

LISA JOURNAL

Issue No 46

Editor: Saeed Ismat

April 2018

CONTENTS

Editorial	3
Man's inhumanity to Man: Israel and Kashmir	
<i>Dr Arshad M Khan</i>	8
India through the glass darkly	
<i>Latha Jishnu</i>	10
Malala: Why so many in Pakistan hate what she symbolizes?	
<i>Saeed Afridi</i>	13
Whispers of an Unwinnable War with Pakistan Are Only Growing Louder	
<i>Harish Khare</i>	19
Is it the end of India's special relationship with Nepal?	
<i>Prashant Jha</i>	23
India's Problems: Between Culture and Capitalism	
<i>Adnan Aboobacker</i>	27
Countering the Asia-Pacific Quad Military Alliance: China-Pakistan Relations	
<i>Ulson Gunnar</i>	30
Modi, a staunch enemy of Pakistan	
<i>Malik Muhammad Ashraf</i>	34
Washington Prepares New Escalation as Afghanistan Unravels	
<i>Bill Van Auken</i>	37
India's Hydrological War	
<i>Abid Latif Sindhu</i>	41
The US is Executing a Global War Plan	
<i>Finian Cunningham</i>	45
Miseries of Dalits and Minorities in India	
<i>Sabena Siddiqi</i>	49
The Absurdity of the New 'Great Game' in Central Asia	
<i>Lyle J. Goldstein</i>	52
Russia, Pakistan Edge Closer in New Cold War Conditions	
<i>M. K. Bhadrakumar</i>	56
China Can Help Accelerate Stalled Iran-Pakistan Pipeline	
<i>Adam Garrie</i>	59

CONTENTS (Continued)

Shifting Geopolitical Realities in Afghanistan. Threat to US Hegemony? <i>Fraidoon Amel</i>	61
Now India Is At War With Itself <i>Nayantara Sahgal</i>	66
Hadiya's Love Jihad v/s Propaganda of Love Jihad <i>Arif Khan</i>	70
Rewriting Indian history in the Image of Hindu Chauvinists <i>Abdus Sattar Ghazali</i>	75

LISA

London Institute of South Asia (LISA) is a not for profit, independent organization committed to promoting education, human rights and peace. LISA publications including LISA Journal (Quarterly) are not for sale.

DISCLAIMER

The Journal is not for sale. It may be using some copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available in our efforts to advance understanding of environmental, political, human rights, economic, democracy, scientific, and social justice issues, etc. We believe this constitutes a 'fair use' of any such copyrighted material as provided for in Copyright Laws.

The views expressed in LISA Journal are the sole responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of London Institute of South Asia. The London Institute of South Asia will not be held responsible or liable for any inaccurate or incorrect statements contained in the LISA Journal.

LISA is a Registered Charity in the United Kingdom. NO:1168632

EDITORIAL

Kashmir burns and the world conscience sleeps

Kashmir has been turned into a graveyard by Indian state and the narratives by chauvinistic Indian media are blatantly generating more hatred against Kashmir and Kashmiris.

Another year started with gruesome scenes when Kashmir is engulfed with deadly silence, with tangled concertina wires blocking maximum towns of South Kashmir and parts of Srinagar city. Nerve Indian troops occupying lanes and bi-lanes. The only voices you can hear are from police gypsies, armoured vehicles and the sirens of ambulances. Rayees Rasool a socio-political writer and activist reminds us that in 2016 uprising people through-out the world in general and many among the Indian political class in particular started expressing outrage at the killings of unarmed Kashmiris. But within the minds of people in Kashmir who fight the Indian forces in Kashmir on day in and day basis think their future is incompatible with India. In a small population of 13 million approx ruled by 700,000 Indian Forces, who have killed tens of thousands of civilians in a span of 3 decades, stories of torture, rape and murder are common and the Indian Soldiers are protected by impunity laws like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. The law encourages soldiers to kill any person “suspected” of a committing an offense, to search homes without a warrant and to destroy buildings suspected of harbouring militants. Soldiers accused of human rights violations such as extrajudicial killings and rape cannot be prosecuted unless the federal government grants permission, of which not a single instance exists despite hundreds of petitions.

Three decades of military occupation and crackdown have changed Kashmir into a valley of horror full of scary memories. Unceasingly the whole population is being subjected to collective punishment whenever they rise in a dissent and protest.

‘The Kashmiriyat’ a local Kashmiri news organisation has reported that 58 armed rebels and 20 civilians killed so far this year by Indian forces in anti-militancy operations launched by them. These stats again raise the same question. If this is the way to deal with Kashmiri population then the issue of Kashmir will never settle down. Kashmir will keep burning. No matter how

many interlocutors you recruit, no matter how many back channel dialogues you start.

There is no doubt in that armed rebels by the freedom fighters have huge support in Kashmir, anyone who fights with Indian forces share a huge sympathy among the population. Every time incidents of killings happen we witness how the population sides with armed rebels and not the Indian forces.

What is utterly diabolical is that the killings in Kashmir are being celebrated in India. The narrative being set by few Indian national news channels against Kashmiris is dangerous. If this remained unrestrained and unaddressed it could well lead into a fully fledged a civil war. Indian State and intelligentsia should stop preaching the narrative of Kashmir issue being a mere law and order problem. They should rise above their personal political ambitions to solve this long pending political issue of Jammu and Kashmir.

Gross human rights violations in the Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) is a challenge to the world conscience after all the blood of the Kashmiris is as red as ours.

Suzy Kassem very aptly remarked;

“Just like freedom, Truth is not cheap. Yet both are worth more than all the gold in the world. But what is freedom, if there is no truth? And what is truth, if there is no freedom? Both are worth fighting for — because one without the other would be hell.”

Corruption in Pakistan

There is little doubt that corruption of the political elite of Pakistan knows no bounds and is degenerating into insufferable malaise. The erstwhile Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif was ousted by the Supreme Court last year on corruption charges and was declared dishonest. The Supreme Court further sent references to the National Accountability Bureau. Currently he is being tried by an accountability court and in all probability may end up in jail along with his two sons and a daughter. Tariq Ali writes, “Sharif’s party, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, is fighting back, accusing the court of a vendetta – which usually means that his billions could not buy a single judge. This is truly exceptional. Life in Pakistan has not been morally salutary for any of its citizens. *The family politics represented by the Bhutto-Zardaris and their rivals, the Sharifs, is swathed in corruption.* Each has learned from the other how best to conceal it, minimising paperwork and juggling accounts.”

International community and western nations should take measures to return all the wealth that has been laundered into many western capitals by the corrupt political leaders of developing nations, In this regard the recently passed law on money laundering in the United Kingdom is welcome with a hope that it shall be implemented in letter and spirit. If the West wants genuine democracy in the developing world it should not protect and support the corrupt rulers who have looted the wealth of their poor people and stashed it abroad

Dalit Protest Paralyse India: Five Dead

In India when a Dalit converts to another faith he or she still faces the 'unparalleled social abuse of untouchability (A.J.Toynbee)' because caste Hindus would still consider the person 'untouchable'; in reality discrimination increases when a Dalit escapes by conversion into Christianity or Islam, considered 'foreign' religions in India. The real problem for the convert remains Hinduism, not the religion she has converted to.

This month the Dalits mustered unprecedented courage to protest against the state for continuous usurpation of their basic rights as human beings but unfortunately the protests that swept north India have cost five lives today. In Madhya Pradesh, four people died during clashes and a man was killed in firing in Rajasthan's Alwar. Violence was also reported from parts of Punjab, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, and Uttar Pradesh. Punjab came to a standstill as the government put the army on stand-by and transport off the roads. Hundreds of protesters carrying sticks, baseball bats and flags forced shops to shut in Jalandhar, Amritsar and Bathinda. Traffic in and around Chandigarh was hit as protesters blocked highways and arterial roads.

The shutdown has been called by Dalit groups against a Supreme Court order of March 20. Union government highlighted the high rate of atrocities on the community and the abysmally low rate of conviction. Most opposition parties, including the Congress, have sided with the Dalits.

Appeal

London Institute of South Asia, Indian film makers, artists, students, academics and social movements express profound concern over the unrelenting, unfair and unprovoked detention of Dalit activist and Bhim Army leader Chandrashekhar Azad 'Ravan' by the Uttar Pradesh government.

Azad has been in prison since June 2017, on the charges of being a threat to ‘national security’ for championing the cause of India’s Dalits – a community repeatedly subjected to racist violence, rape, inhumane untouchability practices, social, cultural and political discrimination. Due to the high level of impunity in cases involving Dalit victims, they have no way of asserting their rights through the judicial system.

We believe the only reason why Azad and his associates have been targeted for imprisonment is the fact they refuse to be intimidated by the threats of both private armies of the upper-caste Hindus as duly abetted by strong-arm tactics of the state machinery. Like Malcolm X, the visionary leader of the black community in the United States, Azad is struggling to protect Dalit rights courageously in a way that is practical, constructive and effective.

Chandrashekhar Azad Raavan has now launched an indefinite hunger strike from Saharanpur district jail, where he is currently lodged. He launched his hunger strike in the aftermath of the nation-wide protests by Dalits on April 2nd against the dilution of the SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) ACT “The Dalit community came out onto the streets to fight for their rights. The Constitution, which was framed by Baba Saheb Ambedkar, gives us that right. Yes, it is true that there was violence in some parts during the protests, but Dalits were the worst victims of it. Most people who died in these protests were Dalits. Since then, the police in UP and Uttarakhand have intensified their campaign against Dalits and Bhim Army activists”

Shifting Alliances and Emerging Coalitions

Shifting alliances and the structure of military coalitions are crucial in understanding the world today. The existing developments point to a huge shift in the structure of strategic alliances which indicate weakening of US hegemony in South Asia and in the Middle East. Signs are appearing that indicate a possibility that could lead to the beginning of a breakup of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Apparently a NATO Exit movement is underway. Take the example of Turkey that is rapidly building relations with Russia, Iran and China. It is fast drifting away from the US in pursuit of its national interest and it may well be considering opting out of NATO. Turkey in Northern Syria is fighting against America’s proxy Kurdish forces, that is to say one NATO member state is fighting another NATO member state.

Pakistan a non NATO strategic partner of the USA is also reviewing its options and is seeking **rapprochement with Russia and Iran. Pakistan is gradually slipping away from US influence and its total domination. Pakistan is fighting terrorism on its territory that allegedly emanate from Afghanistan. In the perception of Pakistan these terrorist are a part of an Indian proxy war that is using Afghanistan territory as a base and this has allegedly tacit support of the US. It looks rather murky and complicated that while the Turks are fighting American proxy in Syria, Pakistan is fighting Indian Proxy on its own territory also allegedly supported by the US. Both Turkey and Pakistan are officially strategic partners of the US while Turkey is also a NATO partner**

From a broader strategic perspective standpoint, a new alliance is emerging that could in the future see Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Russia and China as a block. If these countries can develop a consensus on Afghanistan and with the rapid development of CPEC (China Pakistan Economic Corridor) this could develop into a formidable strategic and economic alliance.

Michel Chossudovsky endorses this view to some extent. He writes, “Turkey’s realignment is not limited to Russia it also includes Iran as well as Pakistan, which is in the process of severing its military ties with the US, while extending its trade and investment relations with China. Pakistan as well as India are full members of the Shanghai Cooperation Agreement (SCO).

These geopolitical shifts have served to weaken U.S. influence in the Middle East, Central Asia and South Asia.

Turkey has an alliance of convenience with Iran. And Iran in turn is now supported by a powerful China-Russia block, which includes military cooperation, strategic pipelines as well extensive trade and investment agreements. In turn, the unity of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States is now in jeopardy, with Qatar, Oman and Kuwait building an alliance with Iran (as well as Turkey), to the detriment of Saudi Arabia and the UAE.” In view of these changes the South Asian nations particularly India and Pakistan should review their options and evolve policies of cooperation and development and avoid confrontation.

Man's inhumanity to Man: Israel and Kashmir

Dr Arshad M Khan

Man's inhumanity to man reached new levels of odium. The generally trigger-happy Israeli army fired at unarmed demonstrators on the other side of the fence cordoning Gazans into a prison. That hundreds were injured and at least 18 killed evoked little sympathy from our media and certainly no one dared criticize Benjamin Netanyahu's crowing of the incident as a great victory.

The 'liberal' National Public Radio terms such incidents "violent clashes" as if there is a certain parity of arms, when a military firing at civilian demonstrators would result more appropriately in a massacre.

But Israel has new worries. For the first time, Palestinians (Christian and Muslim) now outnumber Jews within Israel and the occupied territories. A half million more now with the difference expected to widen on account of the higher Palestinian birth rate- hence it's a war of attrition.

Trigger-happy soldiers, an imprisoned Gaza with appalling living conditions, and then, of course, there is ethnic cleansing. Outright expulsion or denial of water and electricity and generally making life unbearable leads to a 'voluntary' form of departure.

The village of Umm al-Hiran thus was razed to the ground after the eviction of its residents. Ayman Odeh, a Palestinian Arab member of the Knesset, was shot in the head and back by rubber bullets as he and others protested. The area will now house Jewish settlers.

The reality of eviction, ethnic cleansing and annexation is not news, but is an undeniable new reality seeking to cordon off Palestinians in the worst areas. For some Israelis, the choice boils down to segregated Bantustans or brutal expulsion. The country itself is changing as Middle-Eastern Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews now number closer to the European Ashkenazi and are expected to exceed them eventually. A

civilized living together is excluded by religion in this Middle-Eastern enclave masquerading as a Western democracy; more like George Wallace's Alabama awaiting a Martin Luther King, Jr.

About 2500 miles east is yet another beleaguered population, the Kashmiris suffering a brutal decades-long occupation by an estimated three-quarter million force of Indian soldiers. In one tactic they use shotgun weapons loaded with small pellet shells — no riot control techniques for them. Their preferred target is not the lower body but the upper, resulting in all too numerous instances of small boys and young men being blinded for life. Major Aditya Kumar was charged with murder after one incident only to be granted relief recently by a pliant Indian Supreme Court.

Demonstrations have intensified since the killing of the popular and charismatic rebel leader, Burhan Wani, in July 2016. He was just 21. Thousands of civilians have been injured, many blinded, and many have died as a result of the brutal response by the occupation forces. The latest incident on April led to 20 deaths.

India promised a plebiscite under UN supervision about 70 years ago. It has not been held. The fact that Kashmiris are in massive civilian protest as well as open rebellion is well established by the presence of troops. It is also abundantly clear, given a choice, that Kashmiris would tell their Indian overlords to get the hell out. Whether they would want to join Pakistan or wish to remain by themselves is an open question. It hardly matters in these days of open economic communities.

But foresight or statesmanship is not to be expected in leaders pushing their antiquated and noisome upper caste Hindu supremacy, tarnishing the founder Nehru's proud boast of a secular state. Add to it a rewriting of history in which the Taj Mahal is a Hindu temple. It is not. In the new India Christians, Muslims and lower caste Hindus (Dalits) are under constant threat or attack.

So there we are ... two nuclear powers in constant confrontation without the sense to bury a colonial past and forge a new modern subcontinent. No, that would be much too sensible. Instead, religious extremism has secured a foothold and we all know how that can end unless it is quickly snuffed out.

Dr Arshad M Khan is a former Professor based in the U.S. whose comments over several decades have appeared in a wide-ranging array

of print and internet media. His work has been quoted in the U.S. Congress and published in the Congressional Record.

India through the glass darkly

Latha Jishnu

Juxtapose this with what is happening on the political front. As religious bigotry and old hatreds are stoked across the most backward stretches of northern India and fomented in opposition states, communal clashes and horrific caste violence are ripping apart the fragile social fabric of a country that is confronting a demographic nightmare

MAHATMA Gandhi, revered as the father of the nation for helping to free India from the British, has made a sudden exit from history. Millions of schoolchildren will never know what happened to Gandhi after independence since new textbooks have carefully scrubbed out any reference to his assassination by a militant Hindu who was once a member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the mother ship of Hindu nationalism.

That Gandhi fell to bullets pumped into him by a right-wing Hindu killer is being hidden from a new generation as the Hindu right turns myths and an imagined past into a new history of India tailored to meet political ends.

History has always been a contested arena in India, where the past has been interpreted through the ideological lens of the left and the rest, but never before have outright lies been peddled as facts.

