see it as a healthy development. While China has agreed to take active part in bringing peace in Afghanistan, the US has finally acknowledged the importance of Pakistan and is cooperating. Pak-US relations that were downhill are once again moving uphill.

At the recently concluded Beijing Conference Ashraf Ghani defined five circles manifesting Afghanistan's future foreign policy. He placed Pakistan in Ist circle

(immediate six neighbours) and 2nd circle (Islamic World) and India in 4th circle (Asia). This is indeed a huge shift in thinking of Afghan leadership. What it implies is that Afghan top leadership has consented to prefer Pakistan over India. For a change, the US has readily reconciled with changed priorities of new regime without any ifs and buts.

Kabul dropped another bombshell on India by declining her military aid and training assistance, and to rub salt on her wounds asked Pakistan to train Afghan officers. For the first time 16 Afghan cadets are receiving training in PMA Kakul. To add to India's woes, Ghani made it clear that he will not allow Afghan soil for proxy war against any neighbour. He further distressed India by inviting Pakistan to host the next 'Heart of Asia' Conference, which earlier on was scheduled to be hosted by India. Pakistan's reservations on use of its trade route by India from Wagah to Afghanistan have been accepted by Afghanistan, USA and China.

On the military front, bilateral visits of senior military leaders and top intelligence personnel have recently increased. Gen Raheel and Corps Commanders 11 Corps and Southern Command undertook trips to Kabul. DG ISI Lt Gen Rizwan Akhtar visited Kabul thrice. Militaries and intelligence agencies of both sides are carrying out intimate coordination to manage the porous border, training matters, intelligence sharing and also taking care of each other's security concerns.

Military commanders and security officials are now regularly consulting to mutually share intelligence and coordinate security operations. Joint border control centres at Torkham and Spin Boldak have been revived to coordinate operations against the militants and share intelligence on illegal cross-border movement.

The US has reconciled to the emerging changes in Afghanistan not by choice but because it has been forced by circumstances. To compensate its natural ally and strategic partner India, Obama undertook a second trip to India and skipped Pakistan. Besides removing the irritants in Indo-US nuclear agreement signed in 2008, and signing another 10 year defence pact, the visitor made the old promise of helping India to earn a permanent berth in UNSC and also elbowed India to become a leading partner in Asia-Pacific Coalition to counter China.

Following conclusions can be drawn from the emerging scenario:-

- Afghanistan and its immediate neighbours have come on one page to establish regional peace and usher in prosperity in this war torn region and to keep out chief trouble maker India.
- Pakistan's foreign policy has come out of its traditional apologetic and defensive policy and Gen Raheel Sharif has played a key role in making it slightly pro-active by showing the real face of India to governments of Afghanistan, US and UK.
- Although Pakistan has been preferred over India by Ashraf Ghani, India which by now has penetrated in every department of Afghanistan including Army and intelligence agencies will continue with its dirty work of keeping Pak-Afghan relations tense in pursuit of its regional ambitions.
- Irrespective of the US apparent affability towards Pakistan, India will continue to remain its strategic partner and Pakistan a tactical partner to serve its short term goals.
- Genuine peace in Afghanistan will return once all foreign troops go home, Indian interference is curtailed, and Taliban agree to share power.

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Illusions about Modi and Hindutva

Prakash Karat

The last two weeks have seen various business organizations, editorials in the corporate media and political commentators decrying the spate of communal activities and propaganda in the country. Under the Modi government, the RSS and its outfits are increasingly asserting the Hindutva agenda. The latest has been the campaign to “reconvert” those who have left the Hindu fold. According to the RSS chief, Mohan Bhagwat, this is not conversion but a ‘ghar wapsi’ and in his words, the return of ‘maal’ stolen by a thief. Along with this, the RSS outfits have embarked on an aggressive campaign to threaten anyone who espouses “non-Hindu” values. There are attacks on a Hindi film ‘PK’ which has made fun of Godmen who hoodwink the people. Writers of books which question obscurantist and reactionary social practices are also targeted such as the Tamil writer Perumal Murugan. The Hindu Mahasabha has begun a campaign to glorify Nathuram Godse and wants to put up statues in his honour.

The growing assertiveness of the Hindutva forces and the brazen targeting of the minorities have begun to cause concern even among the big business and corporates. The corporate media which represent their views has written editorials calling upon Prime Minister Narendra Modi to put an end to this communal propaganda. The Times of India editorial stated that these activities are “putting the government’s reform agenda at risk”. Therefore, “The prime minister must end this debate unequivocally”. The Hindustan Times editorial stated: “The fruits of development that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has promised will take some time to kick in, but we have reasons to be concerned about the deteriorating social climate in the meanwhile”. The editorial demanded that “The Modi government must act decisively to stop the celebration of Nathuram Godse”.

If the corporate media is worried, the Chambers of Commerce has also echoed this concern. The new FICCI president Jyotsna Suri stated recently: “It (recent statements) is certainly diluting the focus and it is uncalled for. It is detrimental to the development agenda.....The government should do some straightening out”.

The ASSOCHAM general secretary was more forthright: “The `ghar wapsi` agenda of any section of society will create a huge dent in the growth agenda.....but will invest in a country where a law and order situation may arise over a period of time”.

These are voices being raised by the staunchest supporters of Narendra Modi who had backed him to the hilt during the election campaign. It is the backing of the corporates and big business along with the RSS network that saw Narendra Modi propelled to power. The big business and corporate houses are being disingenuous in raising the alarm at the Hindutva shenanigans.

The entire big business had supported Narendra Modi because of their experience of the `Gujarat model`. They saw Narendra Modi as a messiah who delivered a form of capitalist development which would fatten their profits and accumulate wealth. They knew very well that the Gujarat model was predicated on an aggressive Hindutva which had unleashed horrific violence on the minorities and suppressed them. They had struck a Faustian bargain to get Modi to power in return for the largesse he could deliver them. Now asking Narendra Modi, as the prime minister, to put an end to these activities displays either the height of naivety, or, a refusal to acknowledge what they already know.

The myth that Modi stands for development and good governance and has given up the Hindutva platform was fostered by the big business and the corporate media themselves. This was done to ensure that Narendra Modi would get the widest support from the people in the elections. This packaging of Modi was contrary to the reality of how Modi had emerged as a political leader in Gujarat. Modi had resorted to the crudest form of minority baiting during successive assembly election campaigns in Gujarat. In the elections held in 2002, Modi had made speeches like “hum paanch hamare pachees” (we are five and we will become 25) targeting the Muslims. It was during Modi’s rule in Gujarat that some of the forcible conversions of Christian tribals to Hinduism by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad took place.

With Modi as prime minister, the reality is that the RSS has come to occupy the centre stage of State power in India. For the first time, an RSS pracharak has become the prime minister of the country. It is not just the “extremist” or the “fringe elements” who are engaged in communal activities. The RSS chief

himself has endorsed the 'ghar wapsi' campaign and declared that India is a Hindu Rashtra.

The Narendra Modi and the BJP in government is adopting the same approach. It was the government that decided to undermine Christmas by declaring it as a 'good governance day' and instructing government employees to attend office on that day, ignoring the fact that it is a gazetted holiday. It is the government which issued circulars to schools to organise activities on that day and see that students attend them. This was a petty way to display their disdain for the religious beliefs and festivals of non-Hindus.

In the face of such a reality, The Times of India's editorial of December 23 demand that "Either Bhagwat needs to moderate his statements and ditch Hindutva, or BJP must decisively distance itself from RSS" strains credulity. The BJP is a creature of the RSS and the party and the government is ultimately controlled by the RSS.

It will be a good thing if the big capitalists shed their illusions about the character of the prime minister and the nature of the Modi government. But this is unlikely to happen. The bonanza they expect has already materialized for some. According to the Forbes list of India's richest 100, Gautam Adani is the biggest beneficiary under the new regime. Shares of Adani companies shot up ahead of the elections and Adani has added \$ 4.5 billion to his wealth since 2013. This is a phenomenal sum of Rs 25,000 Crore.

One of the reasons for their concern has been that the Hindutva forces may create communal tensions and violence and spoil the environment for investment and business. Narendra Modi is aware of this concern and is taking steps to assure them. The spate of ordinances promulgated on FDI in insurance, opening coal mining to private sector and diluting the Land Acquisition Act provisions are all signals to the corporates and foreign capital. This government will act in their interests while going ahead with the project of Hindutva. It remains to be seen whether the big bourgeois class will put the interests of the country ahead of their own class interests. There is not much scope for optimism in this regard.

War in the shadows

Munir Akram

A quick viewing of a video recent lecture delivered by Ajit Doval, India's ex-spymaster and now the national security adviser should set all doubts about India's clandestine wars at rest. Mr Doval calls Pakistan the "enemy"; extols Indian intelligence's ability to compromise and infiltrate the Kashmir insurgency; crows about the beheading of Pakistani soldiers by the TTP and advocates a policy of "defensive offense" against Pakistan.

Mr Ajit Doval's India National Security Adviser's lecture. To view open link <https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=898326933533928>

ALL people of goodwill desire peace between Pakistan and India. Given their historical animosities, a close relationship is probably unachievable in the foreseeable future. But a 'cold' peace, which does not eliminate their fundamental differences but enables coexistence and cooperation, is possible.

