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Quest for Domination in the Middle East
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EDITORIAL PERSPECTIVE

Global Terrorism
MAJ. GEN. AFSIR KARIM (RETD)



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CENTRE FOR SECURITY AND STRATEGY
INDIA FOUNDATION, NEW DELHI

EDITORIAL PERSPECTIVE

Global Terrorism

MAJ. GEN. AFSIR KARIM (RETD)

According to a Global Terrorism Index (GTI) report, which provides a comprehensive summary of the key global trends and patterns, over 80 per cent of the fatal casualties since 2013 have occurred in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria, and Syria. These casualties, however, were generally caused by local terrorist groups before the advent of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The ISIL has emerged as the most potent threat of terrorism to most countries of the civilised world, with its overt or covert supporters across the world. Despite the recent decline in the fortunes of the ISIL in Syria and Iraq, there is likely to be no great change in the global situation in the near future. The ISIL has plans of future expansion in Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Palestine, and southern Turkey. Moreover, it is trying to get a foothold in several African and south and central Asian countries.

The main supporters of the ISIL in Africa are Boko Haram and its affiliates. In south Asia, the ISIL has a strong support base among some Taliban factions and the jihadi groups of Pakistan. As these organisations share a common religious ideology based on extreme interpretations of Wahhabi Islam, they are likely to facilitate the territorial expansion of the ISIL in south Asia.

Countering the rise of religious extremism in south Asia is becoming more and more difficult as moderate Sunni theologies are under attack in most Sunni-dominated Muslim regions.

The only country in the south Asian region that has been using terrorism as an instrument of policy against its neighbours is Pakistan;

training of various terrorist groups in Pakistan for launching attacks in India and Afghanistan has been continuing unabated for many decades.

The two major jihadi terrorist groups in Pakistan focused on India are led by Azhar Masood and Hafiz Sayeed. These leaders enjoy the patronage of the armed forces of Pakistan and have a special significance for Pakistan's deep state. Hafiz Sayeed has been put under house arrest a couple of times whenever the danger of cutting off of funds from the US looms large, but Azhar Masood has been left free to carry on his activities.

Azhar Masood originally belonged to Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM), which has Kashmir as its main target. He organised and headed a new organisation called Jaish e Mohammad (JeM) after his release from an Indian prison as part of Indian Airlines flight IC-814 hostage swap in 2000. JeM has since launched several attacks on Kashmir and Indian diplomatic and aid establishments in Afghanistan. The attacks in Afghanistan were under the garb of Taliban, and JeM managed to keep a low profile. As such it did not attract much international attention.

China has thwarted all international efforts to declare Azhar Masood as an international terrorist, because it is getting help from JeM and its affiliates to keep on leash several jihadi organisations of the Pak-Afghan region that are connected with terror groups of Xingjian.

PAKISTAN'S INTERNAL TURMOIL

Recently, Pakistani groups affiliated with the ISIL killed more than 80 followers of Sufi Islam and wounded hundreds at the dargah of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar at Sehwan in Sindh. Lal Shahbaz Qalandar is revered by Muslims, Hindus, Ismailis, and others located all over Pakistan. This incident showed the growing influence of ISIL ideology in Pakistan. New battle lines are being drawn between the followers of Sufi Islam and those of Wahhabi Islam.

ISIL-affiliated Pakistani Muslims who killed at Sehwan were all part of hate-spewing Pakistani madrasas and not directly connected with the

ISIL. A dangerous law-and-order situation is developing as the jihadi groups that are now supporting the ISIL are considered Pakistan's geostrategy assets. These organisations, however, may soon turn against their present Pakistani handlers. General Pervez Musharraf recently stated on a Pakistani TV channel that Hafiz Sayeed's Jamaat-ud-Dawa was a 'strategic asset' because 'he didn't kill in Pakistan' but was helping the uprising in Kashmir.