Indoctrination to turn out a nationalist generation, that is, children who will believe that the past was one of unrivalled Hindu supremacy in all fields, from science to war, is in full swing in the states where the BJP, the RSS's political offspring, is in power.

And here, history is being turned completely on its head. In Rajasthan, textbooks proclaim that Mughal Emperor Akbar lost the famous Battle of Haldighatti to Rana Pratap, the ruler of Mewar, in 1576, while students in the rest of India are taught that Rana Pratap lost to the Mughal forces led by Raja Man Singh, a fellow Rajput.

In Madhya Pradesh, another BJP-ruled state, children are being taught a whopper: that India won the 1962 war against China, although we came off badly in the confrontation. But for the Hindu right wing, the resentment over the defeat continues to colour India's relations with its large neighbour.

The falsification of history, though, is not the only danger the young — and the old — is going through. The belittling of science is an even greater threat as India slips further into obscurantism under a regime that glorifies myths as evidence of scientific prowess. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's claim at the Indian Science Congress early into his tenure that the elephant-headed god Ganesha was proof that India was skilled in plastic surgery in ancient times has been roundly criticised; Indians have learned to live down that embarrassment. But his breathtaking audacity in denying climate change during a nationally televised programme for schoolchildren has left everyone dumbstruck and provided little solace that the country can deal with one of the gravest challenges confronting it.

When a schoolgirl asked how India could protect the environment, the prime minister was dismissive. Climate has not changed but people have changed and destroyed the environment. For good measure he added that the elders often complain that it is colder only because their tolerance level has dipped and not because of climate change.

India has come a very long way from Nehru's ideal of building a rational society by fostering the scientific temper in the people. The BJP loses no opportunity to belittle and abuse its first prime minister and the new textbooks have practically erased Nehru even though the foundation for the country's modern secular state and its scientific prowess in everything from space technology to software was laid during his time.

What the BJP provides is never-ending embarrassment that makes India look ridiculous. Most recently there was more humiliation as the country's education minister claimed that Darwin's theory of evolution is "scientifically wrong" since no one has seen "an ape turning into a man".

And soon after Stephen Hawking's death, the science and technology minister Harsh Vardhan claimed that the renowned physicist and cosmologist had said that the Vedas have a theory that is superior to Albert Einstein's $e=mc^2$ theory of relativity.

The contempt for proven scientific knowledge, coupled with the saffron brigade's campaign to promote a dubious "swadeshi science" that aims to combine "Bharatiya heritage with a harmonious synthesis of physical and spiritual sciences", augurs ill for the country. So the ministerial prescription for agricultural distress is yogic farming (yoga by farmers for "vibrations of peace, love and divinity to seeds and land") or havans, the ritual burning of ghee and firewood to bring rains!

Juxtapose this with what is happening on the political front. As religious bigotry and old hatreds are stoked across the most backward stretches of northern India and fomented in opposition states, communal clashes and horrific caste violence are ripping apart the fragile social fabric of a country that is confronting a demographic nightmare.

India is an extraordinarily young country. Half of its population of 13 billion is under the age of 25, and two-thirds are less than 35. By 2027, all of this will add up to a staggering workforce of a billion people, the largest in the world.

How is India going to cope with such a vast sea of humanity looking for jobs, the legion which has neither the education nor the skills to be productive workers? Steeped in the medievalism of the times and with nothing going for them, how will this generation transform India into a superpower that its rulers claim it will soon be?

Caught up in its agenda of creating a Hindu nation and faulty economic policies, the government has quietly jettisoned its plans to provide skills to 500 million young people by 2022, having trained less than a fraction so far. The BJP, it appears, has more important tasks at hand.

The biggest chunk of the young are in the badlands of Uttar Pradesh where a priest runs the state and is hell-bent on creating communal tensions. He does not even pretend to have a development agenda and is used by the ruling party to drum up support for Hindutva across India. The other sizable mass is in Bihar which is now notorious for frequent communal flare-ups and not much else.

What India needs is the miracle of quality education, specialised skills and a host of openings in factories and offices for millions. Will havans and deep breathing do the trick?

The writer is a journalist based in New Delhi.

Malala: Why so many in Pakistan hate what she symbolizes?

Saeed Afridi

Abir Fatima wrote: *Come Malala, stay with us in Khyber Pakhtoon Khwa province of Pakistan and complete your qualification under the fear of terrorism, sectarianism and sexual harassment. We are also studying here where there is no security but we have more passion than you. Please do not run from your roots. Do not fear. Let us know you really deserve the noble prize. If you are truly worthy of it, come join us in the real cause, don't fake things out there.*

Malala, the name has become a symbol of so much more than just a little girl. Malala also has become a one-word trigger in Pakistan for vitriolic anger and malicious suspicion. There is a tendency among her promoters, supporters and blind cultists to dismiss this reaction as part of the cultural backwardness, patriarchal misogyny, religious imbecility and tribal barbarism prevalent in the North West of Pakistan. They think it is a product of some vile cerebral disease which is beyond empathy and pity. Further, they consider that any criticism of Malala or what Malala symbolizes can only come from a pervasive and deeply diseased mindset that belongs to the darker ages of human development. To these people, the very idea that anyone, not a terrorist or terrorist sympathizer could find a critical word to say about Malala is simply inconceivable.

Yet, there are many, especially in her own hometown and the region around it, who come across as some of the most vocal critics of Malala, and also, it must be said, some of the most vicious.

After you spend some time speaking to those who criticise Malala you get a sense that their criticism may be directed at her but is seldom about her.

Malala to those people is not only a little girl but also an unfortunate and naïve pawn in something much more elaborate and sinister.

Take a moment, let this sink in, and contemplate how this could be possible. These are the very people who Malala championed. The fathers who bore the wrath of the Taliban by allowing their daughters to attend schools alongside Malala, the mothers who nursed injured girls beaten by the Taliban and grandparents who buried granddaughters blown apart on their way to school. Among this group are loved ones who saw their daughters shot alongside Malala in the very incident that propelled her to worldwide recognition. These are the people who lived through the very worst of Swat Valley's Talibanisation and yet, in that very valley, these victims of Taliban-rule are some of the most vociferous critics of Malala. Why?

After you spend some time speaking to those who criticise Malala you get a sense that their criticism may be directed at her but is seldom about her. Malala to those people is not only a little girl but also an unfortunate and naïve pawn in something much more elaborate and sinister. You get the sense that to those criticising Malala she is not a single entity. With a little patience and some much-needed perseverance you begin to understand that to them, Malala is, if not multiple then at least, two distinct entities. The first is the little girl who reminds them of their own little girls. Savagely attacked, endured physical pain lived with the psychological scars and overwhelmed by the outpouring of prayers and human emotion for her well-being. That little girl, that Malala, is for them a symbol of what their daughters can be, and in many cases, they already are. No little girl should have to live through this.

The second entity they see, in the words of one local father, is 'Brand-Malala'. Some of the mildest criticisms of Brand-Malala in her homeland are about the insensitive and apathetic manipulation of a little girl's suffering to achieve political goals. More emphatic critics see it as the vile prostitution of a child's suffering to serve political and ideological aims; one person called it 'sympathy porn'. That reference wasn't made by a cave-dwelling Neanderthal but by someone from Swat who went on to have an Ivy League education, spent years working in Washington and later at the UN, including the aftermath of both Bosnia and Rwanda. 'She' is not a Neanderthal. It's important to understand what lies behind the criticism of Brand-Malala as it seems much more than mere cerebral barbarism.

Why so much hate?

Frank discussions with those disparaging Brand-Malala quickly leads one to suspect that despite the diversity of the criticism, there the semblance of a common thread running through overwhelming number of them subscribe to a varying degree of acceptance, if not belief, in the existence of a conspiracy behind Brand-Malala and they are able to present, quite articulately, a considerable amount of circumstantial evidence to support their suspicion. Almost all praise Malala's bravery and empathize with her suffering. Only an exceptional fringe subscribes to her ordeal being staged and those people are best left to their fantasies. *A majority of the rest, who lived through the Taliban's reign of atrocities in Swat, point to the manner in which her story was pounced upon, propagated and made into a worldwide symbol by way of a narrative embellished beyond recognition.* There is a considerable amount of suspicion about the motives of her father who, quite naturally, had become the focal point for much of the media while his daughter fought for her life. It does not help that he was known in his locality, even before the incident, as a 'political animal' associated with a political party that promotes secularism, historically inspired by Soviet Socialism but now with no option but to advocate westernization, in a deeply religious environment. Locals view her father as a person who courted recognition and self-promotion by blaming all Swats' ills, including the Taliban, on the military.

This meets with considerable suspicion locally as it was the military's concerted, but selective, the campaign against the Taliban that freed Swat from the shackles of Talibanisation. Her father's anti-military views in the aftermath of that campaign garnered much local suspicion but made him popular with Pakistan's largely well to do and westernized elite within whom that's a prerequisite for support. In Pakistan, the military's persistent penchant for meddling in politics has made being anti-military a badge of honour for most people who subscribe to western democratic or liberal values. Most locals hold the opinion that Malala's father courted publicity, was morally flexible in his search of recognition and was quite adept at playing the anti-military card, including using his daughter to meet these ends. For these reasons locals, rightly or wrongly, did not take long to equate the media coverage of his injured daughter's plight as a furthering of his personal ambitions. Perhaps the most detrimental aspect of Malala's story was how it was told and more importantly, by whom. Despite gaining some meaningful national recognition before her attack, it was the post-attack publicity that shaped her future and also cemented the attitude of the locals.

Even before Malala was shot, she was a known activist. She had gained recognition locally as well as nationally for being among those who, despite

overwhelming odds, did whatever limited they could to stand up to the Taliban. The debate had already begun and it was winning hearts and encouraging many minds to think. This all stopped once the post-attack publicity came into gear. From the journey between the pain and suffering of the girl Malala to the high profile and grandiose marketing of the Brand-Malala, many Pakistanis, and especially those from Swat, became polarised. In a society, still reeling from the inadequate definition and execution of the War on Terror (WoT), Malala's plight fitted well with the narrative promoted by the United States and its ideological allies within Pakistan. Those opposed to the US's WoT narrative, drone assassinations and promotion of liberal values saw Brand-Malala as yet another peg in the US conspiracy to Westernise, rather than modernize, Pakistan's society. They cherry picked the names of Brand-Malala's advocates to highlight those with anti-Pakistan, anti-Muslim and xenophobic histories to demonstrate the validity of their suspicions. For some of these people, Malala was a little girl used by her father, attacked by the Taliban and then perverted by the West; an innocent victim abused in one way or the other by everyone around her. The reality is more complex, but in Pakistan, narratives are usually sold in binaries and the gaps are filled with conspiracies.

In the absence of honest discourse, conspiracies become currency and the most often quoted bogeyman, sometimes justified, and is 'The West'.

Why are so many Pakistanis willing to accept an elaborate Western conspiracy rather than the very likely truth that the West and its largely well-to-do politically liberal Pakistani allies simply pounced on an unfortunate incident to meet their goals? Why must there be a conspiracy?

Pakistanis are brought up in a version of history which is at best fanciful and at worst fantasy. Pakistan is home to a near 5000 years old history of various people, civilizations, religions, languages, and cultures yet the official history of Pakistan seems to incorporate a mere fraction of five millennia; its Islamised portions. The creation of Pakistan is not taught as a graduated process of a struggle for equal rights that evolved over time into a quest for guaranteed representation, and then a dominion safe-haven till it finally resulted in a separation with partition forced upon it. This was no simple progression but a complex one that requires honest and truthful learning. Instead, Pakistan's creation is taught as a political battle pitting the Muslim underdog against the combined might of Imperial Britain and the wily Hindus of the British Raj. Adversity and paranoia are falsely built into Pakistan's independence story and its subsequent murky and troublesome life; pockmarked by shadowy deals, immoral intrigue and foreign-assisted usurpations of power. In the absence of

truthful contemplation and honest reflection, all gaps are conveniently filled with elaborate conspiracies. Transparency is not something that comes naturally to the Pakistani state, democratic or otherwise. The entire corruption-ridden political system is infested with back-channel agreements, underhand dealings and morally questionable arrangement for seizing, holding and perpetuating power. In the absence of honest discourse, conspiracies become currency and the most often quoted bogeyman, sometimes justified, is 'The West'.

Pakistan now has entire generations brought up on conspiracy theories. Sit down among them and you hear stories that are simply surreal. In this fanciful cauldron of conspiracy ridden narratives 'Brand-Malala' had little hope of being accepted as anything but another western conspiracy despite admiration for Malala, the girl's, ordeal and subsequent efforts. It did not help that those in Pakistan who championed the cause of Brand-Malala were widely slated, many quite unjustly, as elitist minions of westernization. At the very least, generalized as mere pawns in the West's assault on hitherto ill-defined 'Muslim Values', and at worst, considered venal sell outs available to tout anything that originated in the corridors of western powers. To Brand-Malala's critics, Malala's promotion, marketing, and eventual Nobel peace prize is all a conspiracy to forward a Western-Agenda.

Anti-western conspiracy theorists in Pakistan like making comparisons, however unwarranted and irrational. In Malala's case, they justify Western-Agenda conspiracies by the comparative treatment vetted outside Pakistan to a person who stands a veritable Mt Olympus above all others claiming or attributed the humanitarian pedestal. In Pakistan, that very name, above all others, symbolizes the spirit of humanity in its most fêted form; Edhi.

If you are unfamiliar with Pakistan, you would probably have to Google the name Edhi to know who I am talking about. In his lifetime this figure, unknown to you, through his organisation, sheltered more abused women, gave a home to more orphaned children, educated more girls, assisted more disabled people, facilitated the adoption of more unwanted kids, accepted more abandoned babies, ferried more injured to hospital and shielded more children from sexual and physical abuse than any person you would be able to name. If there was a human in Pakistan who could be apotheosized on the mantle of humanity, it was Abdul Sattar Edhi.

Now, without searching the internet, tell me the names of the two girls who were shot alongside Malala. Thank you, for contemplating what that means to those whose daughters we all forgot.

This colossus of humanity lay on his deathbed while the millions touched by his many acts of kindness had tried unsuccessfully for his work to be acknowledged by the Nobel Committee, despite Malala nominating him personally. Edhi died quietly, comparatively unacknowledged by the world at large, in July 2016, almost twenty months after the world watched Malala deservedly accept her Nobel Peace Prize. For critics of Brand-Malala, the West's comparative ignorance of Edhi is the smoking gun that justifies much of their suspicions regarding her promotion. Unfortunately, in this ill-informed comparison, they are willing to ignore the bravery, optimism, and courage of the girl Malala.

How do we, the supporters of Malala, feed such irrational conspiracies? As a test, I urge you, if you are outraged by their criticisms of Malala and find yourself unable to believe anyone could be so callous, insensitive or indifferent to the plight of a girl shot by vile people simply because she wanted to go to school and get an education, then take a moment; focus. Now, without searching the internet, tell me the names of the two girls who were shot alongside Malala. Thank you, for contemplating what that means to those whose daughters we all forgot.

The writer is a former management consultant focusing on the Energy Industry and writes on Energy Security and the Politics of Energy Resources. He is conducting research related to the role of Central Asia's energy resources in China's Energy Security at the University of Westminster, UK.

Whispers of an Unwinnable War with Pakistan are only growing louder

Harish Khare

Irrespective of these political juveniles, we seem to have developed a magnificent obsession with force, violence and aggression. This is becoming a cultural norm in “New India”. We are itching to punch above our weight. We want to prove – to ourselves and to others – that in New India we have strong leaders who are not afraid of a good fight. This obsession with violence has segued into a working religion; aggression is even deemed to have curative uses.

The toxic mood has, indeed, become a trap. A clamour can already be heard: take the current conflict with Pakistan to a higher notch. Without our wanting to do so, we have unwittingly created a war-hysteria and are now bent upon closing all our escape routes.

The right-wing social media sites are brimming with talk of usefulness of a limited conflict. *Credit: Reuters*

The Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir is suddenly sizzling. Too much heavy firing, and too many *jawans* and civilians getting killed. And, then, those damn terrorists manage to sneak in and attack an army base; and, two days later a CRPF camp faces a *fidayeen* assault. More soldiers get martyred.

On Monday, the raksha mantri found herself compelled to visit Jammu after the Sunjuwan military base was attacked. She was reported to have categorically

declared: “I wouldn’t certainly state a timeline [for action against Pakistan]. But will say this, Pakistan will pay for this misadventure. I repeat, Pakistan will pay for it.”