Unfortunately, even such a 'cold' peace is unlikely to be realised so long as India and Pakistan continue to wage their wars in the shadows.

A lot has been written and said about Pakistan's support to insurgencies in Afghanistan and Kashmir. Not much has appeared about India's longer and wider role in clandestine warfare against its neighbours, Sri Lanka, Nepal and particularly Pakistan. A quick viewing of a Facebook video of a recent lecture delivered by Ajit Doval, India's ex-spymaster and now the national security adviser, should set all doubts about India's clandestine wars at rest. Mr Doval calls Pakistan the "enemy"; extols Indian intelligence's ability to compromise and infiltrate the Kashmir insurgency; crows about the beheading of Pakistani soldiers by the TTP and advocates a policy of "defensive offense" against Pakistan.

Pakistan will have to defeat India's secret war against Pakistan if it is to defeat the TTP.

Actually, India's shadow wars against Pakistan commenced in 1971 when it actively trained and financed the Mukti Bahini to fight the Pakistan Army in East Pakistan, laying the ground for India's eventual military intervention to break up Pakistan. Even after the Simla Agreement, bomb blasts continued in Karachi and other Pakistani cities to keep Pakistan destabilised and defensive. New Delhi has missed no opportunity to support Baloch, Pashtun and Sindhi 'nationalists' and other dissidents in Pakistan.

Indira Gandhi's attack on Amritsar's Golden Temple created an opportunity for Pakistan to pay India back in its own coin. But its support for the Khalistan insurgency was also a 'defensive offensive' move to neutralise the threat of an Indian attack at the behest of its Soviet ally which Pakistan, in collaboration with the US, had pinned down in Afghanistan. India's 'warrior' prime minister was assassinated by her Sikh guards. Eventually, after president Zia's demise, the Khalistan insurgency was brutally put down by India. There is considerable speculation to this day whether the incoming PPP government released a list of Sikh insurgents to the Indians.

Even as the Khalistan insurgency died, Pakistan was offered its own 'opportunity of the century' — as the East Pakistan revolt was called by the Indians — to secure self-determination for the Kashmiris. In December 1989, the Kashmiris revolted at the rigged elections there. On 20 December, hundreds of peaceful Kashmiri demonstrators were mowed down by Indian security forces, unleashing an armed struggle for freedom. Pakistan's intelligence agencies, fresh from their success in backing the Mujahideen in Afghanistan, opted to support the religious parties, instead of the indigenous Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, to lead the Kashmiri struggle.

Under the pressure of the insurgency, India agreed in 1994 to discuss a Kashmir settlement with Pakistan. India's Foreign Secretary offered a settlement based on "autonomy plus, independence minus" for occupied Kashmir. Unfortunately, Pakistan was not quick enough to press its advantage and secure a good deal for the Kashmiris. India used the time to infiltrate and compromise the insurgency (as Mr Doval boasted). Some jihadi groups, like Al Faran, resorted to kidnapping and killing foreigners. This was the initial step in India's campaign to transform the Kashmiri struggle from a legitimate liberation struggle into a terrorist movement.

When the US, after 9/11, launched its war on terrorism, India's principal aim became to equate the Kashmiri struggle with global terrorism and Al Qaeda. New Delhi got its chance when 'terrorists' attacked the Indian parliament in December 2001. Despite the fact that Pakistan's culpability was unproven, a commitment was extracted from president Musharraf's government that Pakistan would not allow its territory to be used for 'terrorism' against others. Acceptance of this 'obligation' was interpreted as an admission of Pakistan's culpability. The Kashmiri struggle was over for all intents and purposes.

When Pakistan, under US pressure, attempted to curtail support to the Kashmiri 'jihadi' groups, some of them — who had developed connections with Al Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban — turned on their Pakistani patrons. Hence the two attempts on the life of former president Musharraf. However, some groups, like the Lashkar-e-Taiba, although outlawed and aggrieved with the government, refrained from attacking the Army or Pakistani targets and maintained their focus on India. They demonstrated their extensive capabilities in the Mumbai terrorist attack.

India, for its part, had already unleashed its so-called 'defensive offense' policy against Pakistan. Under the auspices of the Afghan intelligence directorate, headed by a member of the Northern Alliance, with which India had developed close relations during the civil war against Mullah Omar's Taliban, India set up bases (in the guise of consulates) close to the Afghan-Pakistan border to sponsor and support the Balochistan Liberation Army.

When the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) emerged from the embers of the Red Mosque operation, Afghan and Indian intelligence were quick to seize the opportunity to infiltrate and utilise some of its elements, particularly Baitullah Mehsud's kin, against Pakistan and its armed forces. This has been openly admitted by Afghan intelligence. As Doval noted, there have been 40,000 Pakistani casualties attributed to the TTP's acts of terrorism.

The situation in Balochistan and Fata became murkier due to rumours about the sponsorship of the anti-Iran Jundullah by certain Western agencies and the spate of recent attacks against China by the East Turkmenistan Independence Movement (ETIM), which was co-located with the TTP and other terrorist groups in North Waziristan and adjacent areas of Afghanistan.

Thus, for Pakistan, the Zarb-e-Azb operation against the TTP and its associates became an imperative, first and foremost, to protect the homeland, but also to prevent damage to its strategic relationship with China. It may be an added bonus that this campaign, which has also damaged all other militant groups in North Waziristan, has had a beneficial effect on Pakistan's relations with the US and Afghanistan.

However, Pakistan will have to defeat India's secret war against Pakistan if it is to defeat the TTP. It is difficult to expect a change in Indian policy while people like Mr Doval are in charge. The key to defeating India's designs is to secure the full confidence and cooperation of the Afghan government and utilise the influence of China, America and Russia to isolate and attack the TTP and its associated groups, especially Al Qaeda and ETIM, and deny India the bases and facilities to operate against Pakistan from Afghan territory.

It is only when the wars in the shadows are terminated that conditions may emerge for some form of normalisation between Pakistan and India.

The writer is a former Pakistan ambassador to the UN.

Kashmir's Polite, Mad Revolutionary, India's Bogeyman

Radha Surya

It's worth accessing YouTube videos of Mr. Masrat Alam Bhat, Muslim League chairman and general secretary of Hurriyat Conference. You can watch him for instance in a riveting Kashmir Monitor video. The pro-freedom leader sits amidst a circle of friends. It is less than 24 hours since his release after five years of incarceration. The newly liberated leader appears relaxed. The fearful "terrorist" speaks to the media with certain urgency. His tone of voice is soft, even gentle. Don't watch these videos if you are looking for impassioned denunciation of Indian rule in Kashmir. Although Mr. Masrat Alam wears a bushy beard, this one time science graduate of Sri Pratap College, Srinagar, has no interest in Hafiz Saeed style fulminations against India. The Kashmiri leader tells the media he is thankful to God for the ongoing commotion in the Indian Parliament (and ensuing publicity). A humorous twinkle lights up his eyes.

In another video the so-called threat to the unity and integrity of India throws back his head and laughs uproariously. He appears to be greatly amused by the brouhaha over his release in New Delhi and in India. He asks why make such a big deal out of the freeing of one person when thousands of political prisoners languish in detention. He has been in and out of prison since the age of 21. Arrested in 1991 for joining the armed struggle against Indian rule he spent much of the decade in jail. Since then there have been many periods of incarceration. With political parties and putative deshbakts in India baying for his blood, he confronts the looming prospect of yet another prison term with stoicism. After all he says he has only been transferred from a small prison to a larger one. The large prison of which he speaks is Kashmir.

The political storm that raged in New Delhi on March 9-10 presented a sharp contrast to the calm and steadfast dedication of the pro-freedom Kashmiri leader: "Movement is always there irrespective of whether I am in or out" (Greater Kashmir). The ruling BJP came under fire from both the Opposition and BJP allies. The Lok Sabha witnessed uproar on two consecutive days. PM Modi was called on to react to the actions of Jammu and Kashmir's newly

sworn in Chief Minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, the BJP's coalition partner in the J&K government. In recent months the PM became famous for observing a 'main chup rahoonga' (I'll keep silence) policy as the forces of Hindu chauvinism and hyper national bigotry ran rampant--spewing anti-minority hate speech, launching anti-minority campaigns, vandalizing Christian places of worship and crediting path breaking inventions to the science and technology of pre-modern India. But on Monday March 9 he wasted no time in adding his august voice to the so-called aakrosh welling up from the heart of India at the Kashmiri leader's release from illegal incarceration. Momentarily the ruling party and the opposition came together as a single unified entity. Nothing brings about political amity as speedily as real or imagined threats to national security. For political parties of every persuasion it's truly uplifting to hoist the tricolored and rally around the national flag.

India's mainstream news media has not covered itself with glory in its reporting on Mr. Masrat Alam. He is commonly designated as the hardliner Hurriyat leader and thereby relegated to the realm of political untouchability. Other instances of loaded language used by the media include "dreaded separatist" and "Hurriyat hawk." In an otherwise sane and commendable editorial on the discharge of Mr. Alam the Hindu has called him a Hurriyat hardliner who showed no remorse. There is really no reason why Mr. Alam should be called on to exhibit remorse. True, the Hurriyat leader spearheaded the pro-azaadi protests of summer 2010. This has been brought out by innumerable news articles that have appeared since March 8. But these articles have omitted to mention that the security forces responded to the protests with disproportionate force and killed over a hundred Kashmiri youngsters. For all purposes the brutality of the security forces has disappeared into the memory hole. By journalistic sleight of hand responsibility for the killings is made to rest with the Hurriyat leader. Here's an example from the Indian Express of March 9, 2015: he had shot into limelight after he issued calendars for stone pelters resulting in the death of 112 people in 2010. A simple Google search will yield tens of articles demonstrating the identical sleight of hand.