The attack on Lal Shahbaz Qalandar's Dargah in Sind by Salafi-Wahhabis on directions of the ISIL has widened the rift between various religious factions and may well lead to widespread civil unrest and violence. In Wahhabi-Salafi ideology, there is no room for a tolerant and inclusive society that respects all shades of religious beliefs or follows the policy of *sulh-e-kul* (general accord). The Salafis consider the followers of Sufi saints to be misbelievers who deserve to be killed (*wajib ul qatl*). It was the acceptance of Salafi theology as Pakistan's state ideology by General Zia ul Haq that often led to regular massacres of Sufis, Shias, and Hindus. The problem is that the Salafi-Wahhabi culture may spill over to various neighbouring countries, including India, unless checked vigorously.

Syria in the Vortex of US-Russia's Quest for Domination in the Middle East

HAFIZULLAH EMADI

The Middle East, due to its strategic location and rich natural resources, has been coveted by imperial powers for about a hundred years, since the European colonial powers – Britain and France – created modern Syria from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire. Western imperial powers maintained their domination over the region by supporting the bureaucratic ruling elites that ruthlessly suppressed peoples' aspiration for democracy and freedom. Since World War II, disenchantment with imperial-backed rulers was on the rise, causing tyrant leaders to initiate some cosmetic reforms with the intention to counter and contain anti-systemic resistance. The rising Soviet imperial state was determined to carve its spheres of influence challenging Western powers in the region and exploited public grievances against tyrant rulers to advance its own political agenda – establishing a foothold in the region. In Syria, it forged closer working relations with the Alawite ruling family after Hafiz al-Assad seized power in the 1970s. Disintegration of the Soviet imperial state in 1991 not only led to reconfiguration of the political system there but also forced the successor state, Russia, to reassess its foreign policy options – instead of supporting former Soviet client states, it must focus on rebuilding Russia and modernising its military might. This development in Russia caused Syria to improve relations with Western countries as Russia could not provide loans, credits, and other types of assistance to sustain the regime.

Lack of financial and military support from Russia caused Syria to liberalise its economy – a factor that paved the road for international financial and trade institutions to move into Syria. Loans and credits by international institutions forced the country to acquiesce to rules and regulations laid down by donor countries and agencies. Austerity measures imposed wreaked havoc on the Syrian economy, with devastating consequences – forcing poor peasantry to abandon their land and migrate to urban centres in search of a better life. Rising unemployment in urban centres aggravated the plight of new settlers, and this situation paved the road for greater public disenchantment with the bureaucracy, which that ultimately culminated into an anti-regime movement as people could no longer tolerate degradation of their daily lives.

The trigger point of the mass movement for democracy and freedom was the arrest and torture of 15 school children by government security forces on charges of writing graffiti on a wall. People protested and demanded their release, but the government response to peaceful protest was harsh – opening fire on the crowd, killing four persons. The next day security forces fired bullets on mourners at the funeral procession, killing another person. The regime's brutal suppression of peaceful protest demonstration outraged Syrians to the extent that in March 2011, thousands of people marched on the streets in Damascus against the hated regime of Bashar al-Assad, whose family ruled Syria with an iron fist.

The struggle for democracy in Syria has common features with popular movements that led to regime change in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt – the demand for food, human dignity, freedom, and justice for all. It drew inspiration from these movements, which toppled Arab dictators who ruled their subjects like pharaohs.¹

The movement initially had a popular character directed against al-Assad's brutal policies of governance. A popular slogan against the regime was 'Only God, Syria and Freedom' and nothing else, which was in sharp contrast to that of the regime 'Only Gold, Syria and Bashar al-Assad', equating al-Assad's status to that of God. Although people used slogans

with religious overtones, the movement had no intention of instituting a system of governance based on religious beliefs. Syrians were determined to break the shackles that kept them in bondage and enjoy freedom and democracy. Since its inception, the movement has been opposed and mercilessly attacked by both regressive Islamic forces whose stated mission is to build an Islamic caliphate system of governance, eliminate all that was best, and impose medieval laws to govern every aspect of peoples' lives and the NATO–Arab monarchy axis, as they too have been determined to impose their political agendas on the Syrian people. Syrians by and large condemn al-Assad as a blood-thirsty dictator, calling for democracy, freedom, and regime change. The US and its Arab state allies treat al-Assad and his regime as a criminal enterprise killing its own subjects and call for his step down as the only way to peace and stability.