The honourable raksha mantri’s loaded words were meant to be reassuring, in perfect sync with the uber-patriotic national mood, so assiduously being cultivated by a newly emerging religious-military-political axis. The axis is getting firmed up, silently sucking all reasonable men, women and institutions into its irrational exuberance, almost creeping on all of us.

Consider this: Lieutenant General Devraj Anbu, the general officer commanding-in-chief, Northern Command, felt obliged to join issues with a petty politician, Asaduddin Owaisi of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen. A general getting into a spitting match with a politico!

The toxic mood has, indeed, become a trap. A clamour can already be heard: take the current conflict with Pakistan to a higher notch. Without our wanting to do so, we have unwittingly created a war-hysteria and are now bent upon closing all our escape routes.

Earlier, we had manufactured for ourselves a seductive narrative: before 2014, we have had a pusillanimous political leadership, which had no guts to take on the Pakistan army; these weaklings practiced appeasement and called it diplomacy. Now, that script of feeble-mindedness was thoroughly rewritten and vigorously edited into a 56-inch-thick blue book of courageous options. We carried out daring, if not unprecedented, surgical strikes and advertised it from the housetops; even reaped rich electoral harvest in Uttar Pradesh. But these “Pakis” remain recalcitrant, unrebuked and unbent.

We are all being corralled into subscribing to a new tagline: Pakistan is in need for another round of spanking. So, now, the narrative is being ratcheted up a notch further: We should hurt Pakistan, punish it, give it a nose bloodier than we gave in those fabulous surgical strikes; why queasily rule out a tank battle in the Samba-Jammu-Akhnoor sector? (*Note: Pakistan denies any surgical strikes by India on its soil and the world opinion is that the surgical strikes were more of a propaganda to pacify Indian ego*)

There is no mystery to this new posturing. The right-wing social media sites are brimming with talk of usefulness of a limited conflict. All one has to do is to take a look at the latest issue of the influential, *Organiser*, the RSS organ. The case against Pakistan is spelled out by retired brigadiers and colonels, with all

the self-serving assurance at their command, and with complete disregard of Pakistan's strength and capabilities to return the compliment.

The new argument is stated simply and clearly: "Pakistan needs to be hit in a manner that it is hurt enough to rein in its rogue elements. There can be calibration of Indian response but at the end of it all, if the matter stops at all-out war escalating into a nuclear war, so be it. India needs to immediately start putting in place the national effort required for such an eventuality."

A conflict, even a war, would produce pain. No problem. We should not feel deterred. Another argument, made by another retired army officer, is explicit on costs and rewards: "Indian Security Forces – armed forces and CMPFs – have far greater 'punishment withstanding' capability than the Pakistan war machine. Let none of the political cadres and the peaceniks have any reservations on such a score. The current crisis situation provides an opportunity to Modi and the BJP to seize the initiative and force the momentum."

There is no secret that the RSS is the inspiration and ideal for the current government in New Delhi. That its mouthpiece is inclined to give platform to this extreme hawkishness should alert us to the possibilities of the government succumbing to such provocative goading. One can be reasonably sure that the PMO must be hearing similar advice privately from the top RSS functionaries.

The unstated assumption is that besides national glory and service, massive dividends, political and electoral, are assured. On the other hand, the Congress party had pointedly reminded the prime minister of all the tall talk about national defence and of the hard line he advocated during the 2014 Lok Sabha campaign, promising an end to irritating pinpricks from Pakistan and its non-state proxies.

As an opposition party, the Congress has no reason to let the government off the hook; in any case, concepts like "national security", "national defence" and "national interest" have already been reduced to partisan pieties by the government. The Congress party can well argue that it alone cannot be asked to carry the burden of "responsible opposition".

The Modi government now finds itself in a pincer movement: there is relentless hostility-talking, night after night, channel after channel, ensuring that the government does not even think of reconsidering its current counter-productive approach; and on the other hand, we have an opposition, remorselessly,

insistent on holding the government to account by its biases and prejudices and boasts.

Irrespective of these political juveniles, we seem to have developed a magnificent obsession with force, violence and aggression. This is becoming a cultural norm in “New India”. We are itching to punch above our weight. We want to prove – to ourselves and to others – that in New India we have strong leaders who are not afraid of a good fight. This obsession with violence has segued into a working religion; aggression is even deemed to have curative uses.

This obsession has naturally determined the choice of personnel for key national security positions – men who would be only too happy to oblige, and muster arguments, suggest tactics and sketch action plans to accommodate the leaders’ aggressive predisposition. And, then, there are the Vivekananda Warriors, always at hand to provide cleverly venomous formulations about Pakistan and China.

Yet, the national challenge remains how not to stumble into an unwanted and unnecessary war with Pakistan, especially a conflict about which there can be no strategic clarity and certainly no assurance of a desired outcome. Our polity is in thrall of divisiveness, with all the cocky arrogance of a majoritarian bloody-mindedness. It would not be easy for such a polity to produce the requisite diplomatic sophistication and strategic reasonableness to avoid getting caught in the let-us-have-another-war-with-Pakistan trap. And, it is a trap we have laid for ourselves.

Harish Khare is Editor-in-Chief of The Tribune, where this article originally appeared. It has been edited to meet style guidelines.

Is it the end of India's special relationship with Nepal?

Prashant Jha

Despite the close linguistic, marital, religious, and, cultural ties, at people to people level between Indians and Nepalese, since late 2015, political issues and border disputes have strained relations between the two countries with anti-Indian sentiment growing amongst the government and people of Nepal. Further because of border disputes between the two countries, a boundary agreement hasn't yet been ratified by either government.

As Delhi's Nepal policy swings from excessive involvement to neglect, from a desire to shape politics to tendency to stay away from it entirely, a major shift is certainly underway. India-Nepal special relationship is in its final leg.

On Monday, Nepal's newly elected Prime Minister KP Oli received his first foreign visitor -- the Pakistani Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi.

It was unusual. Nepal and Pakistan share cordial ties and are both a part of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), but Islamabad and Kathmandu don't quite share ties so intimate as to warrant Abbasi being the first visitor to greet Oli after his win.

This incident, however, symbolically marked the changing times in India's neighbourhood.

Nepal's Prime Minister usually makes his first visit to India and Oli is still expected to do so. But after winning the election on an explicitly 'ultra nationalist' platform, where he has promised to diversify Nepal's relations beyond India and deepen ties with others, particularly China, symbolically, Oli will do all he can to show his 'independent' credentials. And in Nepal's political lexicon, both 'nationalism' and 'independence' have come to be synonymous with resisting India. Having the Pakistani Prime Minister over is as good a sign of signalling independence.

This assertion of 'independence' in Nepal has left India with an almost schizophrenic policy approach.

On one hand, a strong section of the political establishment believes it can do little but to engage with the new government, 'appease' it, remain detached from the domestic politics and hope Nepal doesn't move too close to China. On the other, an influential section in Delhi believes that the aim must be to get even more invested in Nepali politics, contain Oli and tilt towards the north and prepare for a situation where an alternative coalition can be eventually constructed against him.

But this throws up a larger question. Is the Nepal-India 'special relationship' undergoing a fundamental shift? Despite deep ties, this may well be the case, where India is no longer exercising the same influence over Nepali politics and does not command the same levers to shape Nepali elite opinion and society.

The special relationship

No two countries - as leaders of both remind us - share ties as intimate as Nepal and India.

This 'special relationship' takes concrete cultural forms. Nepalis and Indians visit each other's country for religious pilgrimage - Pashupati and Janakpur are traditional centres in Nepal, as Varanasi and the four dhams are in India. The Buddhist network is interlinked -- Lumbini is in Nepal, while Kushinagar, Gaya and Sarnath are in India. The special relationship has explicit state support. Nepal and India have an open border, with free movement of people. Nepal's currency is pegged to the Indian currency.

Nepali and Indian workers can work freely in each other's countries, without visas and work permits. Nepal and India gain tremendously from remittances

from the other. Nepalis can own property in India. Generations of Nepali students have studied in India.

Nepal depends on India for third country trade. Its essentials -- from fuel to basic medical supplies - -come from India. India is Nepal's largest trade partner and there is abundant informal trade that exists across the open border.

There has also been an explicit political contour to the special relationship. India has played a key part in Nepal's democratic movements -- helping oust the Rana oligarchy in Nepal in the early 50s; indirectly supporting the restoration of democracy in 1990; engineering a peace accord between democratic parties and Maoists to oust the monarchy in 2006.

Rupture?

But there appears to be a rupture in the relationship at four levels.

The first is indeed politics and India's ability to influence Nepali politics. In September 2015, Nepal's Constituent Assembly adopted a constitution; despite India urging Kathmandu to accommodate the concerns of the people of the Tarai, Nepal's political elite did not listen. India tacitly supported Madhesi protests at the border, crippling essential supplies. This generated a backlash in Kathmandu and the hills. India developed cold feet and eventually lost out on all ends. It earned the hostility of hill communities; and it could not deliver to Madhesis and get the constitution overhauled.

Once it became clear that India's word could be defied, and defying it could well be politically attractive, KP Oli took on the mantle of an ultranationalist leader. Delhi tried to block his electoral alliance with the Maoists; it tried to block their election victory; and it tried to stop the announcement of the merger of the two communist parties. It failed on all ends.

Second, a geopolitical alignment is underway. China was getting aggressive in precisely this period. It had stepped up economic investment and trade linkages. But as Indian influence waned, it got involved in shaping politics.

Beijing backed the communist alliance and Oli's rise. KP Oli himself had made a trip to the Nepal-China border right after his win, and has said he will deepen ties with the north to increase his leverage with the south.

The third rupture is happening at the level of the Eminent Persons Group (EPG). Nepal and India set up an EPG, of four members each, to relook at the entire gamut of relations - in particular the 1950 treaty. It is now clear that the group would recommend an overhaul of the treaty. This in itself is fine.

But Nepali members have pressed hard for regulation of the border and documenting entry and exit of each person. This is bound to generate complexities for communities who live at the border, who have deep cross-border livelihood networks, and could well jeopardise the people to people ties.

And finally, Nepali society -- particularly the hill dominated Kathmandu bureaucracy, media, civil society institutions -- is becoming more autonomous of Indian influence.

The elites now go to the west for training; others have come up through the Nepali-speaking world. Their emotional investment in India is limited. Their networks here are barely present. Those who could have balanced these views in politics and society -- the people of the Tarai plains -- lie marginalised.

As Delhi's Nepal policy swings from excessive involvement to neglect, from a desire to shape politics to tendency to stay away from it entirely, a major shift is certainly underway. India-Nepal special relationship is in its final leg.

*Prashant Jha is a journalist and author. He has written *Battles of the New Republic: A Contemporary History of Nepal*, a deeply personal, reportage-based account of war and peace in his country. This article first appeared in the *Hindustan Times*. He is the Associate Editor of *Hindustan Times*, writing on Indian politics and foreign policy.*

India's Problems: Between Culture and Capitalism

Adnan Aboobacker

India has many special characteristics in her traditional culture which can accept different ideologies in a harmonious way. The vast area of the Indian subcontinent was a site of the marriage of different religions. Under the British policy of divide and conquer, however, India was partitioned as Muslim majority states were carved out in the likes of Pakistan and Bangladesh. This is the main problem which has provoked large bloodshed in all the states of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. This wound created 67 years ago has resulted in the formation of several insurgencies in these three countries. But just how powerful is India when these states are united?

Hindu rule arrived after 800 years of Muslim rule, 100 years of British rule, and then 67 years of secular and socialist rule. This major political shift began in 2014 and has continued under the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party's rule supported by billionaire economic oligarchs pushing ultra-capitalism to exploit Indian resources. Poor people with less political and social capital are marginalized under the current elites' rule and the caste system. The tribal population, non-elite Muslims, and Dalits are threatened by economic pressure. Now it appears that social activists are arising out of almost all Indian universities against economic and social injustice of the upper Brahmanical class' hegemony, communalism, and the silence of the Indian government over

the intolerant situation created by the country's ruling authorities and neo-imperial policies.

Foreign imperialists see this opportunity to cultivate their major liberal policies on Indian soil. The current government is testing different types of examinations upon the masses in planning its future agenda. The absence of a real, genuine, and strong opposition also aids the ultra-capitalist pseudo-nationalists to move forward with their plans.

Kashmir insurgent groups are strengthening inside India due to continuous military intervention against innocent civilians. In the state of Uttar Pradesh, assembly elections are approaching in which the communal card can easily be played to extinguish nationalist efforts in this state where the larger proportion of the population can influence policy formulation and gain new seats in the Rajyasabha, the upper house of parliament where the ruling party has less influence. Controlling this vast geographical area with a diverse range and nature of tribes, religions, and ethnicities is difficult for any empire.

India's economic system has gradually moved towards capitalism since 1991, and is reaching the state of ultra neo-capitalism. Partiality in the treatment of marginalized groups is increasing, thus contributing to the growth of Maoist armed groups in the North-Eastern states and central states where they control a significant area inside India. India's internal security is also being challenged by these insurgent groups in the tribal forest regions. In contrast to this stands a growing type of nationalism which supports ultra-capitalism. Although the economy is growing stronger, its yields cannot be enjoyed by marginalized people due to the social injustice so prevalent in India.

Eighty percent of India's population is under the age of 35. The effective distribution and utilization of the country's yields, however, is only possible once the country is secure from insurgencies. The relation between some states and the central government is in a poor state due to political and ideological differences. India's overall problems are aggravated and multiplied by insurgencies.

India's constitution is supposed to guarantee sufficient security and rights to all of the country's citizens. The establishment of a uniform Hindu civil code, however, is an aim of the Brahmanical super elites currently in control of India. The influences of these 5% elite are prevalent in the defence, media, judiciary, and main government sectors, etc. Thus, an effort to impose a nationalism

which destroys the country's communal harmony is a planned and joint effort as the cultural and historical factors of control are also under this right-wing.

Hindutva nationalist policies are transforming some areas of the country into entire insurgencies. While the current government has the strength to control corruption in the country, it was the previous pseudo-secular government with billions of dollars in corruption that brought this right wing party into power.

The latest surprise was revealed by new rules for investment adopted by the government. These new laws will open the agricultural and manufacturing sectors up to foreign direct investment. The monopolies of big corporations will break local markets and exploit farmers with low wages. The government-approved land acquisition bills permit companies to take land from rural areas, where the livelihood of tribal people depends on such, for infrastructural development. The coal-bearing law on excessive coal mining affects the tribal regions of central India. Overall, the laws which favour corporations and global resource eaters pose a great threat to the ecosystem and land on which tribes live. Recent protests by Dalits in Gujarat are a good symbol of real opposition to ultra-capitalism.

There were many political systems available upon India's independence thanks to the different freedom fighters, think tanks, and different ideologies involved. Sardar Vallabai Patel represents Hindu nationalism. Mahatma Gandhi's concept of Grama Swaraj proposed more authority to be delegated to the villages. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru represented the secular socialists and communists. Meanwhile, Muslim nationalists have gone to Pakistan and Bangladesh where they formed states according to their Muslim nationalism. B.R. Ambedkar, who came from among the Dalits protesting against Hindutva politics, ensured protection for minorities and tribes of the backwards castes, including the Dalits. Mahatma Gandhi's death transformed the mood in India from Hindu nationalism to secular socialism under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru. After all, Mahatma Gandhi was assassination by Hindu nationalists. The problems of secular government under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Sikh riots provoked the transition to emergency authoritarian rule. From 1984, a period of emergency rule saw a large portion of secular socialists leave and form a new socialist party which later transformed into a Hindu nationalist force, ultimately developing into the right wing.

Over 69 years, socialist secular rule could not guarantee the development of marginalized tribal people. Wide corruption of the government in education, health services, the subsidized food supply, and in tribal and border areas gave rise to insurgencies as corrupt politicians double-played the army, turning them

into trouble makers. People thus have enmity towards the government administration over its policies, and now it is insurgent groups that are working against the Indian government.

Evangelical churches funded by the Americans supply educational and health services in the insurgent North-Eastern borderlands. Non-governmental organizations with foreign funding are destabilizing the situation and arming insurgents. Policy makers and economists, as well as think tanks, are made up of neoliberal sympathizers. India is now made up of large princely states in which Muslim communities, Sikhs, tribes, Dalits, secularists, socialists, liberals, and communists are all fighting for power in the social, political, economic, and cultural fields. All the while, they do not understand the conditions of the people equally or provide them with justice and protection.