There is a further dimension to this story. Strangely enough in the course of the recent furore no one seems to have mentioned just why the "dreaded" Mr. Masrat Alam was spearheading the protests of 2010. Yet another crucial fact has been made to disappear into the memory hole. Consequently the protests end up appearing senseless and motiveless. For all intent and purposes the

Kashmiri youngsters were out there protesting for the heck of it. Little wonder the public remains uninformed when the mainstream media does such a shoddy job of presenting the full story. To set the record straight it is worth noting that mass protests began in reaction to the Macchil fake encounter staged in April 2010. The fake encounter entailed the cold blooded murder of three Kashmiri civilians by Army officers and jawans. The victims were passed off as foreign infiltrators. The perpetrators of the heinous deed obtained cash rewards for eliminating foreign militants. The story unravelled a month later when the bodies were exhumed and identified by the parents of the murdered men. The Macchil fake encounter deaths became notorious but there have been innumerable violations of human rights that go unacknowledged. Is it then surprising if there is political alienation among Kashmiris and the aspiration for self-rule?

In a fast changing news environment it was initially thought that the Hurriyat leader's release had been ordered by Chief Minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed. Later it was found that the release had been approved by the Central Government in the interim period when Jammu and Kashmir came under Governor's rule. With this discovery the crisis in BJP-PDP relations seems to have been defused. Under heavy pressure from the BJP, the PDP has stated that no further release of political prisoners will take place. It's now back to business as usual. It appears that political prisoners who have served their term will remain in captivity. Two cheers for the rule of law and due process. Two cheers for Indian democracy. For now the dust has settled. The Kashmir issue has dropped from the headlines of the Indian news media. The politicians and the deshbakts can return to the self-serving pretence about the decline of pro-azaadi sentiment in Kashmir. It's now back to believing that Kashmir is identical to every other Indian state and that its problems have to do with governance and development. No need to confront the troublesome fact that divided Kashmir lies at the heart of an international dispute.

Meanwhile in Srinagar Mr. Masrat Alam Bhat maintains his composure. He told the Hindu that he plans to return to "normal" life outside prison--resistance politics. In this he is true to character. Back in 2010 an officer of the Counter Insurgency Cell of the Kashmir police told Tehelka that "as soon as Alam is released, he starts from where he had left off. I haven't seen a separatist leader as completely obsessed as he is" (<http://www.tehelka.com/is-this-man-the-heir-to-geelanis-mantle-how-masarat-alam-makes-young-kashmiris-dance/2/>).

The Tehelka story (August 14, 2010, Issue 32 Volume 7) shows that the Kashmiri leader joined the political movement at the age of 16. He was a supporter of the Muslim United Front (MUF) which challenged the New Delhi backed National Conference (NC) party. As is well known to observers of Kashmir's history and politics, the elections of 1987 became notable in the annals of infamy because of egregious rigging of the results by New Delhi. The victorious candidates of the MUF were set aside in favour of NC candidates. Foiled in the effort to bring about social and political change via the ballot box, erstwhile MUF candidates and their supporters took to armed struggle. It's unnecessary here to go into details of the brutal counterinsurgency operation launched by India and resultant killing of tens of thousands of Kashmiris. Enough to note that Mr. Masrat Alam joined the militant movement as a commander of Hezbollah. He was in prison through much of the nineties. Perhaps he was set free under the amnesty program of the 2002-2008 PDP-Congress coalition government. At some point in the nineties or eighties he seems to have embraced the politics of peaceful, nonviolent resistance. He has been forged in the red-hot crucible of Kashmir's politics. He has been part of every phase of Kashmir's pro-azaadi movement since the late eighties. He has seen it all. He has witnessed the torture centres run by the Indian army and somehow survived the slaughter in which so many young people of his generation perished in tragic circumstances. Perhaps the trauma of earlier periods of his life explains the moving and impressive calm with which the 44 year old pro-azaadi leader awaits the utmost punishment that India can inflict in the name of national security and national integrity. In the meantime the polite, mad revolutionary (Tehelka) will busy himself with working to release Kashmir from ghulami.

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Pakistan is Nurse, Guide and Guardian of Afghan Peace

M K Bhadrakumar

The civil war in Afghanistan, which began with the overthrow of King Zahir Shah over four decades ago, is at last showing signs of reconciliation. February 19, 2015 may stand out as the day peace doves took wings. Earlier today, Reuters quoted unnamed “Pakistani army and diplomatic officials” confirming to that the Afghan Taliban have “signalled through the Pakistani military that they are willing to open peace talks, which could begin later in the day”.

Quite obviously, the visit on Tuesday by the Pakistan army Chief Gen. Raheel Sharif to Kabul was to give the green signal to the Afghan leadership. This time around, Gen. Sharif met not only President Ashraf Ghani but Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah as well, which underscored that a defining moment in the accommodation of the Taliban in Afghan mainstream politics is approaching. Indeed, Voice of America quoted Abdullah standing alongside Gen Sharif and expressing satisfaction over the process of normalization of Afghan-Pakistan relations, stressing that “concrete steps” have been taken by both sides.

From the Pakistani viewpoint, evidently, it is crucial to have constructively engaged with Abdullah (whom Islamabad has been cultivating tenaciously, his past Northern Alliance background notwithstanding). The fact that Gen. Sharif regards Abdullah as a key interlocutor would suggest not only that a high degree of mutual trust has developed but also that the political alignments within Afghanistan itself have shifted phenomenally and an emergent national consensus within Afghanistan cutting across ethnic and regional divides regarding the imperative of reconciliation with the Taliban has appeared.

The dramatic developments signify that Pakistan is finally getting the Taliban leadership out of the attic to sit across the table with the Afghan government’s negotiators. In an extraordinary statement from Rawalpindi today, the Pakistani GHQ daringly put its imprimatur on the breakthrough in the Afghan peace process and has underlined that the process will be “absolutely transparent, Afghan-owned and Afghan-led”, echoing closely the earlier remark by

President Ghani that he “will not conduct any negotiation in secret from my people and they will be informed of any development.”

Clearly, the US is actively promoting the process. Indeed, the US-Pakistani high-level exchanges have become noticeably dense in the past few weeks – CENTCOM chief General Lloyd Austin paying return visit to Rawalpindi in mid-August within six weeks of Gen Sharif’s path-breaking visit to Tampa; visit by Gen John Campbell, commander of the US forces in Afghanistan, to Rawalpindi in early February (his second visit in two months); President Barack Obama’s phone call to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif ten days later; and a 4-member Congressional delegation led by the chairman of the House of Representatives’ Appropriations Committee on Defense Rodney Frelinghuysen calling on Gen Sharif at Rawalpindi on Wednesday for a briefing on the latter’s visit to Kabul the previous day.

What emerges is that Pakistan is holding all the strings on the Afghan peace process and its full cooperation becomes the single most crucial factor for the success of any peace talks. It is Pakistan that is bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table as well as coordinating with the Afghan government the modalities and the dynamics of the peace talks. And it is also Pakistan through whose good offices the US (and China) would become a facilitator and it is, again, Pakistan which will ultimately have a say regarding the venue of the actual peace talks. To borrow the famous words from the English poet William Wordsworth, Pakistan has become the ‘nurse’, the ‘guide’ and the ‘guardian’ of the Afghan peace process.

All in all, the paradigm shift in Pakistan’s approach to terrorism is leading developments to their logical conclusion. On the other hand, all this would also become an impressive spectacle of Pakistani diplomacy at work. Needless to say, the Pakistani objective will be to develop synergy between the peace talks and a parallel track – or, more appropriately, two tracks – involving its strategic partnership with China and the US. The Chinese President Xi Jinping is due to visit Pakistan shortly. Obama has also expressed the desire to meet with Prime Minister Sharif.

To be sure, an unprecedented degree of coordination and harmony exists today between the elected civilian leadership (and the political class in general) in Pakistan and the military leadership.

Holy Cow-Beef And Indian Political Games

Ram Puniyani

Can the dietary practices, the animal which is worshipped as a mother by section of population, be brought in on the political arena? While all this sounds surreal, its true as far as the role of cow is there in Indian political firmament. Recently Maharashtra Government got the Presidents assent to the bill "Maharashtra Animal Preservation (Amendment) Bill 1995 which will now ban the slaughter of bulls and bullocks as well. The defaulters will face a prison term of five years and a fine of Rs. 10000. When I first read 'Animal Preservation' part of the title of the bill, I thought this is some bill related to all the animals which are used for human consumption or deals with the use of animals for different purposes by the society. Contrary to that it turned out that this applies only to Cow and its progeny. A decade ago I was shocked to read that one of the outstanding scholars of ancient Indian History Professor Dwijendra Nath Jha received regular threats on phone telling him not to publish his book, 'Holy Cow Beef in Indian Dietary tradition'. This scholarly work traces the place of beef in Indian diet from centuries.