SOCIAL CLASSES: WAR OF POSITION

Disintegration of the Soviet Union also led to the end of bipolar system and the rise of the US as the only superpower determined to reconfigure the geopolitics of the Middle East. To achieve this end, the US tacitly worked to remove Arab dictators whom it considered not to be reliable allies in defending its imperial interest in the region – Arab rulers who ostentatiously spoke about Arab nationalism and Arab socialism but never believed in them. With the changes taking place at the international arena, these Arab rulers now embraced and championed Western democracy, spoke proudly about human rights, and worked to improve relations with Western imperial powers, especially the United States. The Syrian dictator al-Assad had no option but to strengthen ties with the US and Western Europe and liberalise the country's economy. Syria followed the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank policies to make Syria competitive for attracting capital investment by foreign firms in its commercial and agricultural sectors. Damascus's policy of economic liberalisation since 2006 led to increasing unemployment and growing

inequality, causing disenchantment with the regime that eventually morphed into a full-fledged civil war a few years later.

The politics of reform pursued by Damascus benefited the upper-class families and severely affected the situation of other classes – the middle class as well as the peasantry, labourers, and others. Upper-class families in Damascus and provincial centres whose class interests are intrinsically intertwined with those of the bureaucratic capitalist regime and big Sunni capitalist entrepreneurs prospered economically from their association with the ruling elite, supported Damascus, and remained loyal to and defended the regime against the opposition. The middle class was divided; a segment that included owners of commercial and industrial enterprises supported the regime despite the fact that the majority are Sunnis and another segment that advocated Arab nationalists or sympathised with political ideologies, such as socialism, communism, and liberalism, despised the regime and remained ambivalent towards the opposition parties. They vacillated in their position with regard to the popular movement directed against the regime and failed to provide or seek an alternative solution to the crisis that unfolded throughout Syria. However, a significant number of the class, especially the lower strata, supported and joined the movement for democracy and freedom. Islamic extremists, who come mainly from the middle-class background, managed to exploit public grievances and recruit fighters from among this class that included doctors, engineers, businessmen, and other professionals as well as lower social classes to fight alongside their men.

The working class, including the Sunnis who laboured from dawn to dusk to make a living, played a major role in the movement for democracy and freedom as they experienced steady deterioration of their standards of living, unable to provide higher education for their children, who had to leave school and work in order to support their families. They supported the anti-government movement, hoping that a regime change will improve their shattered lives.

Poverty forced landless peasants to leave their villages and migrate to urban centres in hopes of finding employment opportunities to make

money and return to their land. They lived on the outskirts of cities, suffering from abject poverty. They played a prominent role in the movement for democracy and freedom. However, they lacked their own organisation to represent and defend their interests and remained prey to propagandas by opposition political organisations. Their political demands – improvement of their living conditions – had been relegated to a secondary position as the struggle for democracy and freedom overshadowed all other demands.

The struggle for a regime change in Syria is complicated by differences among members of the opposition parties with divergent political interests. Although all rebel groups oppose the regime and fight to force al-Assad to leave the country, they oppose each other. Sectarian differences further complicate working relations and coordination of activities among the opposition groups. The oppressed Sunni majority long aspired to seize power, and the Shia-minority-dominated states continued to fight to defend the status quo – a struggle that assumed increasingly sectarian character – Sunnis versus Shias. Minority-faith-based and ethnic communities, such as Kurds, Christians, Druze, and secularists, fear that a regime based on Sunni Arab majority would be detrimental to their own freedom, liberty, safety, and security.

FOREIGN INVOLVEMENT IN THE SYRIAN CONFLICT

The movement for democracy and freedom in Syria was a spontaneous mass movement, with its origin in provincial urban centres, where poverty and unemployed are rampant in contrast to major cities such as Damascus, Aleppo, and other coastal cities, where affluent families and the ruling elite are concentrated – regions that are protected and defended by the regime's repressive military apparatuses. Failure of the regime to meet public demands and its continued suppression of protest demonstration for democracy caused Syrians of all walks of life in rural and urban areas to oppose and fight the regime.