Countering the Asia-Pacific Quad Military Alliance: China-Pakistan Relations

Ulson Gunnar

The US recently included India in its shifting Asia Pacific policy, as part of its Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (often referred to as the "Quad"). The Quad also includes Australia and Japan along with the United States itself.

The nascent alliance is openly arrayed against China, with member states openly declaring their intent to contribute toward containing Beijing's activities in the region and compete against Chinese efforts to establish greater ties with its immediate neighbours. This includes Japan and Australia pledging to more aggressively patrol the South and East China Seas.

For India's part, it seeks to become a greater power within the Indian Ocean. Additionally, New Delhi has increasingly postured its military against China against the backdrop of greater tensions along the Chinese-Indian border. China appears to be pursuing its own strategy to break out of the Quad's containment policy, including measures to place India in check.

Beijing's Pakistan to Washington's India

Part of this strategy includes growing ties between Beijing and Islamabad. This includes a number of major joint infrastructure projects across Pakistan. Collectively known as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the ambitious network of projects connects Gwadar port in Pakistan's Baluchistan province on the Arabian Sea with the Pakistani-Chinese border near the western Chinese province of Xinjiang.

Railways and roads provide China with access to the Arabian Sea, eliminating the need to move certain goods past Singapore and through the Strait of Malacca.

CPEC also includes a gas pipeline from Gwadar to Nawabshah which will eventually enable gas imports from Iran.

Beyond CPEC, China is also building power plants across Pakistan, developing stronger ties between various Chinese and Pakistani industries and institutions and developing closer Chinese-Pakistani military ties.

Chinese-Pakistani military ties provide the ideal answer to Washington's intentions to use India against China. Pakistan and India have maintained contentious relations for decades, but the fact that both nations possess formidable nuclear arsenals and large conventional armies means that any conflict is short-lived with both sides attempting to avoid major escalations.

China has ensured that Pakistan has maintained military parity with neighbouring India, including through the joint-development of both conventional weapons systems and its nuclear program.

Together, these ties will significantly enhance Pakistan's economy, providing long-term jobs both in constructing and maintaining infrastructure projects, as well as adding to national economic growth. They will also ensure that Pakistan maintains military parity with neighbouring India, maintaining a balance of power in South Asia.

For Beijing, these ties provide China with access not only to the Arabian Sea, but also with a means of further connecting its western Xinjiang province, allowing for additional economic development there. With a strong ally bordering India, ties with Pakistan also grants Beijing more leverage when manoeuvring diplomatically vis-à-vis New Delhi.

Attacking China's Pakistan Flank

For both nations, these ties represent an answer to pressure they both face from Washington. In China's Xinjiang province, the United States has leveraged socioeconomic disparity there to stoke separatist movements and even terrorism aimed at destabilizing Beijing.

Likewise, Pakistan's Baluchistan province hosts violent extremists accompanying a separatist movement also sponsored by Washington.

The US National Endowment for Democracy, an increasingly notorious front used by Washington and Wall Street to influence the internal politics of nations around the globe, has pumped in millions of dollars year-to-year for decades to build up networks in Xinjiang and Baluchistan to not only contest control over these regions by their respective central governments, but to also disrupt ambitious economic development in both provinces.

The separatist movement in Baluchistan, for example, has targeted Chinese construction projects in a bid to impede the region's development and complicate Chinese-Pakistani ties. The US-sponsored conflict illustrates the true face of Washington's campaign to more widely contain China's political and economic rise in the region.

In 2017, terrorists attacked a labourers' camp at the port of Gwadar, wounding 26. Media outlets like Reuters would specifically mention the likelihood of such attacks upsetting China's One Belt, One Road initiative of which CPEC projects fall under. Disrupting this ambitious project has become the primary objective of US and European policymakers focused on Asia.

Politico in its article, "China's plans to rule the seas hit trouble in Pakistan," would claim: China's strategic ambition to extend its maritime power across the Indian Ocean is hitting severe obstacles in the giant, volatile Pakistani province of Baluchistan.

Beijing's priority is to develop the sleepy Baloch fishing port of Gwadar, 300 miles west of Karachi, to project its commercial and naval influence further west. But kidnappings drive-by shootings and bomb attacks in the past few weeks and months offer a chilling warning that China will have to pay a high price for a deep-water harbour near the mouth of the Persian Gulf.

Politico's article notes how Chinese-Pakistani ties put India directly in check. But in a much wider sense, they also put US efforts to contain China in check as well. The article also notes that both China and Pakistan remain unswayed by the violence plaguing Baluchistan and are committed to completing CPEC projects in the troubled province.

While the Politico article never mentions the US government and its support of separatists in Baluchistan, a local government representative did cite the US military's ongoing occupation of neighbouring Afghanistan as being partially responsible for Baluchistan's security situation.

More recently it has been reported that China is seeking to establish a military base in Baluchistan. This is in addition to an increase in Pakistani military assets in the province.

The Washington Times in its article, "China Building Military Base in Pakistan," would report:

China is constructing its second overseas military base in Pakistan as part of a push for greater power projection capabilities along strategic sea routes.

The facility will be built at Jiwani, a port close to the Iranian border on the Gulf of Oman, according to two people familiar with deal.

Plans call for the Jiwani base to be a joint naval and air facility for Chinese forces, located a short distance up the coast from the Chinese-built commercial port facility at Gwadar, Pakistan. Both Gwadar and Jiwani are part of Pakistan's western Baluchistan province.

The move further cements joint Chinese-Pakistani plans for Baluchistan and raise the bar for US-backed efforts to foment conflict in the region. China's invited presence in the region versus America's uninvited covertly-backed separatist movement is a microcosm of America's overall unsustainable policy to contain China.

Hard Choices for Quad Members

US dominance in Asia has for decades been built upon immense economic disparity between itself and nations across the region plagued by war, large populations and lopsided deals dealt to them by supposedly international institutions. With the rise of China and other regional states, this disparity is diminishing and with it America's dominance of the region.

At one time, a covertly-backed separatist movement would have (and did) confound development in Pakistan. Today, it was the pretext China needed to further expand its reach and definitively answer US efforts with a permanent solution the US has no answer to.

America's attempt to compete against China's economic development with unsustainable military threats and equally unsustainable covertly-backed conflict is a losing battle. The US-led Quad alliance will bring only hardship to its Australian, Japanese and Indian members who will be tasked with picking up the slack and made to pay steep prices economically and diplomatically to do so. In the end, the conflict the Quad seeks to create to foil China and the rest of Asia's ambitions will only hurt the entire region as a whole, including three of the four Quad members themselves, as other analysts have pointed out.

This leaves only one question: how long will it be before America's Quad partners realize cooperating with rather than competing against the rest of Asia is in their best interests and leave America searching for new partners in even further flung reaches of Asia? The answer will be provided by Beijing's own diplomatic efforts to convince them, including old enemies like Japan and fierce competitors like India, that there is a place in this new Asia for them.

Modi, a staunch enemy of Pakistan

Malik Muhammad Ashraf

The Modi-led Indian government is essentially anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistan, as is evident from the persecution of Indian Muslims, the reign of terror let loose by the Indian security forces against Kashmiri Muslims, persistent cross-border firing along the LOC, bellicose blustering by the Indian ministers and Generals and the avowed agenda of the Indian government to isolate Pakistan.

Modi is a staunch follower of the Indian leaders, who opposed tooth and nail the partition of India and the creation of a separate homeland for the Muslims of the sub-continent, who even today have not reconciled to this reality. Reportedly addressing budget session in the Parliament last month, he subjected Congress to scathing criticism for having accepted the partition of India in 1947 and also reiterated that India could have taken Kashmir, if instead of Jawaharlal Lal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhai Patel was the Prime Minister at the time partition. This adequately reflects the mindset and the deep down anti-Pakistan feelings that Modi harbours, as well as, provides an insight into the rationale for the policies that his government is pursuing.

India is taking advantage of the strained relations between US and Pakistan over the war on terror, particularly the arm-twisting tactics employed by the Trump administration to put pressure on Pakistan and the dynamics of the new global politics. The US and its western allies are hell bent to prevent China

from becoming the number one economic and military power, and simultaneously trying to ensure that Russia does not re-emerge as a potential challenger to US status as the only Super Power of the World. They are trying to prop up India as a counter-balance to the burgeoning Chinese influence in the region and beyond. India logically becomes strategic partner of US and the West in view of their strategic interests in South Asia and South East Asia. In lieu of India doing their bidding in this scheme of things, they are prepared to turn their backs on what was happening in Kashmir and what policies India pursued viz-a-viz Pakistan.

The US-India nexus is a potential threat to the peace and security in this region and it would not be an exaggeration to say that India was trying to import instability in the region which ultimately would also harm her own interests, though the Indian leaders blinded by their desire to establish their hegemony in the region do not realize it at the moment. In the permeating scenario, the possibility of any amity between India and Pakistan seems almost non-existent, particularly till the time the Modi government is in saddle in India.

The new strategy unfurled by President Trump to deal with the situation in Afghanistan is also a perfect recipe to aggravate instability in the region. My considered view is that US was not going to get out of Afghanistan in the foreseeable future and her strategy seems to keep the situation in a fluid state, as instability in the region could help it to undermine CPEC, the biggest ever economic initiative ever unleashed at the global level. The US and India fear that the successful implementation of the OBOR and CPEC would surely make China the number one economic power in the world, besides changing the economic profile of the participating countries especially Pakistan. Viewed from that perspective, the only way that reality can be stopped from unfolding is to foment instability in the region.

The emergence of IS in Afghanistan as ascribed to US patronage by none other than the former Afghan President Hamid Karzai cannot be dismissed lightly. US support for the Islamic State is also corroborated by independent global sources.

Reportedly, the US is mulling options to put further pressure on Pakistan, which might entail cutting off military assistance to Pakistan permanently. The US notwithstanding the fact that Pakistan has rendered unprecedented sacrifices in the war against terror and dismantled the entire infrastructure of the terrorist outfits, is not prepared to acknowledge the effort and continues to insist that Pakistan had not done enough and terrorists based in Pakistan were still using its soil to launch attacks within Afghanistan. The argument preferred is that

Pakistan was not restricting the flow of fighters and weapons across its border with Afghanistan. That surely is a very absurd suggestion. Granted that Pakistan was not doing enough or able to stem cross-border movement of the terrorists, the question arises: what was the US and Afghan forces doing on their side of the border to prevent it?

It is pertinent to point out that when operation Zarb-e-Azb was launched in North Waziristan, Pakistan Army leadership and Pakistan government did take the US military commander and Afghan government into confidence and asked them to make sure that the terrorists running from North Waziristan did not escape to Afghanistan. But unfortunately, that cooperation never materialized, with the result that the Haqqani and TTP leaders crossed over to Afghanistan. The TTP has been executing terrorist attacks within Pakistan using Afghan territory and in spite of repeated pointers and requests, very little has been done to deal with the issue. The Haqqani are Afghans and they have returned to Afghanistan after operation Zarb-e-Azb. Reportedly and also acknowledged by the US military commanders, 40% Afghan territory is beyond the control and writ of the Afghan government and obviously the terrorists are using that area to launch terrorist attacks against their chosen targets.

Pakistan has unilaterally started fencing of the border between the two countries and a number of forts and watch-posts are also being established to monitor the cross-border movement. Pakistan shares a porous border of 2430 Kms with Afghanistan and it is not physically possible to seal it completely. If at all that is what the US feels can prevent terrorism in Afghanistan, then it becomes the combined responsibility of US and Pakistan to undertake the project. That is not being done.

The foregoing ground realities testify to the fact that the US administration was not sincere in resolving the Afghan conundrum and was instead interested more in precipitating the situation to the chagrin of the regional countries including Pakistan and of course China, which probably has the biggest stake in peace and tranquillity in the region.

Peace in Afghanistan means peace in Pakistan and Pakistan would be the last country to undermine its own strategic and economic interests by supporting the elements which were out to destabilize the situation in Afghanistan. The US stance about Pakistan continuing to provide sanctuaries to the terrorists is logically wrong as well.

I am afraid in the backdrop of the bigger global game that the US and its allies have unfurled, Pakistan will have to brace for the negative fall-out of the US-India nexus in our region, for a long time to come.

The writer is a freelance columnist and writes for several main stream English newspapers and magazines.

Washington Prepares New Escalation as Afghanistan Unravels

Bill Van Auken

The Trump administration is preparing to deploy at least 1,000 more US troops to Afghanistan over the coming months amid mounting signs that the 16-year-old US war and occupation is confronting its gravest crisis since the invasion of October 2001.

In his first State of the Union speech on Tuesday night, US President Donald Trump boasted of having given “our warriors in Afghanistan ... new rules of engagement.” He continued, “Along with their heroic Afghan partners, our military is no longer undermined by artificial timelines, and we no longer tell our enemies our plans.”

To put it more bluntly, with the Afghanistan war now in its 17th year, there is no end in sight. The “new rules of engagement” have included a tripling of the number of US airstrikes against the country in 2017 compared to the previous year, leading to a sharp increase in civilian casualties, most of them women and children. The number of US troops, including “advisers” operating with Afghan

units and Special Forces units participating in search and destroys operations against insurgents, is increasing from approximately 11,000 to over 15,000.

The increased carnage, however, has done nothing to stabilize Afghanistan's corrupt and impotent government or to reverse the territorial gains made by the Taliban and other insurgent groups.

The inability of Afghan security forces and their US "advisers" to secure even the most heavily guarded zones of the capital of Kabul has been underscored over the past two weeks in a series of spectacular attacks. These included a January 21 assault on the luxury Intercontinental Hotel that killed 22 people, including 14 foreigners, a suicide bombing last weekend that claimed the lives of 103 people and wounded another 200 at a police checkpoint near foreign diplomatic missions and government buildings and an armed assault on Monday against Afghanistan's military academy in Kabul in which at least a dozen soldiers died.

As for Trump's assertion that "we no longer tell our enemies our plans," this policy found its genuine expression with the release Tuesday of the latest quarterly report of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), which said that the Pentagon had refused to provide key data on the war. The agency reported that it had been "informed that DOD [Department of Defense] has determined that although the most recent numbers are unclassified, they are not releasable to the public."

Withheld were both estimates as to the extent of control exercised by government forces and the Taliban over Afghan territory and the casualty figures for the Afghan security forces.

SIGAR was formed by an act of Congress and is mandated to produce the quarterly reports on the progress of the war, which has to date cost over \$1 trillion, and killed at least 120,000 Afghans and 2,269 American military and civilian personnel, while turning millions of Afghan civilians into refugees.

The withholding of such information, the SIGAR report commented, was "troubling." The figures on government versus insurgent control of territory "had been one of the last remaining publicly available indicators for members of Congress ... and for the American public of how the 16-year-long U.S. effort to secure Afghanistan is faring," the report stated.

It added that “the number of districts controlled or influenced by the government has been falling since SIGAR began reporting on it, while the number controlled or influenced by the insurgents has been rising—a fact that should cause even more concern about its disappearance from public disclosure and discussion.”

The Pentagon has also barred SIGAR from reporting data on the attrition of Afghan security forces as a result of casualties and desertions last year. In its last quarterly report it described “historic losses” but could not give any specific number. It had noted earlier in 2017 that a total of 2,531 Afghan security forces were killed and 4,238 wounded in the first four months of the year, which would translate into some 20,000 casualties on an annual basis, losses which US commanders have described as “unsustainable.”

Following the release of the SIGAR report, the Pentagon backtracked on its attempt to censor the data on territorial control, with a US military spokesman claiming that it had been the result of “a human error in labelling.”

The previously censored figures provided by the Pentagon showed the US-backed Afghan regime in control of just 56 percent of the country, the lowest amount since the US war began. It claimed insurgents held sway over 14 percent of Afghan territory, also a record, while 30 percent was “contested”.

Earlier, the BBC issued its own findings based on an extensive investigation, reporting that the Taliban and other insurgents were contesting the government for control in up to 70 percent of Afghanistan.

A statement released by the White House on Tuesday night included a threat to further extend the US war into Pakistan. The statement said: “President Trump’s conditions-based South Asia Strategy provides commanders with the authority and resources needed to deny terrorists the safe haven they seek in Afghanistan and Pakistan.”