The idea is to target the minorities for beef eating, and cow slaughter. One recalls that one of the slogans which rent the air in the run up the 2014 General elections was "Modi ko matdan, gai ko jeevadan [Vote for Modi, give life to the cow], BJP ka sandesh, bachegi gai, bachega desh [BJP's message, the cow will be saved, the country will be saved]". This slogan was propped up 'Cow Development Cell' of BJP.

As such emotive-identity issues are the hall mark of the politics in the name of religion. BJP built itself up on another identity issue, that of Ram Temple. The cow has always been accompanying and a parallel issue for political mobilization by RSS-BJP. It has also been the point of triggering violence in many cases all through. With the formation of VHP by RSS in 1964, cow issue has been systematically propped up time and over again. Many a misconceptions about cow, beef eating have been constructed. Building of misconceptions has also been extended to the dietary habits of the 'Muslim' community in particular. The profession of section of Muslims, Kasai (butcher), those in the trade of beef selling has been brought in to the 'Hate other', 'social

common sense' in particular. The result being that it is perceived at broad layers of society as if beef eating is compulsory for Muslims. The notion which has been popularized is that Cow is Holy for Hindus: Muslims kill her! The perception is that the Muslim invaders brought beef eating into India. These misconceptions are by now the part of 'social common sense' of the large number of people in the society.

All the components of this are myths and stereotypes have been constructed over a period of time. Time and over again one hears about some small communal violence, killing of Dalits and traders of cows leading to communal polarization. Many a Dalits dealing with cow hide have been killed in places like Gohana in Haryana and the VHP leaders had justified such acts.

Contrary to this the beef eating and sacrifice of cows was prevalent here from Vedic period. The sacrifice of cows in the Yagnas (ritual around fire) is extensively mentioned in the scriptures. There is mention about beef eating in various books. There is a phrase in Taitreya Brahmin which states 'Atho Annam Via Gau' (Cow is in veritably food) Different gods are mentioned to be having their choices for particular type of cow flesh. Prof D. N. Jha quotes innumerable examples of this in his masterpiece.

The preaching of non violence in India came with the rise of agricultural society. Jainism called for total non violence, while Buddhism talked non-violence; preventing of wasteful animal sacrifice in particular. It was much later that Brahmanism picked up cow as a symbol for Brahmanism in response and as a reaction to non-violence of these religions. Since Brahmanism has asserted itself to be the Hinduism it projects as if Cow is holy for Hindus overall. The matter of fact is that many sections of society, more particularly Dalits and Tribal have been eating beef all through. It is another matter that lately with the rising assertion of Hindutva, many a communities which are dependent on beef as a rich and cheap source of protein are gradually being forced to either give it up or do a rethink on that.

In contrast to what is being asserted by BJP and company, Swami Vivekanand had a different take on the issue. He points out speaking to a large gathering in USA said: "You will be astonished if I tell you that, according to old ceremonials, he is not a good Hindu who does not eat beef. On certain occasions he must sacrifice a bull and eat it."

[Vivekananda speaking at the Shakespeare Club, Pasadena, California, USA (2 February 1900) on the theme of ‘Buddhist India’, cited in Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol: 3 (Calcutta: Advaita Ashram, 1997), p. 536.]

This is corroborated by other research works sponsored by the Ramakrishna Mission established by Swami Vivekananda himself. One of these reads: “The Vedic Aryans, including the Brahmanas, ate fish, meat and even beef. A distinguished guest was honoured with beef served at a meal. Although the Vedic Aryans ate beef, milch cows were not killed. One of the words that designated cow was aghnya (what shall not be killed). But a guest was a goghna (one for whom a cow is killed). It is only bulls, barren cows and calves that were killed.”[C. Kunhan Raja, ‘Vedic Culture’, cited in the series, Suniti Kumar Chatterji and others (eds.), *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol: 1 (Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission, 1993), 217.]

In response to this bill thousands of workers of Devnar abattoir (Mumbai), who will be losing their jobs came on the streets to protest against this move of the government (March 11). Many traders, from different religion also came to Azad Maidan in Mumbai to protest this communal act of the Maharashtra Government. In a PIL filed in the Bombay High Court the petitioner argues that this ban on beef infringes on the fundamental right of citizens to choose meat of their choice is fundamental. The hope is that the society overcomes such abuse of ‘identity issues’ for political goals and lets the people have their own choices in matters of food habits, and let those who are making their living from this trade do so peacefully.

Ram Puniyani was a professor in biomedical engineering at the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, and took voluntary retirement in December 2004 to work full time for communal harmony in India. He is involved with human rights activities from last two decades. He is associated with various secular and democratic initiatives like All India Secular Forum, Center for Study of Society and Secularism and ANHAD

Arundhati Roy accuses Mahatma Gandhi of discrimination

Jason Burke

Prize-winning author questions position in India of 'person whose doctrine of nonviolence was based on brutal caste system' Indian writer and political activist Arundhati Roy said the generally accepted image of Gandhi was a lie.

Arundhati Roy, the Booker prize winning author, has accused Mahatma Gandhi of discrimination and called for institutions bearing his name to be renamed.

Speaking at Kerala University in southern Indian city of Thiruvananthapuram Roy, 52, described the generally accepted image of Gandhi as a lie.

"It is time to unveil a few truths about a person whose doctrine of nonviolence was based on the acceptance of a most brutal social hierarchy ever known, the caste system ... Do we really need to name our universities after him?" Roy said.

The caste system is thousands of years old but still defines the status of hundreds of millions of people in India. So-called untouchables, or Dalits, continue to suffer discrimination. Mahatma Gandhi, whose views on caste have been a long-running argument among historians.

The author's comments provoked immediate outrage from descendants and some scepticism from historians.

"Being outspoken is one thing but being so blasé about your ignorance is quite another," said Tushar Gandhi, great-grandson of the world-renowned thinker and activist. "It's just an attempt to get publicity."

Prof Mridula Mukherjee, an expert in modern Indian history at Jawaharlal University in Delhi, said Roy's criticism was misplaced. "Gandhi devoted much of his life to fighting caste prejudice. He was a reformer not a revivalist within the Hindu religion. His effort was in keeping with his philosophy of

nonviolence and bringing social transformation without creating hatred," Mukherjee said.

Roy's comments are part of a long-running historical argument over Gandhi's views on caste.

Gandhi's stance is sometimes contrasted by commentators with that of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, a Dalit who grew up in poverty but went on to become a prominent independence leader and India's first law minister, with responsibility for much of the country's constitution. Roy recently wrote a new introduction to Ambedkar's undelivered 1936 speech, *The Annihilation of Caste*, in which she called Gandhi "the saint of the status quo".

The British government recently announced that a statue of Gandhi would be placed in Parliament Square. Roy's comments come amid a series of rows over the study and representation of Indian history. The appointment of a little-known academic to the head of a national research body has raised concerns that the new Hindu nationalist government in India may try to promote an ideological version of the country's past.

The Bharatiya Janata party (BJP), led by Narendra Modi won a landslide victory in May, ending a decade of rule by the centre-left Congress party. When last in power, between 1998 and 2004, the BJP prompted controversy with its criticism of prominent historians and efforts to excise what ministers claimed was a Marxist or western vision from textbooks.

Prof Yellapragada Sudershan Rao took up his post as chair of the Indian Council of Historical Research last month. Rao was formerly head of history and tourism management at a little-known university.

Rao immediately caused controversy with comments criticising alleged Marxist influence on Indian historical studies and western-inspired methods of research. He also told interviewers that he believed the Hindu literary epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, were historically accurate accounts of real events.

Salil Tripathi, a columnist in *Mint*, a local newspaper, wrote: "His appointment is troubling ... because he appears to believe that history is shaped by both faith

and reason. Faith matters, of course, but faith is part of a culture, it should not dictate history. Faith is about unquestioned belief; history is about facts and reality."

Romila Thapar, one of India's most respected historians, said she feared "the ICHR may now turn the clock back".

"Historical research in India is no longer limited to trying to prove that the narratives of the ancient texts were historically accurate. We are now perhaps more concerned with what they tell us about our past societies and cultures," Thapar wrote.

BJP officials have denied any intention to change the way history is taught in schools or elsewhere.

The decision in February by Penguin to stop distributing an academic work on the Hindu religion by US expert Wendy Doniger after a legal challenge from conservatives prompted particular concern among liberal writers and thinkers in India. The BJP government last week denied reports that it had destroyed thousands of files, including some related to Gandhi's assassination by a Hindu fanatic in 1948.

Jason Burke is the south Asia correspondent of the Guardian and the Observer newspapers. Based in Pakistan from 1998 to 2002, reporting from Afghanistan under the Taliban and during the war of 2001, he has returned to Pakistan and Afghanistan many times since. Currently based in New Delhi, he covers a wide range of social, political and cultural topics across South Asia

How to Decipher Yemen: Where the Enemy of Your Enemy Is Also Your Enemy

Graham E. Fuller

Yemen, like Afghanistan, has a long reputation as a quagmire for foreign invaders. Saudi Arabia could break its teeth there if the U.S. does not constrain it. Astonishingly, Yemeni events have now conspired to bring about the supposed intervention of some 10 regional powers in one of the most hyped events in the Arabian Peninsula of recent times.