To force the uprising into submission, the regime unleashed massive assaults on the opposition groups, using every weapon of mass destruction at its disposal and targeting others who remained neutral or were sympathetic to the regime. The regime's brutality not only caused people to question the legitimacy of the regime but also strengthened their resolve to continue their struggle for democracy and freedom. As the civil conflict dragged on and Islamic extremists continued to seize territories from defeated government troops, the Syrian dictator, without any consideration to the lives of the Syrians and despite condemnation by the international community, continued dropping barrel bombs – metal barrels containing high-grade explosives and shrapnel – and chemical weapons and blocked roads for aid delivery to starve the population into submission. It targeted everyone in areas controlled by the opposition, including ordinary people who could not flee the area.

Although the war on the regime continues unabated, opposition parties remain divided. There emerged a need for the formation of a centre to coordinate anti-regime activities. The pro-Western technocratic elite in exile in Istanbul, Turkey, seized this opportunity and established the Syrian National Council (SNC) in August 2011. Members of the SNC also included Ekhwan al-Muslimin, the Muslim Brotherhood. The organisation received qualified support from the US and its European allies, Britain and France, as they recognised the SNC as the sole and legitimate representative of the Syrian people. Leaders of the SNC used armed conflicts in Syria to advance their own parochial interest – forcing al-Assad to a power-sharing arrangement. Despite financial, political, and military training by the West, the SNC could not effectively challenge the regime and this factor led to the formation of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) as the military wing of the SNC. The FSA set its mission to bring under its leadership military officers and conscripts who abandoned their duties and joined a myriad of disjointed resistance groups led by local youths in their native towns and villages. The FSA (a mixture of various groups) gradually morphed into a powerful entity, receiving much needed support from the US and western European

countries, particularly Britain, ‘despite ample evidence that they work closely with extremist groups NATO has traditionally thought of as enemies.’²

As the anti-regime armed struggle escalated, the US provided training, cash, and intelligence to selected rebel groups – a calculated policy so that no one prevails or becomes a dominant force and they all remain dependent on continued US support. For example, US assistance of \$500 million in arms to the FSA (the US used the FSA as a convenient fig leaf for Western and US audiences to camouflage the sending of arms to the Islamic extremists) ended in the hands of Islamic extremists associated with al-Nusra, which some pundits and policymakers conveniently refer to as a ‘moderate’ opposition force in the Syrian theatre of conflict (al-Nusra, an affiliate of the notorious al-Qaeda, was founded in Syria in 2012). The US channelled money to select Syrian opposition groups through the Syrian Support Group – a self-proclaimed entity for helping the Syrian people. The reason that the US did not provide military assistance directly to the Syrian opposition groups is that the US imposed sanctions prohibiting arms delivery to Syria with the hope that it would convince the Russian government to accept an embargo on delivery of its military equipment to the regime in Damascus. Although Russia has long-standing economic and military ties with Syria, it is not loyal and committed to al-Assad.

The SNC suffered from disunity of its constituent member organisations as each group pursued its own political agenda and failed to unite the people. Lack of a revolutionary organisation with a comprehensive strategy of nation-building to lead the movement provided opportunities for Islamic extremist groups affiliated with al-Qaeda to challenge the SNC and rival opposition groups trying to establish their domination over the movement. They had access to funds, arms, and support from regressive Arab monarchies backed by Western imperial powers. In 2013, hard-line Islamists declared formation of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The group fought and expanded its territories by defeating government troops and fighters of rival Islamic forces. Its quick

victory on the battlefield and the black flag inscribed with Quranic words 'there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger' had a greater appeal to mobilise people in the Middle East against brutal Arab dictators. In societies where communal identities are rooted in Islamic belief, the use of and adherence to Islamic symbols are instrumental for the Islamic State to rally support from inside and outside Syria. Dominance of Islamic extremists in the battle against Damascus forced the SNC to waive the green banner of Islam to justify its bona fide Islamic credentials, hoping to consolidate its leadership of the movement and reduce ISIS influence.