Earlier this month, Washington cut off virtually all military and security aid to Pakistan, worth roughly \$1 billion annually, with Trump claiming in a tweet that Islamabad had given “safe haven to the terrorist we hunt in Afghanistan.”

The virulent turn by the US against Pakistan found direct expression in the response of the US puppet regime in Kabul, which publicly blamed all of the attacks this month on the Pakistani government and its military intelligence service the ISI.

On Wednesday, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani refused to accept a condolence call from Pakistani Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi. Later, however, he did accept one from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the leader of Pakistan's regional rival, India, saying the two discussed "the need for an end to terrorist sanctuaries in our neighbourhood."

The grinding war in Afghanistan has become increasingly bound up with the US attempt to forge an Indo-Pacific anti-China bloc that includes India, as well as Japan and Australia. Washington's backing has encouraged the Indian government to pursue a more aggressive policy against Pakistan, heightening tensions between the two nuclear-armed regional rivals.

US hostility has driven Pakistan into closer alignment with China. In light of Washington's actions, Pakistani Defense Minister Khurram Dastgir Khan told Bloomberg on Wednesday that his country would begin seeking arms purchases from China, as well as Russia and Eastern European countries.

Meanwhile, China has announced tens of billions of dollars in infrastructure projects in Pakistan, including the building of an off-shore naval base near the strategic Gwadar Port in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan. The facility would be the second Chinese overseas military base after its installation in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa.

Washington is above all determined to prevent Pakistan, China and Russia from brokering any peace agreement that would end the protracted bloodletting in Afghanistan. After the recent attacks in Kabul, Trump declared that talks with the Taliban were off the table.

"So we don't want to talk with the Taliban. There may be a time, but it's going to be a long time," Trump said on Monday. "We're going to finish what we have to finish. What nobody else has been able to finish, we're going to be able to do it."

What the Obama administration failed to achieve with over 100,000 US troops in Afghanistan will not be accomplished by Trump with 15,000. What is threatened is a massive US escalation and with it the danger of a wider war that could draw in the region's three nuclear powers, China, India and Pakistan.

Bill Van Auken is a politician and activist for the Socialist Equality Party and was a presidential candidate in the U.S. presidential election of 2004.

India's Hydrological War

Abid Latif Sindhu

Wheat belly is a book which has revolutionized the concept of nutrition and diet. As per the author wild wheat has 13 chromosomes, what is there now has over forty. The human kind is seriously altering the food chain and damaging both the botanical and zoological bio diversity, sometimes under the garb of natural selection and sometime the genetic modification. This all is going on under the severe water stress conditions. The loss of glaciers due to climate change results in receding rivers and the loss of rivers, result in diminishing aquifers. Food security is therefore the foremost element of national power. The pillar of food security is physical availability of food, socio-economic access to food and food absorption. The conditions of food security are deteriorating since 2003 in Pakistan. Food security is not only a humanitarian issue; it is the issue of national security. How we have reached this pass, just after the Uri-attacks by terrorist in Indian held Kashmir, Indian prime minister held a meeting and gave orders for initiation of a different kind of war against Pakistan, the hydrological war (as usual blaming Pakistan for everything).

Since then, the intensity of making projects on river Indus, Jhelum and Particularly Chenab has increased manifold. Any file with PC-1 or PC-2 going to south block or panchvati containing project details upon these rivers is given a top priority for implementation.

Modi after Uri-attacks said that “Blood and water will not flow in one direction any more”. The famous war slogan of World War 1 was “Over There”, with a Soldier pointing the enemy territories; Modi has also raised a war slogan “Over There” pointing towards all the rivers passing through India held Kashmir. Indian has declared a water war and is using water as a weapon for its surgical strikes on the western rivers. The physical signs of this aggression have started appearing. River Chenab, ahead of Khanki is totally dried up, which has never happened in centuries. The citrus growers in Sargodha are experiencing the water shortage up to 70% in even perennial canals. The sugar cane and cotton growers of southern Punjab are forced to reduce the crop coverage due to water scarcity. The growers in Sindh are also shouting foul play and will soon be the initiation point for the war-of-tag in domestic water politics. There is a meltdown of glaciers; this decade was otherwise a mean decade before a long lean period. Pakistan has no reservoir to harness the mean flow of water in Indus water system, on other hand India is filling up its 54 dams from western river and increased its availability of water from 50 days to 200 days of reserves. Pakistan is stuck at 30 days and is still receding.

Unfortunately Pakistani nation is absolutely insensitive to this. Indian south block has achieved this through a two prong systemic campaign since decades, one they have made the world believe that Kashmir is a separate issue and water flow of western rivers passing through Kashmir is altogether a different ball game, which is governed by Indus water treaty.

The second point which they made international audience to believe as well as the domestic is that, there is no water aggression and this all hue and cry about water theft etc is a military driven campaign by Pakistan with a handful of water nationalists. Indian water diplomatic manoeuvring revolves around these two thematic narratives which ironically everyone copied. One cannot separate water and Kashmir. The result of this separation is evident in the form of dried rivers of Pakistan. India has a history of these shenanigans. On 1st April 1948 India stopped supply of water from every canal, which created a war like situation and Pakistani wheat crop failed. USA gave wheat to Pakistan and averted the catastrophe. In 1960 under the auspices of World Bank and USA, Indus water treaty (IWT) was signed, under which three dams, eight canals and five barrages were to be built to ensure the constant supply of water to Pakistani farmers. The IWT ensured availability of 135 million acre feet of water. Under

the treaty the natural flow and elevation drop is used to use run-of-the-river water, but not the storage capacity. Presently India being upper riparian is making almost all the water projects with storage capacity with the plea that storage is necessary to remove the silt through silt gates by flushing. They are citing that, in 1960, this technique was not introduced.

Actually there is a devil in the details of IWT and the problem is in the interpretation of Annexure D and Annexure E. Pakistan is being converted slowly into a desert through the tacit application of these two annexes of IWT. *Pakistan has become the most water stressed country in the world. In 1947 per capita availability of water was 5000 cubic meters, by 2014 it reduced to 1200, and now it is even less than 800 cubic meters.* If the recently initiated water projects on Chenab, Jhelum and Indus followed the trajectory as envisaged by Mr Modi, then after two years, it will be around 500 cubic meters, which will barely be enough for drinking only.

India has completed 17 power generation plants on Chenab, 16 on Jhelum, 17 more are likely to be completed in next 2/3 year when magnanimous Chenab will be a tract land of Sand and gravel. Chenab through 21 canals irrigates 7 million acres of agriculture land. Only Baghliar Dam has reduced 7000 cusecs of flow in Chenab. Another dam sawalkote will completely dry out Chenab once it is completed. India is also building Salal dam, Dul Hasti, Pakal Dul, Sawal Kot, Ratta, Kwar, Bursar, Kirthai, Uri hydro Project, Kishan Ganga hydro project, Chutak and Nino Bazgo dams. Total projects on Pakistani rivers cross the figure of 50. Pakistan has electricity generation potential of 70,000 Megawatts if the Indus river system is utilized, where as barely 5000 Megawatts are being produced and for rest the more expensive options are adapted, Pakistan has 22.5 million acre of fallow land waiting for irrigation water. Out of a total of 77 million acre of cultivable area, only 36 million acre is canal irrigated that too under sever threat from water aggression of India. Anything which is not fixated has multiple centres of gravities as per the laws of Physics.

Any ideological country has therefore multiple centres of gravities; Pakistan has Agrarian economy, youth, Expatriates and Army as its multiple centres of gravities. All these are simultaneously under attack by the enemies of Pakistan.

Indian stance as per the Iwig principle on the Sir Creek issues and on IWT is based on hegemonic perceptions. All the trans boundary aquifer in Pakistan along the river are drying up and people are made to believe that it is not a issue, merely a clarion call of water nationalists and military analysts. Like all Indian recent aggression against Pakistan, the water war has also two fronts,

one the western river and other stoking Kabul to make multiple water storage facilities on Kabul River to strangulate River Indus.

The only water body which India willingly traverse towards Pakistan is a pollutants Stricken, effluent loaded, Hudiari drain which is playing havoc to the arable lands of Lahore and the bed of Ravi.

Land and water are the gold mines of 21st century. Just recently a Saudi Prince bought almost all the riverian lands along Ethiopian Nile to secure the rice production for next 50 to 100 years for Saudi Arabia. China is also buying agriculture land on Africa and all around to ensure the food supply to its people in the coming century. Pakistani decision makers are suffering from a lamp post crisis, the story goes that once a man lost his diamond ring at a beach, but was searching the same under a lamp post. The passerby asked him that why he is searching his ring under the lamp once he has lost it at the beach, the man replied, because there is no light at the beach.

The recent war of Syria is actually the result of water scarcity, which came slowly and the ruling elite remained under the lamp post searching their lost rings of lord.

If Pakistan wants to avert an Ethiopian or Syria like situation, then the water issue is to be taken seriously and the surgical strikes on Pakistan's water bodies be given appropriate response. Modi's new strategy of hydrological war is not a mere threat; it is visible, vivid, happening, palpable and absolutely physical.

The Yugo, Skardu, Basha and Kalabagh dams are to be built without wasting a day, because every day after his yoga session, Mr Modi is signing a new water project on western rivers.

The writer is a free lance who contributes regularly on security related issues. He is also a PhD Scholar who can be reached at sindhulatif@gmail.com

The US is Executing a Global War Plan

Finian Cunningham

Faith in the goodness of humanity is lost. People lose their capacity for "kindness, generosity, consideration, affection, honesty, hospitality, compassion, charity" (Turnbull, The Mountain People). Families disband and compete as individuals for scarce resources. The new motto becomes "May you die today so that I die tomorrow" (Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago). There may even be some cannibalism.

Ultimately, it's about American imperialism trying to assert hegemony over the international order for the benefit of US capitalism. Russia and China are prime targets for this global assault.

The three unfolding war scenarios are seen in Syria, North Korea and Ukraine. These are not disparate, disassociated conflicts. They are inter-related expressions of the American war plans; plans which involve the moving of strategic military power into position.

Last week's massacre of over 100 Syrian government forces by American warplanes near Deir ez-Zor was an audacious overt assault by the US on the Syrian state. The US, along with other NATO allies, have been up to now waging a seven-year proxy war for regime change against Russia's ally,

President Assad. The massacre last week was certainly not the first time that US forces, illegally present in Syria, have attacked the Syrian army. But it seems clearer than ever now that American forces are operating on the overt agenda for regime change. US troops are transparently acting like an occupation army, challenging Russia and its legally mandated support for the Syrian state.

Heightening international concerns are multiple reports that Russian military contractors were among the casualties in the US-led air strike near Deir ez-Zor last week.

Regarding North Korea, Washington is brazenly sabotaging diplomatic efforts underway between the respective Korean leaderships in Pyongyang and Seoul. While this inter-Korean dialogue has been picking up positive momentum, the US has all the while been positioning nuclear-capable B-52 and B-2 bombers in the region, along with at least three aircraft carriers. The B-2s are also reportedly armed with 14-tonne bunker-buster bombs – the largest non-nuclear warhead in the American arsenal, designed to destroy North Korean underground missile silos and “decapitate” the Pyongyang leadership of Kim Jong-un.

American vice-president Mike Pence, while attending the Winter Olympics in South Korea, opening last week, delivered a blunt war message. He said that the recent detente between North Korea and US ally South Korea will come to an end as “soon as the Olympic flame is extinguished” – when the games close later this month. This US policy of belligerence completely upends Russia and China’s efforts to facilitate inter-Korean peace diplomacy.

Meanwhile, the situation in Eastern Ukraine looks decidedly grim for an imminent US-led invasion of the breakaway Donbas region. Pentagon military inspectors have in the past week reportedly arrived along the Contact Zone that separates the US-backed Kiev regime forces and the pro-Russian separatists of the Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics. Donetsk’s military commander Eduard Basurin warned that the arrival of Pentagon and other NATO military advisors from Britain and Canada indicate that US-armed Kiev forces are readying for a renewed assault on the Donbas ethnic Russian population.

Even the normally complacent observers of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), charged with monitoring a nominal ceasefire along the Contact Zone, have lately begun reporting serious advancement of heavy weapons by the Kiev forces – in violation of the 2015 Minsk Peace Accord.

If the US-led Kiev forces proceed with the anticipated offensive next month in Donbas there are real fears for extreme civilian casualties. Such “ethnic cleansing” of Russian people by Kiev regime forces that openly espouse Neo-Nazi ideology would mostly likely precipitate a large-scale intervention by Moscow as a matter of humanitarian defence. Perhaps that is what the US planners are wagering on, which can then be portrayed by the dutiful Western news media as “another Russian aggression”.

US-based political analyst Randy Martin says: “It is undeniable that Washington is on a war footing in three global scenarios. Preparation for war is in fact war.”

He added: “You have to also consider the latest Nuclear Posture Review published by the Pentagon earlier this month. The Pentagon is openly declaring that it views Russia and China as targets, and that it is willing to use nuclear force to contest conventional wars and what the Pentagon deems to be asymmetric aggression.”

Martin says that it is not clear at this stage what Washington wants exactly.

“It is of course all about seeking global domination which is long-consistent with American imperialism as expressed for example in the Wolfowitz Doctrine following the end of the Cold War,” says the analyst.

“But what does Washington want specifically from Russia and China is the question. It is evidently using the threat of war and aggression as a lever. But it is not clear what would placate Washington. Perhaps regime change in Russia where President Putin is ousted by a deferential pro-Western figure. Perhaps Russia and China giving up their plans of Eurasian economic integration and abandoning their plans to drop the American dollar in trade relations.”

One thing, however, seems abundantly clear. The US is embarking on a global war plan, as can be discerned from the grave developments unfolding in Syria, the Korean Peninsula and Ukraine. Each scenario can be understood as a pressure point on Moscow or China to in some way acquiesce to American ambitions for global dominance.

To be sure, Washington is being reckless and criminal in its conduct, violating the UN Charter and countless other international laws. It is brazenly acting like a rogue regime without the slightest hint of shame.

Still, Russia and China are hardly likely to capitulate. Simply because the US ambition of unipolar hegemony is impossible to achieve. The post-Second World Order, which Washington was able to dominate for nearly seven

decades, is becoming obsolete as the international order naturally transforms into a multipolar configuration.

When Washington accuses Moscow and Beijing of “trying to alter the international order to their advantage” what the American rulers are tacitly admitting is their anxiety that the days of US hegemony are on the wane. Russia and China are not doing anything illegitimate. It is simply a fact of historical evolution.

So, ultimately, Washington’s war plans are futile in what they are trying to achieve by criminal coercion. Those plans cannot reverse history. But, demonically, those plans could obliterate the future of the planet.

The world is again on a precipice as it was before on the eve of the First and Second World Wars. Capitalism, imperialism and fascism are again centre stage.

As analyst Randy Martin puts it: “The American rulers are coming out of the closet to show their true naked nature of wanting to wage war on the world. Their supremacist, militarist ideology is, incontrovertibly, fascism in action.”

Finian Cunningham's brutally accurate analysis is one of many now emerging collectively as the ultimate wakeup call for men and women around the Earth determined to stop the outbreak of life-threatening world war. In 2018's evolved, latest iteration of history's perennial spiritual battle between good and evil, "blessed are the peacemakers" as philosophical truth rises in a more powerful and real, soul-searing, vital and all-encompassing articulation than ever before.

Finian Cunningham has written extensively on international affairs, with articles published in several languages. He is a Master's graduate in Agricultural Chemistry and worked as a scientific editor for the Royal Society of Chemistry, Cambridge, England, before pursuing a career in newspaper journalism. He is also a musician and songwriter. For nearly 20 years, he worked as an editor and writer in major news media organisations, including The Mirror, Irish Times and Independent.

Miseries of Dalits and Minorities in India

Sabena Siddiqi

“The Indian government failed to stop or credibly investigate vigilante attacks against minority religious communities during 2017,” said the Human Rights Watch Report 2018

Protesting against the imprisonment of more than 70,000 lower caste Hindu Dalits in the state of Maharashtra, India, UK-based Dalit human rights groups amassed in London on Monday to urge the international community to take notice of the violent repression of the Dalit caste and other religious minorities by the current government in India.