Most of this proxy war makes little sense: the threats emanating from Yemen are distorted and exaggerated, the stakes are actually relatively low (except for Yemenis), any imposed settlement is highly elusive, and the costs to those engaged may be high. For the U.S., it can be once again something of a lose-lose situation, where the enemy of my enemy is often also my enemy.

There are four myths about Yemen that need to be sorted out:

The first myth is that this war represents yet a new front on a massive regional Sunni-Shiite struggle. The reality is that a great deal of this struggle is heavily among Yemeni Shiites themselves. Yes, the Houthis, who are now well on the way to seizing leadership of the entire country, are indeed Shiite. They are Zaydi Shiites to be specific (also known as Fivers, believing in five imams) -- who differ significantly from Iranian Shiites (mostly Twelvers). Indeed, among the various schools of Shiism, Zaydism is theologically closest to Sunni Islam. Sunni and Shia have co-existed quite well in Yemen over long centuries.

Zaydi imams ruled most of Yemen for hundreds of years as an Imamate, until some 60 years ago when an Arab nationalist revolution displaced them.

But the Zaydi Shia remains a major force in the country (some 40 percent) and is dominant in the north. Furthermore, the two most important tribal confederations in the country are also both Zaydi. So was the former president of Yemen for 32 years, Ali Abdullah Saleh (overthrown in the Arab Spring and who now may be secretly supporting the Houthis). The Houthis are simply one

regional Zaydi clan who happen to be rebelling for an end to what they saw as discrimination and the corruption of Saleh and his successor -- both Saudi-supported Shiites. Typically the Houthi movement takes the form of a revivalist movement seeking cleaner government and a "purer Zaydism."

The second myth is that the Houthis represent the cutting edge of Iranian imperialism in Arabia -- as trumpeted by the Saudis. The Zaydi Shia, including the Houthis, over history has never had a lot to do with Iran. But as internal struggles within Yemen have gone on, some of the Houthis have more recently been happy to take Iranian coin and perhaps some weapons -- just as so many others, both Sunni and Shia, are on the Saudi payroll. The Houthis furthermore hate al-Qaeda and hate the Islamic State. And more recently they have denounced the U.S. as well for its past support to the government in Sanaa that was suppressing the Houthis.

The third myth is that Saudi Arabia is fighting to "preserve stability in the Arabian Peninsula." What the Saudis are doing is fighting to maintain overlordship in the Arabian Peninsula (an Arabian Monroe Doctrine). A century ago, the Saudis seized traditionally Yemeni areas in the southwest corner of Saudi Arabia and forcibly imposed radical Wahabi views there. Riyadh has always loathed Yemeni feistiness, independence, its revolutionary politics, and even its experiments with democracy. The Saudis have traditionally sought to buy off as many tribal and political forces as they can in Yemen -- Sunni or Shiite -- to try to maintain their shaky and shifting form of dominance.

But now it's about more than just Yemen. In the wake of the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia has sought to forge a broad counter-revolutionary force to block any further regime change in the Arab world; it brands its new campaign as some kind of pan-Arab Sunni movement designed to face an ostensible "Persian/Shiite threat."

With a lot of money and the support of insecure Gulf rulers, the Saudis now seem to have orchestrated some grand Sunni front to invade Yemen to "meet the looming Iranian threat." From Riyadh's perspective, Tehran has supposedly pocketed Iraq, is successfully keeping Assad in power in Syria, threatens Bahrain, stirs oppressed and restive Shia within the Saudi Kingdom, and now bids to control Yemen, thereby "encircling the Peninsula." Ironically, the

promising U.S.-Iranian nuclear talks raise further fears in Riyadh that Washington will no longer be a predictable member of the demonize-Iran camp.

Much of this paranoia reflects fevered authoritarian Saudi thinking. Never mind that Persians have never in centuries invaded the Arabian Peninsula. Shiite majorities, as in Iraq and Bahrain, have indeed demanded democratic processes that hugely empower them politically. But since the Saudis in recent years have all but declared war against Iran and created a massive anti-Shiite front -- mostly to preserve Arabian and Egyptian autocrats -- Tehran has reciprocated; it is happy to try to keep the Saudis off balance in Yemen at quite limited cost. But it is absurd to believe that Tehran is in a position ever to call the political shots in obstreperous Yemen. And the fear that the Houthis in power want, or are even capable of shutting down the Bab al-Mandab entrance to the Red Sea is a fantasy.

The fourth myth is that the U.S. has support in Yemen. Whatever support it has is extremely limited; its interests and policies in this dirt-poor country over the last decades have focused almost exclusively on counter-terrorism. In the process, the U.S. backed the three-decade dictatorship of Ali Abdullah Saleh and has been conducting dozens of drone strikes in the country that have caused many civilian deaths and stirred much anger. Under the present turmoil, the U.S. has felt compelled to close its embassy and has largely decamped to Riyadh. Washington now helps advise the 10-nation anti-Yemen campaign from Riyadh in what looks increasingly like some grand Arabian armada run amok.

The choices for the U.S. are poor. But Houthi dominance in Yemen need not be a disaster in itself. They are blood enemies of the militantly anti-Shiite forces of al-Qaeda and ISIS. Still, the Houthis will be deeply suspicious of U.S. intentions, especially now that the U.S. is working with Yemen's arch-enemy, Saudi Arabia. For that matter, the Houthis are not fanatics and will not be able by themselves to control Yemen unless they work with the broad array of political and religious forces and ideologies that make up the Yemeni mosaic.

But we now face a major new factor. The new, ailing Saudi King Salman -- or more precisely his activist, powerful and ambitious son -- now are bidding for a historical transformation of the Kingdom's long-standing cautious and defensive foreign policies.

We should remember that the history of Saudi Arabia shows its Wahabi forces sweeping twice across the Peninsula to the Persian Gulf in some kind of Arabian Manifest Destiny.

The Saudis' small Gulf neighbours may not find it so comfortable to support a new, more geopolitically ambitious Riyadh -- with its radical Islamic ideology and its virulently sectarian regional vision. Nor should the U.S. A massive, unnecessary -- and likely failing Saudi effort --to take over Yemen in this counter-revolutionary spirit may augur dangerously for the stability of the Peninsula in the future.

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Myanmar “Color Revolution”: Meet Aung San Suu Kyi’s Saffron Mobs

Tony Cartalucci

Not unlike other US-backed “colour revolutions” around the world, Myanmar’s “Saffron Revolution” is sold as an ultra-liberal pro-democracy, progressive movement, with one of the West’s most successful neo-colonial creations to date, Aung San Suu Kyi, portrayed and revered as a modern day, secular “saint” of neo-liberalism and Western democratic values.

Underneath the pageantry and spin, however, is harboured ultra-right racism and unhinged violence that if ever truthfully reported on, would end the “Saffron” wave, and spell the absolute end of both Suu Kyi’s political career and her legacy.

Most recently Suu Kyi’s “Saffron” movement took to the streets, not to call for greater “freedom” or to defend “human rights,” but to condemn the government’s move toward giving hundreds of thousands of stateless Rohingya refugees citizenship.

Australia’s ABC News would report in an article titled, *“Myanmar scraps temporary ID cards amid protests targeting ethnic minorities without citizenship,”* that:

Myanmar’s government says identity cards for people without full citizenship, including Muslim Rohingya, will expire within weeks.

The scrapping of ID cards snatches away voting rights handed to them just a day earlier (Tuesday), after Myanmar nationalists protested against the move.

The Rohingya, along with hundreds of thousands of people in mainly ethnic minority border areas, who hold the documents ostensibly as part of a process of applying for citizenship, will see their ID cards expire at the end of March, according to a statement from the office of President Thein Sein.

Some might call it strange for a so-called “pro-democracy” movement to take to the streets to specifically deny hundreds of thousands their right to be represented. Indeed, the move was instead entirely driven by Suu Kyi’s political bloc and its attempt to skew upcoming polls with a large, well oiled political machine built with decades of support and billions of dollars funnelled in from the United States and the United Kingdom, the latter having had colonized Myanmar and who still refers to the nation as “Burma,” its colonial nomenclature under British colonial rule.

In a related incident, Australia’s ABC News would also report in an article titled, *“Myanmar monk who called UN envoy a whore ‘could hurt Buddhism’,”* that:

A Myanmar Buddhist monk who called a UN human rights envoy a “whore” has violated his monastic code and could damage his religion, another prominent monk says, but he is unlikely to face censure. Ashin Wirathu denounced Yanghee Lee, the UN special rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, in a speech in Yangon on Friday, after she questioned draft laws that critics said discriminate against women and non-Buddhists.

Wirathu, also known as the “Buddhist Bin Laden,” led Aung San Suu Kyi’s “Saffron Revolution” in 2007 and his followers regularly fill the ranks of street mobs organized in support of her political party, the National League for Democracy (NLD). Both Suu Kyi’s NLD and her “Saffron” mobs are fully funded, backed, protected by, and in absolute servile obedience to both US and British special interests.

America’s Bottomless Pockets Fund Myanmar’s Terrorists and Traitors

A 2006 36-page document out of the *“Burma Campaign UK”* explicitly details the enormous amount of money and resources both the US government and its corporate-funded foundations have poured into Suu Kyi’s image and her “movement.”