Transformation of peoples' movement for democracy and freedom to one of sectarian-oriented conflict with the Sunni religion as the dominant faith is a dividing factor. The Syrian regime exploits the way in which Islamic extremists of Sunni background deal with their opponents in an effort to discredit them and present itself as the only hope for Syria, especially to minority communities. Although Islamic extremists fight to death to force al-Assad to leave the country, they have not been able to unite Syrians against Damascus. Although rank-and-file members of the Alawi community, historically a suppressed minority, have more in common with other oppressed minority communities than their own Alawi ruling strata, they are sympathetic to the regime.

As ISIS scored victories over their rival opposition groups in the battle against Damascus and worked to consolidate and expand its rule, the US began to revise its policy towards, them regarding them as a threat to the US' long-term interest in the region. President Barack Obama ordered provision of \$1 billion annually to aid the anti-government rebels, and the US began surveillance of ISIS positions in September 2014. Obama stated that the US mission is to degrade and destroy the ISIS, which poses a threat to the US and its interests abroad, and began to strike ISIS strongholds in Syria. At the same time, the US continued to characterise al-Assad as a dictator and ranted about al-Assad's brutal policies in dealing with Syrians (torture, sleep deprivation, bombardment of entire villages, etc.) – a description of what the US did to prisoners in Abu

Ghraib, in Fallujah, Iraq, and other US repressive actions, such as rendition – kidnapping of the Syrian-Canadian Maher Arar by US security officers on transit at a New York airport and sending him back to Syria for further interrogation.³

After modernising its military institutions, Russia began to challenge US involvement in Syria and decided to intervene in the war, supporting al-Assad against opposition groups and Islamic extremists. Russia intervened in the Syrian conflict beginning in September 2015, launching military offensives on territories held by Islamic extremists and the Islamic State forces, and helped the regime in Damascus to gain an upper hand in the conflict; it ‘cut off many of the pathways the CIA has been using for a not-very-secret effort to arm rebel groups.’⁴ By its involvement and its subsequent military offensives, Russia intended to regain its image as an imperial power since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

There are other factors that further complicate the situation in Syria – rivalry amongst regional powers for domination of the region – Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shia Iran. The repressive Saudi kingdom opposes Shia domination of Syria and remains committed to replacing the regime with a state dominated by Sunnis and provide Islamic extremists with financial support to overthrow the regime. Iran’s involvement in the Syrian internal affairs is based on the clerical leadership’s belief of not only exporting their brand of Islam but also supporting Shia parties with loyalty to Iran, such as Hizbullah (Party of God) in Lebanon. Hizbullah played a major role in fighting the anti-al-Assad insurgency across the Lebanese border. Iran and Hizbullah mobilised fighters and dispatched them to Syria to fight Islamic extremists and the Islamic State forces. In the proxy war, ‘Sunnis are also bearing the brunt of the violence and dislocation. Sunni towns and neighborhoods are being leveled by Syrian and Russian airstrikes. To crush the mostly Sunni rebellion al-Assad also relies on Shia fighters from Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq.’⁵

Iran, through its agents inside Afghanistan, coaxed the Shia Hazaras to go to Syria and fight enemies of al-Assad. Front offices had been

established to recruit fighters and 'central in this recruitment are men such as Jawad. A police officer by day and self-declared travel agent when off-duty. . . . He acted for a year as middleman for Iran's Revolutionary Guards, IRG when in 2014 it formed an Afghan Shia militia, the Fatemiyoun Division, to fight alongside Syrian government forces. From his travel agency on the second floor of a non-descript office building, Jawad connected combat willing men with Iran's embassy in Kabul. The embassy assisted with visas and travel, and paid Jawad a commission for his troubles. In return for fighting, Afghans are offered a residence permit in Iran and about \$500 monthly salary.'⁶

Shia Hazaras who left Afghanistan for Iran in search of security and a better life have been pressured and persuaded by Iran's secret agents to either join fellow Iranian fighters in Syria in support of al-Assad or return to Afghanistan. The promise of residency in Iran and lucrative salary caused poor Shia Hazaras to go to Syria and fight Islamic extremists and the ISIS. Iran exploits religious sentiments of the Shia Hazara refugees, encouraging naive Hazaras to believe that it is their religious obligation to go to Syria and fight to protect Shia religious sites from destruction and desecration by the ISIS. It recruited Shia Hazara fighters from among the most impoverished and vulnerable segment of the refugee communities. Amir, a Shia Hazara refugee in Europe, stated that 'some Afghans, who were close to Iran's Revolutionary Guards, approached me and my mates at the mosque. . . . They suggested we go to Syria to help defend the Shia holy shrines from Daesh. . . . They said we'd get passports and have an easy life afterwards. We'd be like Iranian citizens and could buy cars, houses.'⁷ However, most of these people fled the battlefield in Syria and joined other refugees on their perilous journey to Europe.

