

**THE IMPACT OF DIPLOMATIC CROSS-  
CURRENTS BETWEEN INDIA, PAKISTAN AND THE US**

BY

V.B.N. RAM

*The China-Pakistan axis which goes against India's national interests needs to be taken head on by India -without dragging its feet. This alone will contain such an axis. The most effective way of achieving the above objective is to evolve a strategy which facilitates speeding up defence ties and logistics and technical cooperation with nations such as the US, Japan and Israel. As far as India's national security is concerned all of these nations have already made a significant contribution. Speeding up the process, for example with the US would require India to expedite the long proposed logistics pact –which mandates reciprocal access to access each other's military bases for refueling repair and maintenance of warships and aircraft. The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement ( LEMOA ) can not be delayed to be given a formal shape any longer in view of the increased Pak-China naval activity in pursuance of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and One Road One Belt (OROB) There is also a dire necessity for the technology-enabler compact Communications Compatibility & Security Arrangement ( COMCASA )- this will facilitate the US providing high tech avionics, encrypted communications and electronic systems to India. The politico-bureaucracy class has been very skeptical of a close US embrace of India fearing the opposition such an initiative will encounter from sections not favouring closer Washington-New Delhi bonding.*

Co development and co production of military hardware which LEMOA will facilitate will give impetus to Prime-minister Modi's Make in India

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campaign, besides becoming a game changer by launching the Defence Trade and Technology Initiative ( DTTI ) In the normal course the US imposes conditions for the export of its military hardware and technology. However, India is among eight nations which can access such hardware/ technology unrestricted.

Prime Minister Modi is likely to meet President Trump on the sidelines of the G20 Summit and later when he pays an official visit to Washington, the Prime Minister should propose to the US President the following:

- Increased US – Indian cooperation / collaboration to safeguard sea corridors in the Indian Ocean, especially the Arabian Sea
- Increased and a more prolonged presence of US troops in Afghanistan-this is aimed at further cementing India-Afghanistan ties and bolstering Afghanistan's security –thereby preventing the Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan, the Haqqani network and other splinter groups hostile to India to put a spanner to India's development activities in Afghanistan, besides checkmating terror attacks against Indian interests in Afghanistan and in India.

### **PAKISTAN'S ACTION AGAINST TERROR**

According to a news report in *The Dawn* of Feb 22, 2017 Pakistan has launched Radd ul Fasaad to combat residual and latent threat of terrorism which covers a broad range of activities in areas including Punjab under the National Action Plan. This anti-terror measure will lay increased focus on de-weaponisation and nation wide control of explosives. However, this measure once again falls much short of Indian expectations as it fails to contain the anti-India terror groups operating from the Pakistani soil

### **HOUSE ARREST OF HAFIZ SAEED**

Is the house arrest of the Jamaat ud Dawa ( JuD ) chief Hafiz Saeed and four of his colleagues a farce ? It could well be construed as an attempt by Pakistan to portray to the US, India and the rest of the international community that it is genuinely committed to uproot terror? If indeed, Pakistan has belatedly become wiser after some soul searching- and all of a sudden decided to eschew terror, why would it allow the JuD to rebrand itself as Tehreek Azadi Jammu & Kashmir?

Placing the house arrestees under the Export Control List ( ECL ) which proscribes their travel abroad and impounding their passports are steps, which if untaken, would have put Islamabad's credibility into question, something Pakistan would have preferred to avoid-under threat of US sanctions and in the hope that the house arrests may make India immediately rush to the long stalled Composite Dialogue table, hence this measure which Saeed and those of his ilk consider "reprehensible and timid by an indecisive State " were taken, despite incurring the wrath of those house arrested.

There is no gainsaying that this cosmetic tokenism of house arrests is not good enough to thwart the evil designs of these terror groups. The sources of their funds, the umbrella organizations abroad, particularly in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Persian Gulf must be completely demolished, if terror is to be completely done away with.

It is very unfortunate that Pakistan has remained a mute spectator and a potent motivator for terror groups in the hope that the proxy war they engage in, will bleed India through a thousand cuts, little realizing that , sooner, rather than later they will destroy Pakistan itself.

The lethality of the Modi-Trump synergy couldn't have been better demonstrated than through these house arrests. Even though this step may be a small symbolic one –it would, most definitely, have jolted Beijing for initiating a rethink on eventually clearing all decks for the imposition of UNSC resolution 1267 sanctioning Saeed, even if it has blocked it for the present. Besides, as per reports in Pakistani newspapers, it has already made Islamabad think of initiating a ban on the Lashkar-e-Taibba and its sister outfits. Such a ban, should, ideally function in conjunction with its National Action Plan (NAP) and would help Pakistan attempting to repair its lost credibility. Experience shows however, that the banned terrorist outfits have invariably reemerged under a new brand and style.