Amid heavy rains, many progressive groups such as the South Asia Solidarity Movement joined the demonstration to demand the release of Dalit leader Chandrashekhar Azad. Presenting a signed memorandum which said, “Release the thousands of Dalits arrested in Maharashtra in the first fortnight of January, immediately drop the charges against them and launch a transparent public inquiry into the events of January 1 and 2. Immediately release Chandrashekhar Azad, the leader of the Bhim Army,” they demanded the arrest of the Hindutva leaders Sambhaji Bhide and Milind Ebute who are believed to have instigated the clashes at Bhima-Koregaon early last month.

Commenting on the scenario, Keval Bharadia from the South Asia Solidarity Group, says, “India is turning into a republic of fear and violence, where mob-

lynching by the Hindu supremacist forces is a common occurrence. The descent into fascism has meant a horrific increase in attacks on Dalits – but the President, Mr. Ram Nath Kovind, a Dalit himself, is silent. We urge him to speak out and stem this tide of violence.” In reality, the Indian social fabric is irretrievably damaged as nothing is being done to lessen the statistics of rape, dowry deaths, female infanticide, farmer suicide, slum dwellers or the poverty rate. Making matters worse is the recent surge of violence against religious minorities and even the Dalit Hindu lower caste.

Releasing its World Report 2018, the Human Rights Watch reports that, “ The Indian government failed to stop or credibly investigate vigilante attacks against minority religious communities during 2017.” Adding that the current ruling party BJP publicly promotes Hindu supremacy and ultra-nationalism at the expense of the fundamental rights of all Indians. Even rumours regarding the consumption or sale of beef result in mob-lynching which go unchecked by the police, there are at least 38 such instances which resulted in deaths but complaints were filed instead under the heading of laws banning cow slaughter.

Commenting on the ongoing crisis, Meenakshi Ganguly, South Asia director at Human Rights Watch says, “Indian authorities have proven themselves unwilling to protect minority religious communities and other vulnerable groups from frequent attack, there needs to be a serious effort to prevent future attacks and to prosecute all those responsible for the violence.”

Leave aside minorities, even a primitive caste system continues under which equal human rights are denied the Dalit community. Also known as the ‘Untouchables’, they are physically excluded and isolated from other higher Hindu castes, they have often consigned the task of removing human waste from latrines by hand, according to the Human Rights Watch. In a bid to get the Indian government and public to recognize their human rights, the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights has tried to remind the authorities that India’s Constitution had abolished untouchability.

Alarming facts have come to light regarding the status of Dalits in Indian society. Apparently, in 38% of government schools, Dalit children are made to sit separately while eating, 27% of Dalits are prevented from entering police stations and 25% from entering ration shops. Continuing with the survey, it appears that in 48.9% villages, Dalits are not given access to cremation grounds and in 25% villages; they are paid lower wage rates.

Mostly paid wages from a distance as they are untouchable, they are also barred from selling products in 35% local markets, in 12% villages not given access to polling booths and in 14% villages they are denied entry in government

/panchayat buildings. As a rule, they have restricted to segregated seating areas anyway and they cannot enter non-Dalit homes in 73% homes. Restrictions on their entry in temples are as high as 64%, ranging from 47 % in UP to 94% in Karnataka. In short, this social issue needs to be tackled as it does not go with India's constitution or human rights.

Concerned by the worsening situation, activist Amrit Wilson feels that Muslims in India face a "genocide-like situation" and now Dalits share the same situation, urging that, "International community must take notice of what's happening in India. It's a scandal that needs to be exposed." Meanwhile, charges of sedition and criminal defamation are used to dumb down academics and journalists that try to criticize government policies according to the Human Rights Watch. It reports that "Threats of legal action and arbitrary corruption investigations put increasing pressure on journalists and media outlets to self-censor."

Not only that, it has noted that blanket internet shutdowns have been imposed 60 times in 2017, out of which 27 were in Jammu and Kashmir. Cutting off foreign funding to human rights activists and defenders under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) is another method used by the government to keep matters in their control.

Sabena Siddiqi is a Lawyer, a Journalist writing on geopolitics and International law-related topics, also engaged in facilitating local charities for women and children since several years.

The Absurdity of the New ‘Great Game’ in CentralAsia

Lyle J. Goldstein

When the American people went to the polls in November 2016, they could be forgiven for thinking they had elected a president who might just bring the troops home from Afghanistan. After nearly seventeen years of grinding war in that poor, desolate and ultimately insignificant country, it seemed that Americans had finally had enough. However, in a classic symptom of what ails the Republic, the common sense instinct to pull the plug on a failed policy was overturned by military and foreign policy elites with a strong vested interest in current practices. As a recent Yale analysis candidly explains: “In the United States, a huge community of defence and civilian personnel earn a living counting on the endless nature of this war without saying so.”

One doesn't have to be well versed in history to know that Afghanistan has been the graveyard of empires. That an entire British army was eliminated there in January 1842 yielding just a single survivor attests to the immense difficulty of the terrain, as well as the warlike inclinations of the local inhabitants. The Soviets met a similarly determined opponent, and it is a long celebrated plank of the American cold warrior ethos that the “genius” of aid to Afghan insurgents put the final nail into the coffin of the sclerotic Soviet leadership. Never mind that this aid seems to have had rather substantial blowback against U.S. national security interests.

Of course, there is the dreadful prospect of yet more Afghan and American casualties. Thankfully, U.S. fatalities have decreased due to the miracle of modern battlefield medicine, but what about the thousands who have suffered grievous wounds? Does anyone seriously believe that the armed forces' incredibly high suicide rate is unrelated to the nature of counterinsurgency wars with excessive deployment schedules, no visible enemy, nor any endpoint? There is also the problem of wasted resources that now may well exceed \$1 trillion. That money could have bought a lot of infrastructure at home—too bad. However, one of the very weakest arguments for “soldiering on” in Afghanistan concerns geopolitics: the soft underbelly of Central Asia, so the argument goes, must be guarded from encroaching Chinese and Russian influence. As on many issues related to this sad conflict, Americans are being swindled.

Occasionally, it has been pointed out that American lives and treasure in Afghanistan are going to protect Chinese investments. More recently, Afghanistan seemed to become yet another front in the “New Cold War” between Washington and Moscow as the Kremlin was accused of supplying weapons to the Taliban. But like many accusations hurled in the ever-more politicized atmosphere of U.S.-Russian relations, this charge seems to lack for any publicly verifiable evidence. Given the parlous state of U.S.-Russian relations, surreptitious initiatives in that direction by the Kremlin cannot quite be ruled out either, despite vehement denials from Moscow. Elsewhere, I have examined China's unfolding strategy for Afghanistan, but a spate of recent articles in the Russian press, including the January 19, 2018 headline “Afghanistan Initiative Will Allow the Kremlin to Press on Washington” from *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* begs the question of Russia's role in the reemerging “Great Game.”

The article takes up the issue of new negotiations at the UN Security Council, now under the chairmanship of Kazakhstan, regarding the situation in Afghanistan. These talks have been occurring over the last few weeks under the auspices of a C5 + 1 [Central Asia five including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan with Afghanistan] type format. Given Moscow's extensive influence in all these states, it's probably not an exaggeration to call this a Russian initiative. Moscow is calling for “direct talks” between the Afghan government and the Taliban in order to reach an “end to this fratricidal civil war” Moscow is ready to offer a site for these talks, apparently, and the article notes that “Russia's activism is not accidental” The piece dismisses allegations that Russia is supplying weapons to the Taliban as rumour-mongering by uninformed sources and, moreover, notes that “support has been expressed by Putin's own lips for the continued basing of US troops in Afghanistan”. This analysis does not rule out the possibility that China is partly

behind Russia's new efforts, especially under conditions of increasing "polarization," wherein India and the United States are becoming closer. The author suggests that Moscow's effort is an attempt to "seize the initiative from the West" [with respect to peacemaking. Evaluating the potential of other potential peacemakers—whether Pakistan, Turkey or China—the author concludes that Russia and the Central Asian states actually might be "most appropriate in the peace-making role."

Undoubtedly, Russians are watching closely to see how and if the Trump administration's new strategy in Afghanistan could "turn the tide." A November 24 report, noted with some optimism that Trump had observed that in Kabul an improvement might be in the cards. Now, that optimism seems a bit foolhardy. And indeed, a more sceptical headline appeared in the Russian military press early in 2018, suggesting that "Afghanistan Cannot Support Its Army without Financial Support from the USA" Unsurprisingly, there are numerous Russian reports of NATO ramping up efforts in the country—for example a new deployment of Czech soldiers—and also how NATO helicopters are replacing Russian models in Afghanistan's Air Force. Like the rest of the world, the Russian press has also actively followed rumours of increasing Chinese involvement in Afghanistan. But in a December 2017 article, Russian expert Leonid Savin explained that China's increasing presence does threaten Russia, since the two powers have joint interests in countering terrorism, narcotics and developing a peace process with moderate elements in the Taliban. According to Savin, "The financial strengthening of China in Afghanistan does not mean that Beijing will seek to dictate to Kabul. ... [China] does not impose its conditions, nor interfere in political processes". Another article suggests that Moscow's foremost security concern does not actually relate to the other great powers, but rather that ISIS militants fleeing Syria could try to establish a new base in Afghanistan and thus threaten the stability of all of Central Asia. This threat has been noted by both Russia's Foreign Minister and also the head of the Federal Security Service (FSB) within the last month.

A paradox is partially revealed in the foregoing analysis. Russia has many significant, and one might even say "vital," interests in Afghanistan. While it does not have a direct border with Afghanistan, Russia is more than a little concerned that instability in the country could spill into Central Asia. While Moscow is wise enough not to try its hand at military intervention (again) directly in Afghanistan, it has long maintained a sizable garrison in Tajikistan. For its part, China has similarly vital interests in Afghanistan, especially given its Belt and Road strategy, but likewise seems reluctant to commit its own troops to the fray. Some European countries like Germany arguably have a major interest in Afghanistan—that is to say in keeping Afghan refugees out of

their respective countries—and so have some “skin in the game.” The absurdity is that the United States does *not* have significant national security interests at stake—yet pays the cost of being involved in the conflict.

There are no current rationales that justify the United States continuing its fight in Afghanistan. Perhaps the least ridiculous rationale is to try to further stabilize a nuclear-armed Pakistan, but as a wise column in the 28 January 2018 *New York Times* explains: “... the more violent the Afghan War became ... the more it destabilized Pakistan.” While the “Blob” is ever more taken with the theory that pressure on Pakistan can “turn the tide,” this is most surely a pipedream. They must confront the reality that just as the fate of Vietnam was ultimately decided by Vietnamese, the future of Afghanistan will likewise be decided by the Afghan people. To the contrary, if the Afghan Army cannot beat the Taliban with all the help and firepower that have been provided over the last fifteen plus years, there is evidently something deeply rotten and corrupt in this force. Or maybe, like the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) and other failed armies the United States has tried to build from scratch in Iraq or Syria, this one also finds it much easier to call in the Americans when things get tough.

As in Vietnam, the war in Afghanistan is being fought at least “70% to avoid a humiliating US defeat.” In other words, Washington has not changed much since the early 1970s. In mid-2017, Ted Carpenter wisely wrote that “If Russia wants the Syria mess, let them have it.” The same logic applies to the even more obvious example of Afghanistan.

Lyle Goldstein serves as an associate professor in the China Maritime Studies Institute. He also a visiting fellow of the Watson Institute of International Studies at Brown University.

Russia, Pakistan Edge Closer in New Cold War Conditions

M. K. Bhadrakumar

Afghanistan, no doubt, was what brought Pakistani Foreign Minister Khwaja Asif to Moscow on a 'working visit' on February 20. This was Asif's second meeting with Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in the past 5-month period. They last met in New York on the sidelines of the UNGA session in September.

The Russian Ministry took pains to highlight Asif's visit. 'Working visit' cuts out protocol frills and gets straight to transacting business. Yet, Moscow made an exception and issued a glowing 'curtain-raiser' to hail Asif's arrival. There must have been strong reasons to do so. The regional backdrop is indeed tumultuous. The new Cold War is slouching toward the Hindu Kush and Central Asian steppes and Pakistan's geography is regaining the criticality in strategic terms reminiscent of the 1980s.

The Russian statements have become highly critical of the US regional strategies in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. Moscow has concluded that the US is determined to keep an open-ended military presence in the region. On the other hand, Russia is being kept at arm's length from the Afghan problem. Instead, Washington is directly engaging the Central Asian states, bypassing Russia, including at the military level. Clearly, Washington is working hard to undermine Moscow's leadership role in the region in the fight against terrorism and to challenge Russia's notion of being the provider of security to the former Soviet republics neighbouring Afghanistan.

Given the experience in Syria (where the US is covertly encouraging the ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliates to make the going tough for the Russia and to create new facts on the ground that weaken Syria's unity), Moscow is increasingly wary of the US intentions vis-à-vis the ISIS in Afghanistan. To be sure, the growing presence of the ISIS in the northern and eastern regions of Afghanistan facing the Central Asian region deeply worries Russia. Moscow has repeatedly hinted that US could be facilitating the transfer of ISIS fighters from Syria and Iraq to Afghanistan. But the Americans move on, ignoring the Russian barbs. The pattern in Syria is repeating.

Lavrov brought up the US-ISIS nexus in the discussions with Asif. The Russian side has floated the idea that the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization can be put to use “to develop practical measures to curtail ISIS influence in Afghanistan and prevent it from spreading to Central Asia.”

From Lavrov's remarks following the talks with Asif, it appears that the SCO summit, which is scheduled to be held in Qingdao (China) in July, may make some moves/initiatives on the Afghan problem. Last year Russia injected a new lease of life into the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group. China will be hosting the next meeting of the Contact Group. The fact is that with the admission of Pakistan and India as full members, SCO now represents all key neighbours of Afghanistan.

At the media briefing after the talks with Asif, Lavrov outlined that Russia and Pakistan have common ground in regard of the Afghan situation. The Pakistani Foreign Ministry readout stated that the two ministers “agreed to closely coordinate in all Afghanistan-related processes for a regional solution of the Afghan conflict.”

Indeed, the articulations from both sides regarding the talks in Moscow on Tuesday suggest that Russia and Pakistan intend to work closely together to coordinate their approaches to the Afghan situation. Russia has promised to step up military support for Pakistan's counter-terrorist operations. Significantly, as per a decision taken earlier, a new commission on military-technical cooperation between the two countries is being set up. Of course, this is happening at a time when the Pakistani military is preparing to face any cuts in US military aid.

To be sure, the talks in Moscow took place in the new cold war conditions. The critical difference today, compared to the eighties, would be that, as the Russian Foreign Ministry curtain-raiser put it,

- *“Today, Pakistan has become an important foreign policy partner of Russia. Both countries cooperate productively at international organisations, in particular at the UN and its agencies. Cooperation between Moscow and Islamabad is based on coinciding or similar positions on most issues facing the international community, including terrorism and religious extremism.”*
- *“Opportunities for joint work expanded considerably after Pakistan joined the SCO as a fully-fledged member in June 2017...”*
- *“The fight against terrorism is a key area of cooperation... The situation in Afghanistan arouses common concern. We are particularly concerned about the growing influence of the ISIS terrorist group in Afghanistan and its efforts to consolidate its positions in the country’s north and east. We advocate a regional approach towards resolving the situation in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. We expect participants in the Moscow format of consultations on the Afghan issue and the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group to work productively.”*

The pronounced convergence over Afghanistan can be expected to create synergy for an all-round expansion and deepening of the Russia-Pakistan relationship. Lavrov gave an upbeat account of the relationship as it stands today. Russia’s interest lies in boosting Pakistan’s grit and capacity to withstand US pressure. Interestingly, Lavrov and Asif also discussed Syria where the US has lately switched to an offensive mode against Russia. (See my blog *US-Russia rivalry surges in Syria*.) Again, Asif voiced Pakistan’s opposition to the sanctions against Russia.

Melkulangara BHADRAKUMAR is a Former ambassador, a career diplomat in the Indian Foreign Service. Devoted much of his 3-decade long career to the Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran desks in the Ministry of External Affairs and in assignments on the territory of the former Soviet Union.

China Can Help Accelerate Stalled Iran-Pakistan Pipeline

Adam Garrie

Iranian officials have expressed their concern over the fact that the construction of a bilateral Iran-Pakistan pipeline has stalled from the Pakistani side. While the Iranian side is nearly complete, Iran's Petroleum Minister Bijan Namdar Zangeneh has stated that if Pakistan refuses to re-start construction on its side of the border, Iran will have no choice but to lodge a formal legal complaint against Islamabad.