Iran believes if al-Assad is forced to abandon the country, it will create problem and difficulties for Iran to sustain client parties in the Middle East and its role as a regional power would decline and diminish. Russia and Iran have common interests in Syria as both are apprehensive of Sunni Islamic extremists and the Islamic State and for this reason they

stepped in militarily to ensure the survival of the regime and indiscriminately dropped bombs in areas controlled by opposition forces, killing innocent people. Russia's role in helping Damascus to beat Islamic fighters in Aleppo caused a Turkish police officer sympathetic to Islamic fighters to take revenge. He shot to death the Russian ambassador Andrey Karlov in a posh art gallery in Ankara on 19 December 2016.

Failure of the SNC to devise inclusive policies caused some member groups to revise their position and strategies vis-a-vis the SNC to the extent that several such groups that earlier supported the SNC now distanced themselves from it and even worked to oppose its policies and practices. For example, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)–aligned Kurdish Democratic Union Party, which supported SNC and fought the Syrian regime, has formed an alliance with the regime and controls a large swath of territories in the north along the Syrian-Turkish border and stops the flow of arms and munitions to Islamic extremists and others fighting Damascus.

Armed confrontation between the government and opposition groups continues to wreak havoc on the lives of the Syrian people, and the ruling elite in the US try to make it even worse than what is going on there. In June 2016, 51 State Department officials signed a letter of objection to Obama's policy on Syria that bombing the ISIS is not sufficient as US interests are being damaged. They called for stepped-up military offensives on al-Assad, arguing that the US has a 'moral' obligation to bomb al-Assad to force him out.⁸ President-elect Donald Trump's position on Syria remains ambiguous. During the election campaign, he stated that current US policy on Syria since the movement started had been 'too little, too late, and too divisive to make any meaningful difference'. He demanded that the US take more aggressive action to topple the regime in Syria. After the election was over, he remained sceptical about the war and US support of the Islamic State fighters battling the regime. Trump maintains that close collaboration with Russia is the best alternative to fight and defeat the ISIS. However, his vice president, Mike Pence, and some aides

believe in taking a more aggressive militaristic approach to the crisis in the Middle East. Although Trump lacks in-depth knowledge of the situation in the Middle East and believes that the US must disengage from the region, the US as an imperial power will continue to defend its interest worldwide and would continue to support authoritarian and dictators allied with the US.

While the US blames al-Assad for his disregard of human lives and destruction of Syria, Russia condemns the Islamic extremists for the same reason and in so doing the two imperial powers are trying to justify their involvement in the brutal civil war as if they are benign and well-intentioned, trying to resolve a conflict that they themselves are responsible for escalating – supporting one group against the other to advance and defend their imperial interests. The US pursues two inter-related objectives in Syria: (i) to eliminate Iran's efforts to influence the outcome of the crisis in the Middle East and emerge as a dominant player and (ii) to contain and eliminate Russia's influence and action in the Middle East, considering the region as its own backyard. The US demands nothing but that al-Assad should step down so that it is able to cobble together a new political arrangement with a wannabe leader who would be subservient to its leadership.

US regional allies Turkey and Qatar, in concert with the US moves, also seized the opportunity to reduce the influence of their regional rival Iran on Syria and Iraq and to defend and protect their own interests in the region. They funnelled millions in financial support and weapons to the Islamic extremists, including al-Nusra and supporters of al-Qaeda, in Syria. Such support enabled the regressive Islamic groups and other would-be jihadi fighters from war-torn Iraq and other regions, including North America and Western Europe, to join the war on the side of their fellow ideological brothers, entering Syria via Turkey.