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### **US PRESSURE ON PAKISTAN**

US pressure on Pakistan to sanction Saeed has been there since 2008 (ever since the 26/11 Mumbai massacre.) In fact, Washington had placed a \$ 10 million bounty for capturing the fugitive, dead or alive. Under, US pressure Pakistan has, at least, twice before put him under house arrest i.e. Dec 2008 and Sept 2009. On both occasions he was released on Court orders. There have been other instances when Pakistan has made a pretense of displaying its sincerity to rein in Saeed and his Charitable set-ups such as Faleh-e-Insaniyat Foundation ( FiF ) As far back as Jan 2016 *The Nation* ( a Pakistani newspaper ) reported “the Ministry of Interior officials have started serious consultations with all the stakeholders before banning FiF and a final decision will be taken in the next few day’s.”

It is quite clear that even till date, the so termed “ final decision “ has not been taken and if I know the pulse of the populace, no decision will ever be taken. Why? The primary reason is, Saeed is a strategic asset to a State which combats “strategic irritants” such as India, through a proxy war. Pakistan’s local self governments have failed to address the twin issues of poverty and distress during calamities (natural, or, man made ) and this vacuum has been efficaciously bridged by FiF and similar set-ups which Saeed funds. The vulnerabilities of the poor and the lower middle class have, thereby been fully exploited by Saeed. Ergo, this class literally worships him. As threatened by Saeed, he has once again petitioned the Court for what he terms “ his illegal house arrest “ and most likely, the court will come forth with the same reasoning like on previous occasions i.e. lack of convictable evidence in support of his release order.

### **US STAND AND ITS WORTH**

Whenever the US has taken a determined stand and has refrained from hyphenating New Delhi with Islamabad, justice has been delivered. Whenever, its strategic matrix has prevented such a course, it has damaged both Indian and US interests. China has played a part in the recent house arrest of Hafiz Saeed, since, as Michael Kugelman- writing

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in *The Dawn* of Feb 1, 2017 says “any Indo-Pak discord at this crucial juncture when the CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) is being given a concrete shape, will put a spanner in Beijing’s works.” That is true, but what is not, is his belief that it was China and not the US – which was the prime motivator for Islamabad to house arrest Saeed. If, indeed China influenced Pakistan’s decision on the house arrests, what prevented it thus far, from avoiding to put road blocks to have Saeed sanctioned under the UNSC resolution 1267? There is no convincing answer to this question.

### **US PRESSURE ON PAKISTAN**

It is noteworthy that it was Dr. Shakeel Afridi (detained in Pakistan on treason charges) - who had helped the CIA in the hunt for Osama Bin Laden. President Trump, during his campaign trail and even earlier had vowed to get Afridi released and brought to the US, no sooner Trump assumed the US presidency. Pakistan’s refusal to comply with the US demand has infuriated Trump. The latter is also fully aware of the terror groups detrimental to the US and Indian interests operating from within Pakistan. Understandably, these, among a host of other reasons were compelling Trump to threaten sanctions on Pakistan if the latter had not initiated even the “token” house arrests.

No less threatening to Pakistan has been its fear that it could be added to the list of Muslim nations which have been placed under travel / immigration ban for 90 days through President Trump’s Executive Order . Islamabad’s above fear has been reinforced by the White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus, when he said Pakistan and Afghanistan could be added to the 7 nation list.

### **PRESENT PAKISTAN ARMY CHIEF MORE REASONABLE**

There is no gainsaying, though, that the disquiet New Delhi encountered when Raheel Sharif was Pakistan’s army chief has been considerably eased by his successor. During the campaign trail and after Donald John Trump assumed office he has castigated Islamic terror. His Defence Secretary Gen. James Mattis has said that the Trump administration

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would offer incentives to Pakistan to cooperate with the US on critical issues. Said Mattis, even prior to his confirmation “if confirmed, I will work with the State Department and Congress to incentivize Pakistan’s cooperation on issues critical to our national interests and the region’s security with focus on Pakistan’s need to expel or neutralize externally focused militant groups that operate within its borders “ Mattis was addressing the press.

In as much as it reinforces President Trump’s commitments, what Mattis has said carries immense significance to both Kabul and New Delhi since the Haqqani network and the Taliban are detrimental to both. However, to Washington’s credit it must be admitted that it has on occasions, withheld assistance to Pakistan, as it did in 2015, when Defence Secretary Ashton Carter declined to give a certification to the Congress (a requisite for fund release) because Pakistan had not taken sufficient action against the Haqqani network, or when the US did not facilitate the supply of F 16 fighter jets.