The most telling information begins on page 14 of 36 of the report’s PDF file. Titled, *“Failing the People of Burma?”* the report enumerates the vast resources the West has invested in building a “pro-democracy” movement, and argues that even more support be given to initiate a “transition” in Myanmar.

The report details the specifics of each organization involved, including the National Endowment for Democracy (NED):

The National Endowment for Democracy (NED see Appendix 1, page 27) has been at the forefront of our program efforts to promote democracy and improved human rights in Burma since 1996. We are providing \$2,500,000 in FY 2003 funding from the Burma earmark in the Foreign Operations legislation. The NED will use these funds to support Burmese and ethnic minority democracy-promoting organizations through a sub-grant program. The projects funded are designed to disseminate information inside Burma supportive of Burma's democratic development, to create democratic infrastructures and institutions, to improve the collection of information on human rights abuses by the Burmese military and to build capacity to support the restoration of democracy when the appropriate political openings occur and the exiles/refugees return.

The role of US State Department-run Radio Free Asia (RFA) and Voice of America (VOA) is also discussed in detail, including the revelation that US foreign policy specifically supports and actively promotes Aung San Suu Kyi and "her" agenda, stating:

Both Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Asia (RFA) have Burmese services. VOA broadcasts a 30-minute mix of international news and information three times a day. RFA broadcasts news and information about Burma two hours a day. VOA and RFA websites also contain audio and text material in Burmese and English. For example, VOA's October 10, 2003 editorial, "Release Aung San Suu Kyi" is prominently featured in the Burmese section of VOAnews.com. RFA's website makes available audio versions of 16 Aung San Suu Kyi's speeches from May 27 and 29, 2003. U.S. international broadcasting provides crucial information to a population denied the benefits of freedom of information by its government.

The US also pours vast resources into organizations affiliated with Aung San Suu Kyi, including "Prospect Burma":

The State Department provided \$150,000 in FY 2001/02 funds to provide scholarships to young Burmese through Prospect Burma, a partner organization with close ties to Aung San Suu Kyi. With FY 2003/04 funds, we plan to

support Prospect Burma's work given the organizations proven competence in managing scholarships for individuals denied educational opportunities by the continued repression of the military junta, but committed to a return to democracy in Burma.

NED is also cited as behind the creation of a vast propaganda network including the New Era Journal, the Irrawaddy, and the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) radio, all posing as "independent" media sources despite the fact they are in reality fully-funded by the US government.

Additionally, a 2007 Reuters article titled, "Myanmar information window closing, says dissident," would reveal another propaganda outlet created by and maintained not by the people of Myanmar, but by the US State Department. Reuters reported:

The United States helps fund Mizzima through its National Endowment for Democracy, one source of the generals' assertions that the protests are the result of outside agitation.

Reuters would also report that the Editor-In-Chief of US-funded Mizzima was (and still is) Soe Myint, a terrorist guilty of hijacking a passenger liner – a terrorist act committed before receiving US funding to start his propaganda outfit. Reuters would report:

Myint and a friend hit the headlines in 1990 when he hijacked a Thai International Airways plane to protest the junta's rejection of elections won by pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy. He used fake bombs made out of soap cases to hijack the plane flying from Bangkok to Yangon with 220 passengers on board. The two friends were released in 1991 after a three-month jail term and were recognised as refugees in India.

The US State Department literally is funding a terrorist guilty of hijacking a civilian airliner, millions of US dollars in taxpayer money to undermine and overthrow the government of Myanmar – all under the guise of "democracy promotion." And believe it or not, the US State Department making a known terrorist head of a propaganda outfit carrying out foreign-backed subversion is

relatively tame compared with Suu Kyi's "Saffron" street front. The "Buddhist Bin Laden" and his "Saffron" Savagery

The abhorrent racism, bigotry, and violence exercised by Suu Kyi's "Saffron" mobs could best be compared to that of America's Ku Klux Klan or violent anti-Semitic pogroms seen in Europe, particularly during the rise of Nazism. Led by the above mentioned violent demagogue Ashin Wirathu, the mobs enforcing Suu Kyi's rising political order depend on constant and substantial cover provided by the Western media.

Despite this cover, kernels of truth still make their way through the propaganda smokescreen.

Buddhist monks and others armed with swords and machetes Friday stalked the streets of a city in central Myanmar, where sectarian violence that has left about 20 people dead has begun to spread to other areas, according to local officials.

In the western state of Rakhine, tensions between the majority Buddhist community and the Rohingya, a stateless ethnic Muslim group, boiled over into clashes that killed scores of people and left tens of thousands of others living in makeshift camps last year.

Most of the victims were Rohingya.

Similar violence in September of 2012 revealed the name of one of the leading "monks." AFP's article, "Monks stage anti-Rohingya march in Myanmar, refers to the leader of these mobs as "a monk named Wirathu," referring of course to Ashin Wirathu himself.

In March 2012, Wirathu had led a rally calling for the release of so-called "political prisoners," so designated by US State Department and its stable of faux-human rights NGOs. Wirathu himself was in prison, according to AFP, for inciting hatred against Muslims, until released as part of an amnesty, an amnesty US State Department-funded Democratic Voice of Burma claims concerned only "political prisoners."

Real monks don't do politics. The "venerable" Wirathu (front, left) leads a rally for "political prisoners" loyal to Aung San Suu Kyi's "pro-democracy"

movement in March, 2012. Wirathu himself has been often portrayed as an “activist monk” and a “political prisoner” who spent years in prison. In reality, he was arrested for his role in deadly sectarian violence in 2003, while Suu Kyi’s “pro-democracy” front is actually US-funded sedition. Wirathu has picked up right where he left off in 2003, and is now leading anti-Rohingya rallies across the country and has most recently labelled a UN envoy a “whore” for defending the Rohingya minority against his and his followers’ savagery.

Human Rights Watch itself, in its attempt to memorialize the struggle of “*Buddhism and activism in Burma*” (.pdf), admits that Wirathu was arrested in 2003 and sentenced to 25 years in prison along with other “monks” for their role in violent clashes between “Buddhists and Muslims” (page 67, .pdf). This would make Wirathu and his companions violent criminals, not “political prisoners.”

While Western news agencies have attempted to spin more recent violence as a new phenomenon implicating Aung San Suu Kyi’s political foot soldiers as genocidal bigots, in reality, the violent, sectarian nature of her support base has been back page news for years. AFP’s more recent but uncharacteristically honest portrayal of Wirathu, with an attempt to conceal his identity and role in Aung San Suu Kyi’s “Saffron” political machine, illustrates the quandary now faced by Western propagandists as the violence flares up again, this time in front of a better informed public.

During 2007’s “Saffron Revolution,” these same so-called “monks” took to the streets in a series of bloody anti-government protests, in support of Aung San Suu Kyi and her Western-contrived political order. HRW would specifically enumerate support provided to Aung San Suu Kyi’s movement by these organizations, including the Young Monks Union (Association), now leading violence and calls for ethnic cleansing across Myanmar.

The UK Independent in their article, “*Burma’s monks call for Muslim community to be shunned,*” mentions the Young Monks Association by name as involved in distributing flyers, demanding people not to associate with ethnic Rohingya, and attempting to block humanitarian aid from reaching Rohingya camps.

The Independent also notes calls for ethnic cleansing made by leaders of the 88 Generation Students group (BBC profile here) – who also played a pivotal role in the pro-Suu Kyi 2007 protests. “Ashin” Htawara, another “monk activist” who considers Aung San Suu Kyi, his “special leader” and greeted her with flowers for her Oslo Noble Peace Prize address earlier this year, stated at an event in London that the Rohingya should be sent “back to their native land.”

.The equivalent of Ku Klux Klan racists demanding that America’s black population be shipped back to Africa, the US State Department’s “pro-democratic” protesters in Myanmar have been revealed as habitual, violent bigots with genocidal tendencies. Their recent violence also casts doubts on Western narratives portraying the 2007 “Saffron Revolution’s” death toll as exclusively caused by government security operations.

While in late 2012 the Western media attempted to ignore the genocidal nature of Suu Kyi’s “Saffron Monks,” now it appears that more are catching on. The International Business Times has since published an article titled, “Burmese Bin Laden: Is Buddhist Monk Wirathu Behind Violence in Myanmar?” stating:

The shadow of controversial monk Wirathu, who has led numerous vocal campaigns against Muslims in Burma, looms large over the sectarian violence in Meikhtila.

Wirathu played an active role in stirring tensions in a Rangoon suburb in February, by spreading unfounded rumours that a local school was being developed into a mosque, according to the Democratic voice of Burma. An angry mob of about 300 Buddhists assaulted the school and other local businesses in Rangoon.

The monk, who describes himself as ‘the Burmese Bin Laden’ said that his militancy “is vital to counter aggressive expansion by Muslims”.

He was arrested in 2003 for distributing anti-Muslim leaflets and has often stirred controversy over his Islamophobic activities, which include a call for the Rhohingya and “kalar”, a pejorative term for Muslims of South Asian descent, to be expelled from Myanmar.

He has also been implicated in religious clashes in Mandalay, where a dozen people died, in several local reports.

The article also cites the Burma Campaign UK, whose director is attempting to rework the West's narrative in Myanmar to protect their long-groomed proxy Suu Kyi, while disavowing the violence carried out by a movement they themselves have propped up, funded, and directed for many years.