Pakistan and Iran continue to mend ties in what was once a very healthy relationship. While the row over the pipeline could potentially cause an upset in this process, the generally constructive yet understandably exasperated attitude of Iran could in fact lead to a win-win solution, should China become involved as an arbitrator and investor in the project.

The official website of Iran's Leader has just published a series of remarks in which Ayatollah Khamenei links the struggle for Palestinian freedom to the struggle for Kashmiri freedom. In doing so, he has linked a cause close to the hearts of Pakistanis with the wider pan-Islamic struggle for Palestine. As Iran is among Palestine's strongest supporters in the world, making this link between Palestine and Kashmir is a clear indication that Iran values an issue of conscience in which Pakistanis have a polar view to that of the Indian government which treats Kashmir like its own "Israel". While the Leader's remarks are sincere and based on the reality of two people's struggle for freedom and justice, the remarks also have the added geopolitical benefit of

representing a soft-power olive branch to Pakistan, the traditional international champion of Kashmiri freedom.

Turning to the Pakistani side, the stalled pipeline is not a sign of anti-Iranian feeling in Islamabad, but rather it is a sign that Pakistan's re-emergence as an important player in the multipolar world is an ongoing process and is at times, progressing asymmetrically in respect of Islamabad's embrace of its new geopolitical position. There are also issues of apolitical corruption and lack of organisation that ought to be taken into account before anyone can accuse Islamabad of stalling the project out of some bewitched feelings towards Iran, America's nemesis.

The clear solution for the pipeline issue is for both Iran and Pakistan to invite China to mediate in the conflict. China continues to be Pakistan's most important partner and considering that the Iranian pipeline will enter Pakistan on a route which will make it easy to supply the Chinese built port at Gwadar with additional energy, existing Chinese investments in the region could easily benefit from a fresh injection of Iranian gas. If China agreed to assist Pakistan in the completion of the pipeline, it would easily satisfy Iranian concerns over the stalled project, while also helping to tie both countries together under the auspices of Chinese cooperation. If the project is successful, it could pave the way for further Chinese initiatives involving both Pakistan and Iran, not least in the necessary and desirable endeavour to help link the Pakistani port at Gwadar with Iran's Chabahar port, thus creating 'two terminals' in a united port system which itself would link the Indian Ocean with the Gulf of Oman.

While China is said to have "abandoned" the project in 2014, four years later and with Iran showing great initiative in the project, China could easily come back on board due to the added incentive of China's One Belt–One Road benefiting greatly from an increased atmosphere of trust and cooperation between Tehran and Islamabad.

As a peaceful superpower whose interests are in pursuing win-win economic relationships across the world, China is in a unique position to help foment the restoration of meaningful positive ties between Iran and Pakistan. Such a reality would have no drawbacks for any of the parties involved.

The write is the Director of Eurasia Future, writing on Eurasian integration, Middle East, South East Asia, China and BRI (Belt Road Initiative).

Shifting geopolitical realities in Afghanistan. Threat to US hegemony?

Fraidoon Amel

The military intervention by any nation into another sovereign nation is imperialism, whether it is done by Americans, Soviets, or Indians. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was as indefensible as the later American invasion of Iraq. Indian intervention in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Kashmir is equally deplorable and unethical

Violent geopolitical rivalries between imperialist and hegemonic powers over Afghanistan's natural resources, trade and transit routes, and geostrategic location have dramatically intensified. Despite sixteen years of heavy-handed US presence to establish its hegemony in Afghanistan and beyond, influence of regional powers like Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan, and India is growing.

The Perpetual War

Sixteen years into the longest war in its history, the US is aggressively flexing its muscles to assert and maintain its hegemony in Afghanistan and the region. This new development, however, does not stem from Donald Trump's so-called Afghan strategy. The aggressive posture on the part of the US is partially a reaction to its humiliating defeat in Syria – and one should add Iraq – at the hands of Russia and Iran (with China in the background). Trump's strategy generated some hysteria among the chattering class as being qualitatively distinct from its predecessors in that it commits the US to an open-ended war. The fact of the matter is that ever since its official [launch](#) on October 7, 2001, the US war in Afghanistan has been an open-ended war. Its endgame depends on US's hegemonic goals in the region. In other words, the US is pursuing a

strategy of perpetual war in Afghanistan irrespective of which president holds office.

Under the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA), the US maintains [nine military bases](#) at strategic locations across Afghanistan including those bordering Iran, Pakistan and Central Asian Republics. The Afghan airspace is controlled by the US for all practical and strategic purposes. The latter, thus, enjoys a unique geopolitical lead to project power beyond Afghanistan. The infrastructure allows the US to [deploy](#) up to 100,000 troops in two to four weeks.

In the grand geopolitical chessboard of Afghanistan, the US is left with the military option only which it pursues, at this stage, through a combination of terrorist proxies, drone attacks and Special Forces operations. It has locked itself in at a geopolitical space surrounded by hostile regional powers like Russia, China, Iran and Pakistan.

More recently, by elevating IS presence in Afghanistan and its level of threat to US enemies such as Russia, China, and Iran, the US is elevating the justification for its own military options intended to go beyond Afghan strategic geography. *The US is essentially playing a destabilizing role in the region as it aims at establishing world-tyranny. Its strategy revolves around the so-called Wolfowitz Doctrine which aims at preventing the emergence of a regional or global power that could challenge US's sole hegemonic status.*

However, US's attempt at establishing its hegemony in Afghanistan and beyond is being challenged by a de facto strategic alliance involving Russia, China, Iran and Pakistan. In other words, the US-NATO coalition is facing a formidable enemy – three of which are nuclear powers – determined to contain US's hegemonic ambitions in the region. China and Russia are at the forefront of shaping this new geopolitical reality.

The Harmonious Hegemony

China's ambitious One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative that aims to connect Asia, Africa and Europe surpasses trade and economic interests and shifts the geopolitical dynamics on a global scale. Its immediate implications are already felt in South and Central Asia – where its ultimate success depends – with Afghanistan as the geopolitical heartland.

As part of OBOR, the over \$50-billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) subproject became [operational](#) on November 13, 2016 when the first batch of Chinese cargo was transported to Gwadar port in insurgency-ridden southern Baluchistan province for onward maritime shipment to markets in

Africa and West Asia. China has built a naval base in Gwadar overseeing the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean with a second one [reportedly](#) in the making exclusively for military purposes. Gwadar runs deep in China's strategic nerves both in peacetime but especially in wartime which could see blockade of Chinese naval access to the Pacific. Given Pakistan's overdependence on China, CPEC is believed to cement China's clout to influence political and military decisions in that country.

China has further consolidated its strategic footprint in the Indian Ocean by [taking over](#) the strategic Hambantota port in Sri Lanka on a 99-year lease contract with 70% stake in exchange for reducing \$1.1 billion of the country's overall 8\$ billion debt to China. China's \$38 billion worth of [investments](#) in Bangladesh may likely result in breaking up the geopolitical stalemate over the construction of a deep seaport in Sonadia island following [pressures](#) exerted by the US, India and Japan on Bangladesh forcing it to abandon the project. China was [outmanoeuvred](#) over Sonadia by Japan's counterproposal to construct the Matarbari deep seaport 25km from Sonadia. That may now be changing as Sino-Bangladeshi relationship has been elevated to the strategic level.

All this is happening to the dismay of the US and India – and Japan – who see China's growing influence as a direct threat to their hegemony over shipping corridors in the Indian Ocean. In anti-Chinese jargon, increasing Chinese presence in and around the Indian Ocean is called The String of Pearls which the trio sees as a Chinese containment strategy. China maintains that its naval presence is to protect its sea lines of communication (SLOCs) – critical among them the South China Sea – that connect Chinese mainland to foreign sources of energy in the Middle East and Africa and build a “[harmonious ocean](#)”. China, in other words, is all about harmonious hegemony.

It is in Afghanistan that the tectonic geopolitical shift is played out in all its ugly forms and manifestations. China seems to be the main winner in post-US occupation Afghanistan having secured lucrative deals to exploit natural resources.

After allegedly paying a \$30 million [bribe](#) to the Afghan Minister of Mines, the state-run China Metallurgical Group Corporation (CMGC) secured the contract for Mes Aynak copper mine in Logar province, one of the largest copper reserves in the world and a 5000-year-old archaeological site, in November 2007. The company managed to acquire the 30-year lease contract against competitors from Russia, the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States. China will invest \$3 billion in Mes Aynak which is valued at more than \$90 billion.

The contract contains two important clauses: (1) construction of a coal-fired power plant for mining purposes (with environmental consequences) and (2) construction of a freight carrying train line connecting West China to Mes Aynak through Tajikistan to be further extended to Quetta in Pakistan.

At the first trilateral dialogue between China, Afghanistan and Pakistan in Beijing on December 26, 2017, Afghanistan [agreed](#) to join CPEC despite prior hesitation at the behest of India which opposes CPEC, among other reasons, as it passes through the strategically located Pakistan-occupied Kashmir region of Gilgit-Baltistan which borders the Wakhan Corridor of Afghanistan to the north, the Xinjiang region of China to the east and northeast, and the Indian-occupied state of Jammu and Kashmir to the southeast. As part of China's New Silk Road project, Afghanistan also favours construction of a network of roads and railway lines linking it to the Caspian Sea, Mediterranean Sea and eventually to Europe through Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey. The Lapis Lazuli Corridor involving Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey was signed in November 2017 to this effect.

In December 2011, Afghanistan [signed](#) its first international oil exploration contract with China National Petroleum Corporation. China, with an investment of \$3 billion, won the 25-year contract for the exploration and exploitation of oil in Amu Darya region of northern Afghanistan (Sar-i-Pul and Faryab provinces). It is estimated that the Amu Darya Basin between Tajikistan and Afghanistan contains more than 1.6 billion barrels of crude oil. China's local partner in the project is "Watan Group" of companies related to **Hamid Karzai** whose decision to refrain from signing the "Bilateral Security Agreement" with the United States may well be connected to these Chinese investments. It is also estimated that other reserves in Balkh and Jawzjan Northern provinces contain 3.5 billion barrels of crude oil. The contract for the latter reserve was [awarded](#) in 2013 to an international consortium including Dragon Oil from the UAE, the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) and their local Ghazanfar Group from Afghanistan.

The Sino-Afghan Special Railway Transportation that connects China, through Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, with northern Afghanistan (Hairatan port), a vital segment of the One Belt, One Road initiative, was [inaugurated](#) as the first-ever freight train line between the two countries in September 2016. The railway link was a [joint](#) project of China's Qin Geng Industrial Co. Ltd and the local Watan Group. However, the link is yet to become fully operational due to India-

leaning Uzbekistan's refusal to allow direct export of Afghan goods through its territory to China.

In January 2017, China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) signed a \$205 million contract to build the 178-kilometer Dare-e-Sof–Yakawlang road project connecting the northern Samangan with central Bamyan province. This is the second phase of the National North-South Corridor. The now completed first phase was Mazar-i-Sharif – Yakawlang road and the third, yet to commence, being the 550km central Bamyan– southern Kandahar road project.

At first glance, it seems that China has made these lucrative deals at the expense of the security cover provided by NATO-US troops. Nothing could be further from the truth. The start of extraction work of the Chinese workers at Mes Aynak copper mine under the security coverage by 2,000 government troops coincided with the popping up of armed groups which specifically targeted Chinese workers forcing a halt to extraction and their return home.

In the meantime, two governors of Logar province namely Abdullah Wardak and Arsala Jamal, both tasked with facilitating extraction at Mes Aynak, were assassinated in September 2008 and October 2013 respectively. Taliban claimed responsibility for the assassination of Wardak but no group claimed responsibility for assassinating Jamal. Ten years on and the project remains in a limbo.

Similarly, the start of extraction of crude oil by the Chinese in Sar-i-Pul and Faryab provinces was met with attacks by armed groups targeting the Chinese and efforts to destabilize these provinces. Six ICRC staff members were killed in Jawzjan province in February 2017 with no claims of responsibility by any group. In recent months, IS fighters many of them foreigners were moved to the north of Afghanistan where they have established a foothold in Sar-i-Pul, Faryab and Jawzjan provinces.

There are also intensified efforts to destabilize Xinjiang and encourage separatism there through the Afghan north-eastern province of Badakhshan, a main route in the ancient Silk Road, which shares borders with Tajikistan to the north and east and China's Xinjiang and Pakistan to the east through the historical Wakhan Corridor. The separatist East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) is believed to be mainly operating in Badakhshan.

Fraidoon Amel is an Afghan writer and activist.

Now India Is At War With Itself

Nayantara Sahgal

Today we are in a state of civil war. The most unwinnable wars in history have been the combination of civil and religious war and this is the twin ammunition in use in India today. The futility, absurdity and inanity of religious war should by now be a long-established fact since God is one whom we worship in different ways, and in no time past, present or future will the human race give up the sacred right to worship in its chosen way. Whether men have been broken on the wheel or on the rack, or burnt alive at the stake, no form of torture has succeeded in making them deny the god they worship or the way they worship. In India this belief in the sanctity of one's own religion is integral to the fact of being Indian, in a land whose Constitution has given us the right to live, love, eat and worship as we choose. The unholy war being waged on our multi-religious civilization needs to come to terms with this basic truth. But we have seen that it is not coming to terms with it because it is in the mood for religious war. Has no political leader ever tried to reverse the inevitability of war, asks eminent historian and author NAYANTARA SAHGAL

Men have gone to war since time began, for conquest, for plunder, for glory, for keeping muscles trim and adrenalin flowing. In the Hindu caste system which divided people and conferred status according to their occupations, the warrior ranked second highest in the hierarchy of caste. War is central to our epics. "Go to war" is the message. From bows and arrows to swords and shields, from hand- to-hand combat to war on horseback, the strategy of war has graduated to tanks and bombs. And, finally, the power to wipe out cities and human beings by the million with a single bomb that did not only banish life from the face of the earth, but ensured that those left alive would die of disease or be killed by radiation. After this memorable step forward in the art of annihilation, a privileged club of nuclear membership reigned supreme.

It went further, from the atom bomb to the hydrogen bomb. At the same time, chemical weapons of mass destruction — napalm and other scientifically tested improvements — made sure of the certainty of killing or maiming those on whom these were lavished. And the last century has consecrated what is known as the arms race. It has given its blessing to the ongoing manufacture of arsenals yet undreamed of. All nations are in the race. This then is war. A young woman of wisdom beyond her 20 years has spoken out against war and been reviled, abused and threatened with rape and worse. These assaults on Gurmehar Kaur have shown us the continuing popularity of war among those who have targeted her, and the mentality that has floated up like scum to the surface in the warlike activities that are reported daily in the newspapers.

Here are some that we read about: One, in a village in Bareilly, a Hindu group has ordered the Muslim villagers to get out. If they have not left the village by the year's end they will face consequences.

Two, cow rakshaks laid siege to a hotel in Jaipur that was falsely rumoured to be serving beef. The manager was beaten and man-handled while the police watched. The FIR filed by the police said unknown persons had trespassed. The Sadhvis who led the violence was not mentioned. It may be recalled that a blacksmith called Mohammed Akhlaq was lynched in Dadri on a similar manufactured rumour. His family is now being declared guilty and his murderers have been cleared as victims of the crime.

Three, meats shops and slaughterhouses across Uttar Pradesh have been sealed for many and various reasons, none of them clear. Three of these have been ransacked and burnt.

Four, the attack on Sanjay Leela Bhansali film, Padmavati, the vandalizing of film sets and the order to cut out scenes from it, has been very thoroughly carried out twice over at different locations.

Five, the continuing onslaught against the freedom to speak, think, and function as an academic institution should, is an on-going tragedy as the ABVP and other vigilante enthusiasts batter their way into university premises to prevent scheduled events from taking place.

Six, vicious and violent attacks on writers continue. When a nation turns upon itself, when it persecutes and kills its own citizens with abandon, when it declares that its own people are foreigners or enemies of the state, this is a situation known as civil war. We now see Indians turning upon Indians in

methodically targeted ways, in some cases with guns or whatever crude weapons they can lay hands on, in some cases with black paint, in some cases with the simple device of numbers known as a mob.