US-Pakistan cooperation, if, purposely and meticulously fostered with view to combating terror can be fruitful, however, if in the process of the US attempting to seek Islamabad’s cooperation- it is not discreet with the latter and compromises India’s position, such an attempt on Washington’s part can be quite disastrous to India’s interests. To illustrate my point I wish to cite an example. Post the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack a delegation led by the then US presidential candidate Senator John McCain and Senator Lindsey Graham (then a senior Republican and a Member of the Select Committee on Intelligence and Mr. Richard Halbrooke (US Special Representative for Afghanistan & Pakistan) visited Islamabad, immediately following a visit to Delhi. They posed a question extremely embarrassing to India i.e. they wished to know from Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri “what would be the likely reaction if there was a limited air raid on Muridke? (The head quarters of the LeT) Kasuri was horrified and answered that such an action would result in public outrage in Pakistan.<sup>1</sup>

The terror attack in Peshawar –which took the lives of many school children and the consequent counter terror measures initiated and

successfully executed under the direction of Pakistan's former Army Chief Gen. Raheel Sharif, which also primarily includes the National Action Plan (NAP)- have made him immensely popular within Pakistan and earned him plaudits internationally.

Notwithstanding the brownie points earned by Gen Sharif, Pakistan's intelligentsia and some sections of the media, have questioned his intention to seek a highly remunerative sinecure as the Chief of the 39 nation coalition (first announced by Mohammad Bin Salman al Saud Saudi Arabia's crown prince and Minister of Defence) on Dec 15, 2017 with the avowed intention of fighting terror in general all over the Muslim world and targeting the Islamic State, in particular. Gen Sharif agreed to accept the position only if Iran were to join such a multilateral force.<sup>2</sup>

Not true to his word the Gen accepted the coveted position despite Tehran refusing to be included in the multi-lateral force. The latter's stand was a foregone conclusion in the light of the Iran-Saudi ideological divide and the fact that there are several proxy wars going on between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Pakistan's ex-Army Chief Gen Sharif in a media interview at the World Economic Forum at Davos (Switzerland) has suggested a suitable course of action to help combat terrorism, the mechanics of which encompass among others: intelligence sharing and placing curbs on agencies which finance and facilitate terror and deliberately desist from salutary counter measures since, there is, according to him, a method to their madness. An objective analyst would be quick to discern the insincerity and the double speak Sharif has indulged in. Who is funding and facilitating groups such as the LeT and Jaish e Mohammad (JeM) besides many other similar outfits against India, prey?

India has not withheld any intelligence inputs relating to terror attacks planned by the so termed non- State actors facilitated and financed by Pakistan's ISI and the military. India has submitted umpteen dossiers of the details of such terror attacks, but Pakistan has only cut lame excuses for its purported inability to act against the terror masterminds and their networks.

**PAKISTAN WANTS GILGIT BALTISTAN'S (GB)  
MERGER AS ITS FIFTH PROVINCE**

At present GB is ostensibly being administered by a Council which is headed by Pakistan's Prime Minister-this Council is packed with his hand picked nominees who outnumber the elected members of the GB assembly in it. The GB Council is a conduit for vested interests in Pakistan attempting to line up their own pockets and indulge in corrupt practices and nepotism. "Most of the members of the GB Council have not even visited the area, let alone have any understanding of the needs of the people. It usually usurps the powers of the local government and the elected Assembly "according to Senator Farhatullah Babar Member of the Senate Sub Committee of Human Rights and Spokesman for former President Zardari.<sup>3</sup>

Pakistan at the behest of China is laying out a roadmap to incorporate the area at the north of PoK (Northern Area) as its fifth province. However, such incorporation will render Pakistan's argument of a final settlement of the Kashmir dispute through a decisive mandate of the people of J&K into jeopardy –since it would nullify a people's verdict in the matter. China believes that Pakistan should be entitled to claim at least a semblance of political legitimacy- or even a pretense of it, to proceed further with CPEC under its OROB umbrella and Gilgit-Baltistan's legitimacy will be more credible as Pakistan's fifth province.

Like the entire issue of J&K, which right from the time of Partition has been systematically and consistently been mismanaged by India, the present status of Gilgit-Baltistan (with Pakistan being in illegal occupation and India claiming sovereignty to this area without any success till date) is entirely due to its not having pursued the military option right in 1947 itself and thereafter continuing to compound the problem by committing monumental blunders by decisions taken following the many Indo-Pak wars.