It would be bad enough if US "democracy promotion" had only caused such bloodshed and perpetual injustice in Myanmar alone, propelling the absolute worst elements of society into prominence, but unfortunately similar movements of violent, US-backed criminals have attempted to seize power in neighbouring Thailand, led by billionaire mass murderer Thaksin Shinawatra, and around the world including in Libya, Syria, and most recently in Ukraine.

If Aung San Suu Kyi, patron saint of US "democracy promotion," can be exposed and prevented from seizing power in Myanmar, Washington's other schemes around the world can also be overturned. And even with the monumental illusions constructed around Suu Kyi, both domestically and abroad, the veneer has begun to peel. Hiding her "Saffron" enforcers will become increasingly difficult, and with a fully mobilized alternative media, when the final push begins, the public will already be one step ahead of the professional liars who have already long-allowed this injustice to fester for decades.

Tony Cartalucci, Bangkok-based geopolitical researcher and writer.

Borderlands

India's Great Wall

This is an abridged essay. An earlier version of this essay was published in French in the magazine GEO.

All national borders are imaginary. But some are more imaginary than others. And perhaps some nations are more imaginative too. Somewhere in the labyrinths of the New Delhi bureaucracy, tucked within the recesses of the Ministry of Home Affairs, is a bureau called the Department of Border Management. The DBM, sometimes with just the flourish of an ink pen, conjures the sinuous, unsteady line that separates the triangle of the subcontinent from the mass of Asia. India's shortest border, according to the department, is its ninety-nine mile border with Afghanistan. This one is especially imaginary, since it's been in Pakistani hands for the past seventy years. India's longest border is the 2,545 mile line that encircles Bangladesh. This one is being drawn right now, with steel and electric light.

Travel along the border districts of the east and you will see it unfurling slowly through the simmering green farmlands of Bengal, turning the territory into a map at last. It is an improbable structure: a double fence, eight feet high, consisting of two parallel rows of black columns made of sturdy angle iron and topped with overhanging beams. The two rows of columns are draped in a tapestry of barbed wire, with spools of concertina wire sandwiched between them.

This imposing national installation is still a work in progress. It has been under construction since 1989; 1700 miles have now been erected, at a cost of approximately \$600 million. There have been many delays and cost overruns, but when it is complete it will render precisely 2042 miles of the invisible border an impenetrable barrier, a gigantic machine for processing bodies—designed, in the words of the DBM, to prevent “illegal immigration and other anti-national activities from across the border.”

Whatever its inadequacies, it is already the world's longest border fence by any measure.

Whether this is an appropriate or proportionate response to India's perceived problem with its smaller neighbour is less certain. The issue of Bangladeshi migration into India has become part of the background chatter of Indian political discourse in the quarter century since work began on the fence, though in times of political turmoil it has been amplified into obtrusive static. Both the partition of India in 1947 and the 1971 war that led to Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan occasioned a massive influx of refugees into India. But migrants of these generations are now generally accepted as naturalized Indians. While the number of subsequent migrants is presumed to be significant, the figures most commonly cited are wildly divergent and unverifiable. In 2000 the Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina famously asserted there were no illegal Bangladeshi migrants in India at all, while three years later India's Intelligence Bureau pegged the figure at 16 million. The Indian press routinely cites more sensational figures, which expand impressively each year. The unlikely sum of 60 million was a popular estimate a couple of years ago.

Just last year, during his election campaign tour of Bengal, Narendra Modi promised to send all illegal migrants "back to Bangladesh"—although, he reassured his audience, those who worshipped the Hindu goddess Durga would be "welcomed as sons of Mother India." Nobody knows, of course, what proportion of the unknown number of Bangladeshi migrants are Hindu. Like all the other numbers, it is likely to be impressive. But it seems doubtful that the extravagant net that India is casting around Bangladesh will be up to the task of sieving Muslims from Hindus.

Whatever its inadequacies, it is already the world's longest border fence by any measure. The infamous West Bank Barrier in Israel, for example, will stretch for 454 miles when complete. The USA-Mexico Wall covers an estimated 578 miles so far. Even the murderous *Zonengrenze*, which once divided Germany from the Baltic Sea to Czechoslovakia, spanned a mere 866 miles. The German wall is said to have claimed a thousand lives in its forty-year career. But according to a report by Human Rights Watch, the same numbers of people were killed by the Indian Border Security Force on the India-Bangladesh border in just one decade, between 2000 and 2010. The Bengal-based human rights organization MASUM, which contributed to that report, has documented hundreds of instances of the shooting, beating to death, and torture of Indian citizens by the country's own armed forces along this border. Its website

features a grisly gallery of photographs and even videos of victims, both Bangladeshis and Indians. Comparisons may be odious, but, inevitably, India's long fence has acquired an ambiguous sobriquet, sometimes invoked with pride, more frequently with sarcasm: "the Great Wall of India."

Journey along this border and you will occasionally see the proud steel fence falter. Sometimes it yields to a mighty shape-shifting river, sometimes to a sluggish creek. Or a stubborn hamlet of farmers and fishermen in mud huts who just don't want to move from its path. Often it's reduced to a ramshackle fence of bamboo or chicken wire. In the north it surrenders to an archipelago of land-locked political "islands," an impossible territory, too complex to demarcate. And then it returns, all sturdy posts and glinting wire and blazing floodlights. But by then it seems less convincing. And in its place you begin to pick up threads of a more credible narrative.

You will meet activists who complain about the border guards' brutality and farmers who complain that the guards don't shoot at infiltrators anymore. Soldiers with bandaged eyes who complain that the villagers are hand in glove with criminals and villagers who tell you that the soldiers are in cahoots with smugglers. Small-town politicians will complain that the border floodlights are keeping the crops awake at night.

And you will realize, sooner or later, that they were all right. Theirs are all true stories, inscribed on a fiction, the one that no nation-state can live without: here is the border, a long line without width. That is Bangladesh. This is India.

Sixty miles northeast of Kolkata, the Petrapole (India)–Benapole (Bangladesh) border is officially designated a "Land Port," less an oxymoron than an irony given the surrounding landscape, a delta full of tidal rivers. No ships dock here, but it is the most significant point of contact between the two countries. So they do their best. There is a ceremonial plaza linking the two nations. India's contribution is an oversized sculptural rendition of its fence posts, in granite. Bangladesh has huge a mural depicting its founding father, Mujibur Rahman, who was assassinated in a military coup in 1975. In the courtyard between, porters dressed in national livery—red jackets for India, green for Bangladesh—exchange loads, passing them mostly from Indian backs

to Bangladeshi backs. Overseeing them are platoons of soldiers from the Indian BSF (Border Security Force) and the Bangladeshi BGB (Border Guard Bangladesh) armed with automatic weapons. Every evening the BSF and the BGB stage a public show of martial prowess with synchronized goose-stepping marches before their flags are lowered and folded for the night. It's modelled on the wildly popular "retreat ceremony" held at Wagah on India's Western border with Pakistan—an elaborately choreographed pas de deux of martial pomp staged by the BSF and their counterparts the Pakistan Rangers at a border post between Amritsar and Lahore. But while the Wagah show is charged with aggression and the passionate and sentimental rivalry of two nations separated at birth, the Petrapole affair is an insipid dance. It reaches a low point when the national anthems are played over the loudspeakers, since *Amar Sonar Bangla* and *Jana Gana Mana* were both written by the same "national poet," Rabindranath Tagore.

Petrapole is a strange town consisting mostly of an incongruously wide divided highway lined with monumental rain trees. But its true renown comes from its reputation as "Asia's largest customs station." And this achievement is manifest in the endless jam of trucks being slowly processed by the Customs and Excise Department. Here "Clearing and Forwarding Agents," as they are called, make a good living, supervising the safe passage of Indian steel billets and machine parts to Bangladesh through thickets of bureaucracy. Their business has recently been streamlined, the paperwork eliminated by online processing, and shipments are cleared in seven days. But the clearing agents must still make the rounds to customs officials and border guards to lubricate their transactions. "It was actually faster without computers," one of them tells me.

Outside the customs station a small convoy of Indian-made vehicles waits to be processed: three of the most patient ambulances in the world and a funeral hearse with a glass coffin in the back. What Bangladesh sells to India is much more modest, these days: some jute from the mills; hilsa fish used to be a big thing, but now it's been banned; one perennial exports human hair for the wig industry in India—itsself a net exporter in hair—where Bengali hair is particularly prized for its quality.

According to a World Bank report, *Bangladesh imports around \$1.7 billion worth of goods from India each year. Its exports are a fraction of this, around*

\$78 million. But the same report also acknowledges that “illegal trade between the two countries amounts to 3/4ths of regular trade.” In other words, \$1.3 billion worth of goods are smuggled through that \$600 million fence each year.

Sudip Haldaris a fisherman Sudip is just one of thousands employed in the biggest industry on the border. It is estimated that up to 10 million Indian cattle are smuggled into Bangladesh each year. The trade is said to be worth at least \$500 million annually, and like all trade it is a matter of supply and demand. India has a surplus of cows but relatively little demand for beef. *In Bangladesh it's the other way around. The price of a cow in India can range from Rs 500-3,000. In Bangladesh: Rs 20,000-40,000.* And this astonishing price difference is preserved by the strangest of market mechanisms: the border fence and the 70,000 soldiers of the BSF who guard it. They maintain yet another national fiction: that the cow is sacred to Hindus and its export for slaughter is prohibited.