Today we are in a state of civil war. The most unwinnable wars in history have been the combination of civil and religious war and this is the twin ammunition in use in India today. The futility, absurdity and inanity of religious war should by now be a long-established fact since God is one whom we worship in different ways, and in no time past, present or future will the human race give up the sacred right to worship in its chosen way. In India this belief in the sanctity of one's own religion is integral to the fact of being Indian, in a land who's Constitution has given us the right to live, love, eat and worship as we choose. The unholy war being waged on our multi-religious civilization needs to come to terms with this basic truth. But we have seen that it is not coming to terms with it because it is in the mood for religious war. Has no political leader ever tried to reverse the inevitability of war?

One did, an Englishman called Tony Benn (born Anthony Wedgwood Benn) of Britain's Labour Party, who proposed unilateral disarmament decades ago. It was a prospect unheard of and unacceptable to his contemporaries. Instead Labour went on to choose a trigger-happy leader, Tony Blair, who along with his partner George Bush illegally invaded Iraq and laid waste a prosperous sovereign nation because its dictator was about to change the terms on which he traded oil. The legacy of the Bush-Blair criminality is chaos in West Asia. And Bush and Blair have yet to be tried as war criminals. True religion has given birth to great song, great poetry, and the great ideal of the brotherhood of man. There is no one today to proclaim this ideal, no Gandhi who went unarmed to the killing field of Noakhali and brought peace by his mere presence, no Nehru's voice for peace in a savagely armed post-war world.

It is for citizens to defend the heritage of equal citizenship bequeathed to us by our founding fathers and to ensure that religion remains a private affair if incidents like those cited above are not to become daily unchecked outrages. As a practitioner of yoga for many years, I have been taught that a cardinal principle on the spiritual path is non-violence. No one who advocates violence is a yogi so permit me to refer to the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh as Shri Adityanath. He is a practical politician of long political experience, and one who has kept four key ministries in his own charge along with control of some two dozen other departments, and therefore must be well aware of what goes on in every corner of the state he now rules. What is happening in Uttar Pradesh is taking place under his watch, a sign that Hindutva is on the warpath. Why else would the Muslims in a Bareilly village be ordered on pain of death to leave? Is

it possible that the Hindu neighbours they have lived with all their lives have delivered this barbaric ultimatum? Or, as is more likely, is this another case of roving vigilante enthusiasm that consigns these defenceless Indian citizens and their families to a wilderness of fear and desperation? Shall we stay silent and watch?

Nayantara Sahgal is an eminent historian and author. This first appeared in The Tribune, Chandigarh, India.

Hadiya's Love Jihad v/s Propaganda of Love Jihad

Arif Khan

"Truth alone Triumphs."

She Stood Tall Against All – Hadiya My Hero!

International Women's Day 2018 brought the best present that Hadiya deserved. Perfect time to celebrate inspiring women who have shown the nerves of steel to the ever-discriminatory patriarchal world we live in. So, my heartiest congratulations to Hadiya and credit to the Supreme Court for at least ending her ordeal by restoring her marriage that was annulled by the dubious Kerala High Court last year. However, I have reserved my congratulations to the SC for delivering so called justice.

In the meantime, a total "Respect" for Hadiya – the iron lady for standing tall against all right-wing propaganda of Love Jihad, Islamophobia, Misogyny, Patriarchy, RSS Goons, National Investigation Agencies, Judicial System, Prejudices and general deep hatred towards Muslims.

One single woman – at the peak of RSS power in India – has proven to the RSS and to the rest of the world that Islam was never spread with sword. Otherwise, TWO YEARS of nonstop RSS intimidations to Hadiya and her husband would have prevented her from embracing the faith of her choice.

The sword of force, intimidation and dirty pressure tactics were NOT used by Islam but were and are still being used by the enemies of Islam.

“The Constitution gives all the freedom to choose their religion, which is a fundamental right of every citizen and all this happened because I embraced Islam,” said Hadiya while interacting with the media.

Whilst going through the ordeal the pressure must have been relentless and immense from all the quarters but her resolve, conviction and determination to fight out against all the odds stood the test of her faith in the religion she had embraced. She triumphed and came out with the flying colours putting everyone who questioned her (freedom of choice, motives and faith) to shame.

Despite their very best efforts (including one year of detention inside her house by her parents blessed by the High Court) they couldn't move her an inch from a faith that she thought was “superior.”

The world need to take the notice that Hadiya has demonstrated the true meaning of the word Jihad contrary to the meaning of the word Jihad (equating to terrorism) as made to understand by the world media

There aren't any better words to describe her character than the words used by Aijaz Zaka Syed in his article of 5th December 2017 and I quote: –

“The steadfastness of character that this lone woman has demonstrated in the line of fire should also shame all those born in Muslim families but who have never quite understood what their faith stands for. Most of us take our faith for granted and have nearly forgotten its liberating teachings that are meant for the whole of humanity”. <http://caravandaily.com/portal/hadiya-wholl-watch-wachers/>

Although, the right wingers have been crying foul about love jihad for almost more than five years but so far, they have failed to prove a single case in a court of law. To date there has been only accusations that are given enough prime air time by the biased communal media driving the Hindutva agenda of hate and polarisation to keep the Hindu vote bank together against the bogey of Indian Muslims.

The Hindutva forces are simply exploiting the insecurities of the majority Hindus who are told that their existence is in danger now due to ever growing Muslim population in India. Muslims are being funded by the Arabs to lure gullible Hindu girls – operation “love Jihad” and buy Hindu properties with the Arab funding – operation “land Jihad” – so now Hindu is in danger from the bogey of Indian Muslim.

I would like to ask my Hindu friends:

- How did Hindus managed to survive 60 years of Congress, 200 years of British rule and 600 years of Muslim rule (including the allegedly cruel reigns of Aurangzeb and Khiljis) and remain a majority (80%) whereas, Muslims remain only a minority (15%)?
- How come a majority of 80% feels insecure or threatened by a minority of 15% who has less than 1% representation in Armed Forces, Police Services, Administrative Services, Judiciary, Legislative Assemblies and Parliament? Last Muslim Chief Minister was in Maharashtra, in the year 1982, thirty-three years ago for a two-year period only; and
- How does an 80% majority community with better literacy rate, financially & politically so strong feels threatened by a community that is most deprived living in worse state than the SC and ST according to Sachar Committee Report.

There is no logic to the bogey of Muslims in India.

In a mixed society, it is but natural to have inter-faith and/or inter-caste marriages to take place. Women today are far better informed and can manage to look after themselves and decided what they want. They are not so gullible or dimwit that they can be brain washed or forced to do anything they don't wish to. Sooner the men understand that the better it for a society.

Coming back to the Judgement delivered by the SC, it can hardly be called Justice. The time it took to put its seal on confirming the fundamental right of "freedom of Choice" that is given to every citizen by the constitution. It was an open and shut case of an adult choosing to practice a religion of her choice and marrying a person of her choice.

A case that should have been thrown out in an hour by a lower court was even entertained by the highest court of the land, which also dragged its feet providing ample opportunity to the various national agencies to somehow by hook or crook prove the bogey of "Love Jihad".

How is this verdict from SC – a complete justice to Hadiya?

All the allegations were eventually proved to be mere allegations only. Hadiya was put through an ordeal for two years resulting in criminal waste of the public money, time, energy, efforts and other valuable resources.

Isn't it about time that the SC does some introspection of the entire Judiciary and critically assess the role of the national agencies and socio-political pressure groups involved in bringing a false case against Hadiya? SC should consider the following: –

- Who will compensate Hadiya for her ordeal – the physical, mental and emotional torture she was put through?
- The couple were denied to peacefully lead their married life – Who will compensate them for the loss of time and earnings opportunity?
- Who would foot the legal costs that were incurred by or on behalf of the couple?
- Who is responsible for wasting the public funds and the courts time by bringing action based upon false allegations? Why so much credence was given to allegations (with no evidence) by the High Court that couldn't hold water in the SC?
- Review the roles of corrupt and/or incompetent lower and High Court Judges incapable of giving verdicts (clouded by the political or religious beliefs) in line with the constitution of India;
- Severely, reprimand or suspend such judges who show disregard to the constitution. Sitting judges shouldn't be allowed to get away with such impunity. Their promotions or careers should be adversely affected by such poor or biased judgements forcing them to think twice before delivering such judgements;
- Shouldn't these judges be held responsible for inflicting injustice on poor citizens some of whom can't even afford to defend themselves let alone taking the governments or judiciary to the task for their absurd decisions;
- Punish the fascist organisations, investigation agencies and corrupt judges for such miscarriages of justice; and
- Finally, stop entertaining case of Love Jihad – there is no room for religious terms or connotations in a court upholding a constitution based upon secular principles.

Where two adults scream from the roof top exercising their right to choose to live the way they want to live, with whom they want to live and practice what they want to believe – there is no further scope for discussion.

Hadiya's case is not the only case that has dished out gross injustice to the minorities. For the past few decades, hundreds of Muslims have been arrested on false charges of terrorism across India and have been subsequently acquitted of false allegations after 14 or even 15 years. *The corrupt judges, police and national agencies got away with impunity on most occasions including 1987 Hashimpura massacre in Meerut and Sikh riots of 1984 in Delhi.*

Supreme Court is the last resort for the innocent victims who have been wronged by the corrupt system. Accordingly, SC carries enormous burden of expectations to provide a “Complete Justice” and not just the acquittal. Honourable SC must not only protect the fundamental rights of the citizens, but it should be seen to punish those who misused their power of authority to deny the citizens of their rights.

To restore the faith in the Judiciary and to deter the miscreants from implicating innocent citizens for crimes they have not committed – Justice should be wholesome and not partial and that is when SC deserves to be congratulated.

Arif Khan is a chartered accountant by profession

Rewriting Indian history in the Image of Hindu Chauvinists

Abdus Sattar Ghazali

The Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha, a right wing Hindu nationalist political party in the Northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, released a Hindu New Year calendar which says that Taj Mahal along with several mosques and monuments from the Mughal era, are “Hindu Temples,” Times of India reported Monday (March 19).

The calendar refers to Taj Mahal as “Tejo Mahalaya temple.” On the other hand, the Kamal Maula Mosque in Madhya Pradesh has been called as “Bhojshala” and Gyanvapi Mosque in Varanasi has been referred to as “Vishwanath temple.”

The Hindu Mahasabha calendar further termed Qutub Minar as “Vishnu Stambh,” Atala mosque in Jaunpur as “Atla Devi temple” and the demolished Babri Masjid in Ayodhya as “Ram Janam Bhoomi.”

Astonishingly, Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha’s Hindu New Year calendar referred the Muslim holy Mecca as “Macceshwar Mahadev temple.”

Hindu Mahasabha National Secretary Pooja Shakun Pandey, while speaking to The Times of India, said that the organisation resolves to make this India a Hindu Rashtra (religious Hindu state). She also hopes that the government will accept their demand and declare the country a Hindu nation.

She accused the Muslims of turning Hindu religious heritage sites into mosques and pledged to restore their original names. Pandey also added that all the names that have been mentioned in the New Year calendar have been verified by a retired professor from the history department of Varshney College, Aligarh.

Meanwhile, Maulana Khalid Rasheed Firangi Mahli, who belongs to All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), has termed the claims made by Hindu

Mahasabha as baseless. He said that dubbing the holy site of Mecca a Hindu temple is against the spirit of secularism.

The Bharatiya Janata Party or BJP

The Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha's new Hindu calendar coincided with attempts by the ruling Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) to re-write the history of India. The BJP government has appointed a committee with the task of using finding evidence such as archaeological finds and DNA to prove that today's Hindus are directly descended from the land's first inhabitants many thousands of years ago, and make the case that ancient Hindu scriptures like Mahabharata and Ramayan are fact not myth.

Reuter's news agency has published deliberations of the committee which met recently. Government documents refer to the panel as the committee for the "holistic study of origin and evolution of Indian culture since 12,000 years before present and its interface with other cultures of the world".

The group of experts, which comprise a geologist, archaeologists, Sanskrit scholars and two bureaucrats, met in January in New Delhi, the Reuters reported. According to the minutes of the meeting, which the news agency said it accessed, the panel aims to use archaeological data and DNA evidence to prove that Hindus descended from the earliest inhabitants of India and that Hindu scriptures were history, not mythology.

"I have been asked to present a report that will help the government rewrite certain aspects of ancient history," Reuters quoted the committee's chairperson, KN Dikshit, as saying. Dikshit said it was "essential to establish a correlation" between ancient Hindu scriptures and evidence that Indian civilisation is several thousands of years old. The current view is that people from Central Asia arrived in India 3,000 to 4,000 years ago.

Hindu scholars argue that history books in India try to ignore the dominant Hindu ethos of the country and its history before the Islamic period. India's greatest historical and cultural document, the Mahabharata, is hardly given any attention in the schools. So too, the Vedas, Ramayana, Puranas, Buddhist Jatakas and other prime historical and cultural documents of the country are ignored because of their religious overtones.

They believe that the real danger in India is not the arising of a chauvinistic nationalism like that of Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy – which are foreign to the

mentality and ethos of the country – but a lack of national spirit and historical consciousness that keeps people alienated from their roots and the country divided.

Minister of State for Culture Mahesh Sharma, who the agency said formed the committee, confirmed in an interview that the panel’s work was part of larger plans to revise India’s history. He said he expects the committee’s conclusions to be introduced in the curriculum of schools and academic research.

Santosh Kumar Shukla, a professor at the Jawaharlal Nehru University and a Sanskrit scholar who is part of the panel, said he believes India’s Hindu culture is millions of years old.

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Singh Spokesperson Manmohan Vaidya told Reuters, that the “true colour of Indian history is saffron, and to bring about cultural changes, we have to rewrite history”.

Human Resource Development Minister Prakash Javadekar said the government would take the Culture Ministry’s recommendations on this matter seriously. “Our government is the first government to have the courage to even question the existing version of history that is being taught in schools and colleges,” he said.

First India Prime Minister’s name removed

As the BJP continued efforts to rewrite the Indian history books, references to Jawaharlal Nehru have been deleted from the new social science textbook for Class VIII. There was no longer any mention of who India’s first prime minister was.

The rewriting of history textbooks is an old priority of the Hindu nationalist movement. In the 1970s, former Jana Sangh members in the Janata Party and the Morarji Desai government had asked for changes in text books, according to Christophe Jaffrelot, professor of Indian politics and sociology at King’s India Institute, London,

In May 1977, Desai was presented a memorandum that sought the withdrawal of four history books — of which three were intended for use in teaching — from public circulation. The books in question were *Medieval India* by Romila Thapar, *Modern India* by Bipan Chandra, *Freedom Struggle* by A. Tripathi, Barun De and Bipan Chandra, and *Communalism and the Writing of Indian History* by Romila Thapar, Harbans Mukhia and Bipan Chandra.

The memorandum criticized these works above all for not condemning forcefully enough certain Muslim rulers — including Aurangzeb — and emphasizing that freedom struggle leaders such as Bala Gangadhar Tilak and Aurobindo were partly responsible for the antagonism between Hindus and Muslims.

Communal politics

The main objective of the rewriting of history is to impart certain historical legitimacy to communal politics. It is common knowledge that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the mother organization of the BJP, hardly had any role in the national movement, except as active collaborators of colonialism.

Yet, the Sangh Parivar is keen on appropriating its legacy, as it would give a much-needed national legitimacy. The history of the national movement is therefore being rewritten to establish that the RSS had indeed played a positive role in the anti-colonial struggle.

This requires the projection of its leaders as freedom fighters on the one hand and the suppression of their actual role, on the other. In such rewritten history incorporated in all textbooks of Vidhya Bharati, the founder of the RSS, Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, figures as a great leader of the anti-colonial struggle, much ahead of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru.

In a textbook prescribed by the Uttar Pradesh government, out of about 20 pages devoted to the Freedom movement, three pages take up the contribution of Hedgewar, who is credited with the leadership of the agitation against the partition of Bengal.

The published volumes of *Towards Freedom* do not credit the RSS with any role in the anti-colonial struggle. Instead there is evidence in them, in the form of letters and speeches of its leaders, about its active collaboration with the British colonial rule.

The consolidation and mobilization of the Hindus are the main objectives of the communal construction of history of which Savarkar set a worthy example. Towards this political end, a systematic attempt, embracing both the academic and popular histories, has been on the anvil for quite some time, particularly during the last two decades, K.N. Panikkar writes in the politics of rewriting history in India.

Abdus Sattar Ghazali is the Chief Editor of the Journal of America. He is the author of several books including Islam & Muslims in the 21st Century published in 2017.