The Turkish fascist regime headed by Erdogan declared al-Assad not fit to lead the country and expressed its support to opposition parties, including ISIS, to get Syria rid of al-Assad. Turkey's main objectives

includes efforts to keep the Syrian Kurds in check as they allied with Damascus in the fight against the Islamic State forces. With the weakening of the Islamic State forces, Turkey intervened in the northern areas of Syria to reduce the power base of the Kurdish fighters, Peshmargah, an affiliate of the PKK that has been fighting Turkey for independence for over 30 years. Kurdish women and girls, inspired by PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, formed women's brigade and, along with Peshmargah, they fight the ISIS. A reporter from the West said that the Kurdish fighters 'have proven to be fierce and tenacious fighters. Months after Iraq's military collapsed in the face of the Islamic State's 2014 invasion, a small group of Kurds managed to hold off a massive assault by the militants on the Syrian city Kobani, which is on the Turkish border. They dealt one of the first blows to the Islamic State, proving their fighting skills.'⁹ PKK, an outlawed political party, was blacklisted by the US and the European Union because during its years of fighting the Turkish government, it inflicted over 400,000 deaths and now the US supports the group to fight a common enemy – the ISIS.

Since the start of the war in Syria, the US has provided financial and military support to some 80 opposition political groups operating throughout the country, in close coordination with its regional allies. One such opposition groups that the US supports is the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The organisation was formed in October 2015 and declared its mission to create a secular, democratic, and federal system of government in Syria. US policymakers believe that the organisation's political values are identical to those of Western societies and so they supported the group. However, the US ally Turkey opposes the SDF because it is overwhelmingly made of ethnic Kurds. It is suggested that 60% of the men and women of the SDF are Kurds, with a small number of Arabs, Turkmen, and Assyrians (it is suggested that the SDF has about 30,000 fighters). Turkey does not want the Kurds on its southern borders to become a safe haven for PKK fighters in Turkey and remains nervous of the Kurdish agitation for an independent homeland. The US relies on the Kurds as an

effective force against the ISIS and uses its airpower to bomb areas in Syria held by the ISIS, and stationing 'more than 300 members of the United States Special Operations Forces' on the ground – all intended to help recruit, train, and advise Arab and Kurdish fighters to battle the Islamic State fighters.¹⁰

Sharp differences among US policy makers on the Syrian conflict are not based on moral concerns – unhappiness with mangled and maimed bodies of Syrian men, women, and children – but are based on the fact that Russian and Iranian involvement on the side of Damascus tilted the regional power balance away from the US. Policy hawks in Washington believe that the US cannot remain the sole imperial power unless it takes aggressive action whenever its imperial interests are at stake or being challenged. However, Obama did not wish the US to get deeply involved in the conflict as the country is already in ruins but rather to maintain the level of engagement it has and focus on its other global rival power – China.

War continues to be waged in the Middle East by the US, and the ruling elites justify the war with lies about freedom, democracy, fighting terrorism, and helping countries to chart their own futures. The truth of the matter is that the US is determined to maintain its domination of the region through destruction and suffering of their people. Millions of people have been forced to leave their homes in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, and Syria. Such a situation further fuelled instability and helped Islamic extremists to make life hell for the people in these regions. The way out of such conflict and to achieving lasting peace and stability necessitates organisation of mass anti-war resistance by the oppressed people inside and outside Syria. The Syrians must come to the realisation that depending on one imperial power against the other is not in the best interest of the country as it would ensure the vicious cycle of dependency, restricting and eliminating their own potential for change and development.

CONCLUSION

The Syrian civil conflict and imperial power intervention have resulted in death and destruction beyond one's imagination – some 500,000 Syrians have lost their lives; about 4.8 million people have fled Syria and live in squalid refugee camps in the neighbouring countries of Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan; and about 6.5 million are displaced inside the country, while many others have lost their lives in their journey to their dreamland – Western Europe – via the rough waters of the Mediterranean Sea. Residential housing, markets, and social and cultural centres and historical sites have been destroyed – destruction that ‘makes Mad Max look like family entertainment’.