India's claim to sovereignty over GB has hit a major road block because of a recently adopted United Nations Security Council Resolution which has for the first time incorporated the Belt and Road Initiative



(BRI ) China has taken the inclusion of BRI in a UN resolution as a victory of sorts. Liu Jieyi, the Chinese permanent representative to the UN considers this Resolution a major diplomatic achievement for China. India has not approved of the above Initiative yet, as a matter of fact Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar had made it abundantly clear to Beijing even as recently as February 2017 that CPEC is not in order since those parties involved in the CPEC corridor zone have no sovereignty over the area.<sup>4</sup>

Over the decades since Partition there has been demographic transformation of the ethnic composition of Gilgit Baltistan from a predominantly Shia dominated one with an entrenched Sufi culture to a staunch Sunni –Wahhabi type, which defies what is the true essence of *Kashmiriat*. Essentially this has weakened India's position.

Even today, separatists in J&K like Syed Ali Geelani, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq and Mohammad Yasim Malik have forewarned Prime-Minister Nawaz Sharif against Pakistan integrating Gilgit-Baltistan as its fifth province . Such merger will definitely not go down well with separatists and there is no reason why this factor along with the misgovernance and human rights violations in PoK should not be made issues by New Delhi to convince the separatists to retract from their open support to Pakistan. India should make it crystal clear to them that it is willing to concede complete autonomy to J&K within Indian Constitution and officially adopt the above stand.

### **CONCLUSION**

What Pakistan has commented officially about Saeed's house arrest is specious and unconvincing, in the light of its track record, Pakistan's statement, in effect, says that it has taken this step to re-work its bilateral relations with India, but such a measure should not be treated by New Delhi, as its "weakness" . India's External Affairs Ministry has expressed cautious optimism. Such optimism has indeed to be "cautious"

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for reasons which to objective analysts of Indo-Pak relations are quite obvious. India remains dissatisfied by the cosmetic house arrests.

Hafiz Saeed has had the audacity to compliment and thank Syed Salahuddin whose only “achievement” over the years has been the butchering of innocents in the Valley and who has claimed responsibility for the attack on the Pathankot airbase.

The enormity of the political unrest in the Pakistan occupied Kashmir as well as Gilgit Baltistan because of people being deprived of civil liberties and human rights is something which Islamabad has not only turned a Nelson’s eye to, but has heaped a cruel crackdown on the media which focuses on this issue –just merely to window dress its ill doings.

India’s patience has run out because of the numerous terror attacks by Pakistan, since 1947, but even those as recent as in 2016 at Pathankot, Gurdaspur, Machil, Papore, Uri and Nagrota –resultantly Mr.Rajeev Chandrashekhar an Independent member of parliament has introduced a Bill to have Pakistan declared as a terrorist State. In the opinion of this writer such an enactment will block the available window/s to henceforth ever deal with an adversary with which India has seemingly irreconcilable differences, Hence it may be unwise to consider such a move at the present juncture. It would be pertinent to ask whether, the diplomatic missions and DGMO’s in either country have proved totally ineffective and useless, only if the answer is in the affirmative ( which in this writer’s view, is not the case ) should we initiate measures to have Pakistan declared a “terrorist State”

Donald Trump’s campaign trail pronouncements had got China worried on multiple counts, many trade related and many geostrategic irritants. A pivotal one of the latter type was dwelt upon at some length by Mr. Michael Pillsbury (Consultant at the US Department of Defence ) at the Raisina 2 conference and related to the controversial telecom which President Trump had with the Taiwan Prime-Minister -which got China wondering –whether –this congratulatory call to president Trump was indeed a precursor to the US reviewing the One China Policy. Pillsbury also said that US-India strategic proximity including Washington’s supply of arms to India, also was an irritant to robust India-China ties. There is no denying that the support which India provides for diplomatic

facilitation to the Dalai Lama to meet important international dignitaries, from time to time, is something about which the Chinese daily Global Times has warned India on more occasions than one. The US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, after his recent visit to Beijing has generated such bilateral warmth that the Chinese Foreign Office spokesperson Hua Chunying has said that there already exists a spirit of “no conflict, no confrontation and mutual respect between the two countries.”<sup>5</sup> Such diplomatic warmth after utterly vitriolic attacks which each nation had made against the other, not in the too distant past which related to a plethora of issues, is bewilderingly surprising.

### END NOTES

1. Neither a Hawk, Nor a Dove: By Mian Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri (page 429)
2. Trump’s Presidency hot topic at Raisina Dialogue by Rekha Dixit: The Week
3. Powers to Islamabad Bureaucracy to grant Mining Licence to Gilgit Baltistan: Pakistan People’s Party bulletin –July 15, 2014
4. UN resolution on key project may affect India’s claims By Sutirtho Patranobis: Hindustan Times
5. China, US agree on principle of no conflict, mutual respect Source Xinhua published in the Global Times of March 23, 2017

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