“It’s like football every night,” says Ajay Kumar, a young BSF sentry back on the shore in Jhaudanga. He smiles wryly as he displays his sporting injuries, livid cicatrices on his arms. “This is what we do; catch cows all night, every night. Ask your friend Sudip, he know all about it.” And Sudip smiles with mild embarrassment. “But what can these people do?” the young soldier continues. “They have to make a living, just like me. And what can I do? There’s so much unemployment back home in Uttar Pradesh, this is better than nothing. But I have to stand around in the sun half the day and then run around like an idiot all night.” Doesn’t he ever use that gun? “Well, we beat up the Bangladeshis when we catch them, of course—why should they make all the money? But we can’t shoot. After all, Bangladesh is a *mitr desh*, a friendly nation,” he says with a sly smile. “But now Modi has been elected . . . so who knows what the hell will happen?”

At a local BSF outpost an older officer simmers with a mixture of caution and resentment when asked about the cow problem. Wouldn’t it be more sensible to legalize the cattle trade? “It would make our lives a lot easier,” he concedes. “But it’s never going to happen; the politicians can’t handle it. At the end of the day, this is a Hindu country.” But it’s not his problem anymore he says: he’s

just completed a gruelling course to join the National Security Guard or NSG, an elite unit popularly known as the “Black Cat Commandos” who are deployed primarily as bodyguards for senior national politicians in the capital. “The selection course was hell, but it’s better than being stuck here,” he says. “Now all I have to do is sit tight for the next two weeks. If I break a leg or even a finger, I’ll lose my place in the NSG. So no smugglers for me. I’ve done my tour. They can have their cows.”

550 yards further inland, the black fence has reached Jhaudanga. Across the road from it lives a very angry farmer called Hori Pada Biswas. “The cow smugglers are ruining my crops. They barge through the fields every night with herds of thirty or forty cattle, and there’s nothing we can do about it.” And the fence just doesn’t help, he rages; the smugglers cut through it in minutes. “In any case, my fields are on the other side of the damn fence!” Equally useless is the BSF: “The smugglers often beat up the BSF sentries, but mostly they just outsmart them.” The old farmer begins literally to shake with fury as he curses the Indian government. “Two years ago things were much more peaceful. The BSF used to kill people. *Then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited Bangladesh and promised to stop the firing. But we want them to shoot! That’s why I voted for Narendra Modi.*”

The climb-down

Asif Ezdi

Seven months after India abruptly called off foreign secretary-level talks with Pakistan in a huff over a meeting of the Pakistan high commissioner in Delhi with leaders of the Kashmir freedom movement, the two officials met in Islamabad last Tuesday.

The Indian side portrayed the meeting as part of the new Indian Foreign Secretary Jaishankar's trip to SAARC countries to talk about SAARC business, during which bilateral issues also came under discussion. The truth is the other way round: the trip was designed primarily to provide a guise for bilateral talks with Pakistan, and SAARC was only used as a fig leaf to conceal the fact that the Modi government has climbed down from the lofty position it took when it cancelled the bilateral meeting last August.

Most of the discussions during Jaishankar's visit to Pakistan were on bilateral matters, though SAARC was also touched upon in passing. There was no joint statement or joint press availability after their talks, but in separate remarks to the media, the foreign secretaries signalled that the two sides would continue their contacts. As Sartaj said, there was no "breakthrough", but then none had been expected. Nevertheless, an important first step has been taken to finding a common basis for the resumption of a regular bilateral dialogue, though India publicly remains coy about the prospect.

While Pakistani Foreign Secretary Aizaz stressed the "importance of maintaining dialogue" in his press statement, Jaishankar pointedly avoided the issue in his brief prepared statement released to the media. In the statement, he "reiterated [India's] known concerns on cross-border terrorism, including on the Mumbai case" but progress in the ongoing trial of the Mumbai accused was not made a precondition for a regular dialogue.

There was also no suggestion by the Indian foreign secretary that the resumption of dialogue was in any way linked with Pakistan forswearing talks with leaders of the freedom movement in Kashmir. This is a far cry from the Indian demand last August that Pakistan had to choose between talks with India

and talks with the Kashmiri ‘separatists’, or the Indian statement that these contacts amounted to unacceptable interference in India’s internal affairs.

Besides calling off talks with Pakistan, India also tried to exert military pressure by resorting to massive and sustained firing across the Line of Control and the Working Boundary. Jaitley, then India’s defence minister, also in effect threatened to escalate cross-border firing further when he publicly ‘reminded’ Pakistan of India’s conventional superiority and its ability to inflict “pain” that would be “unaffordable” for Pakistan.

Lately, Indian firing across the LoC and WB has waned. Modi has also sought to strike a somewhat conciliatory tone to Pakistan’s government – by making two telephone calls to the Pakistani prime minister and by sending a minister of state to attend a ministerial meeting in Islamabad last month of countries participating in the Tapi gas pipeline project.

The Modi government’s strategic goals towards Pakistan and on Kashmir have not changed but it seems prepared to be somewhat flexible on the tactics. This is reflected in signs of a rethinking on talks with Kashmiri ‘separatists’. In the ‘common minimum programme’ of the PDP-BJP coalition which assumed office in occupied Kashmir earlier this month, the BJP has now signalled a willingness to engage in a dialogue with the Hurriyat leadership.

The joint programme notes in this connection that the earlier NDA government led by Vajpayee had initiated a dialogue process with all political groups, including the Hurriyat Conference, in the spirit of ‘insaaniyat, Kashmiriyat and jamhooriyat’ and promises to follow the same principles to “initiate a sustained and meaningful dialogue with all internal stakeholders ... to build a broad-based consensus on resolution of all outstanding issues of J&K”.

Vajpayee of course did not let these vaunted principles come in the way of the use of brute force to suppress the Kashmiri people’s struggle for self-determination, but they served a useful purpose in attracting the moderate faction of the APHC to a dialogue. Modi no doubt also hopes in due course to engage that faction in a similar dialogue, but has no intention of making any concessions that will meet the aspirations of the Kashmiri people for self-determination.

The change in the Modi government's stance is due to a realisation that it overplayed its hand when it broke off talks with Pakistan over the issue of the high commissioner's meeting with the Hurriyat. In their collective fury at the Pakistani diplomat's meeting with "those who want to break India" (Jaitley's words), Indian policymakers evidently failed to make a correct assessment of the ground realities.

A contributory factor in the Indian miscalculation was that on his trip to India to attend Modi's inauguration, Nawaz did not meet Kashmiri leaders, breaking a long-established tradition. Instead, in a clear sign of his personal priorities, he spent time closeted with Indian business magnates and Bollywood stars. Earlier, in his public statements on Kashmir Solidarity Day in 2014, Nawaz had scrupulously refrained from mentioning the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination and the Security Council resolutions on the disputed territory. *The Indians can therefore be forgiven for thinking that Nawaz was so keen to curry favour with Modi that they could even dictate to him if and when Pakistani leaders and officials should meet Kashmiri leaders.*

Left to himself, our prime minister would probably have ditched the Kashmiris in response to the Indian demand that Pakistan choose between talks with India and the 'separatists'. But Nawaz's hand was forced by the public outrage in Pakistan at the sheer impertinence of that demand. Much to the chagrin of the Indians, his remarks in the UN General Assembly last September on India's denial of the right of self-determination to the Kashmiris and of human rights abuses by Indian occupation authorities were therefore among the most direct delivered by a Pakistani leader in the world body for many years.

The Modi government no doubt realises that to start and sustain even a sham dialogue with the Hurriyat, Delhi needs also to enter into talks with Pakistan on an agenda that includes Kashmir. It is therefore only a question of time – and of Delhi finding an appropriate face-saving formula to step back from the position it took last August – before Pakistan-India bilateral talks on Kashmir resume.

If and when the time comes for talks with India on Kashmir, the government must be careful not to repeat the blunders and follies committed by Musharraf. The then military dictator's four-point proposal would have amounted to recognising India's illegal occupation of the state, signing away the right of

self-determination of the Kashmiris, and trashing the UN Security Council resolutions, all with little tangible gains for Pakistan and the Kashmiris. Not only that, Musharraf did not even wait for negotiations to commence before declaring that he was “laying aside” the Security Council resolutions. During the years when the back channel dialogue was going on, Musharraf also stopped raising Kashmir in the UN General Assembly.

The PDP-BJP joint programme for Occupied Kashmir, which has been prepared with the blessing of the Modi government, makes it clear that the projected talks with Pakistan on Kashmir will be limited, as far as India is concerned, to so-called ‘confidence-building measures’ (CBMs), such as increased people-to-people contacts and civil society exchanges, expanded travel and trade, opening of new routes and enhanced connectivity.

Pakistan also has an interest in pursuing talks on ‘CBMs’ but must always keep the issues of self-determination and human rights abuses at the front, top and centre of the Kashmir dispute. Since India is not prepared to discuss these issues bilaterally, Pakistan must raise them forcefully in all appropriate international forums such as the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council. Doing so is essential not only to remind the international community of its commitments and responsibilities towards the Kashmiris and of the legitimacy of the Kashmiri people’s struggle, but also as a message of encouragement and hope to the freedom movement in occupied Kashmir, which is even more important.

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