The proxy war has, no doubt, catapulted Syria into a deep socio-political chaos with no immediate solution at hand. Western imperial powers are determined to destroy Syria's socio-economic structures to pave the road for Western multinational corporations to step in and rebuild the country according to their own terms and this will make Syria further dependent on imperial powers and the world market. Syria's dependency on the world market will never eradicate the basis of the anti-systemic movement – a factor that gave rise to the movement for democracy and freedom in March 2011. Transition and integration of Syria into a neo-liberal economy will also never meet the needs of its people as it did not resolve the deep socio-economic crisis in other Arab states that experienced similar social movements. By supporting opposition groups, Western imperial powers are not only poised for a regime change in Syria but also determined to destroy the Syrian Army so that it would not pose a threat to their ally, Israel, and install a man at the helm who would remain subservient to them.

The movement for democracy and freedom in Syria, like those in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and other places, lacks a revolutionary political organisation with the people's interests at the centre of its political strategy – an organisation to unite the divided community and unleash their power to oppose both imperial and regional powers in their meddling in the

internal affairs of the community and build a new society. The absence of such a party ensures that Syria remains dependent on imperial powers even if the present regime collapses and a new one is established in the future. A liberated Syria, free from the influence of external powers, is only possible if the struggle for a regime change is spearheaded by a revolutionary organisation committed to deep social, cultural, and political reforms, and this is the only route that can liberate Syrians and set an example for others to follow.

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Is Trump Recasting US Diplomatic and Military Strategy or Is He Tweaking It?

ASHOK KAPUR

This is a preliminary assessment of President Trump's approach to external affairs for several reasons.

The domestic political situation of the US is bitterly polarised between the Republicans and the Democrats, and it is unstable. Trump won the electoral college vote and is legitimately the elected president, but the Democrats continue to blame Russian interference in the elections and they do not concede that Hillary Clinton ran a poor campaign and that the American public genuinely wanted a fundamental change in the direction of US policies.

Mainstream US media – CNN, the Washington Post, and the New York Times, for example – played a partisan role in supporting the Clinton campaign, and it was widely reported that she would win; they wanted and expected a Clinton victory. Note that the mainstream media functions in the Washington-New York orbit, and it did not have a sense of the sentiments of American people in the Midwest rust belt, where jobs had been lost and the people demanded a change. Following the election, the media took a sharp position against Trump and maintained its desire to undermine him. As such the media is no longer a source of reliable news for foreign observers. The opinions of its battery of commentators – many of them are self-serving and in love with their voices – are partisan. So it is a challenge for the foreign observers to separate fact from noise.

The daily leaks of secret information to the press points to a nexus of Obama-era political appointees and civil servants (many political appointees were transitioned into the civil service in Washington, DC). These leaks are a felony in US laws. Some of the appointees have been fired, but there are many in the bureaucracy who have to be identified and punished if indeed they leaked secret information to the press and are disloyal to the present administration.

Trump's cabinet- and sub-cabinet-level appointments are not in place as they have to go through a rigorous confirmation process and the Democrats in the Senate have publicly vowed to obstruct the confirmation process even though they lack the votes to defeat Trump nominees. So the Trump administration is functioning without the benefit of thorough staff work by experienced hands. This was clear from the poor rollout of the travel ban against seven majority Muslim countries and its rejection by US courts.

Trump has an unconventional communication style. He is impulsive in his tweets, the language is not precise, it does not offer guidance to members of his administration, and it appears to be meant to address his core supporters. So there is a sense of a gap between his campaign promises and the need to mount an effective administration. No doubt there is progress being made in dealing with major public policy issues, but the Trump style is confusing and distracting. Trump is not a polished politician, nor did he claim to be one in his campaign, and it is noteworthy that he faced the Republican establishment, defeated 16 experienced opponents among the Republicans, and then went on to defeat Hillary Clinton despite her record as a practising and lawyerly politician as the wife of Bill Clinton and as the secretary of state with Obama. As an outsider in the Washington political circles who wants to reform Washington's politics, he has many people who resent his approach and his success as one who came in from the cold.

But thus far, Trump has been cautious in his foreign policy actions. Despite his big campaign promises, he has veered to the traditional approaches with a major qualification on my part: his speeches on the campaign trail produced results even before he was elected or as president-elect, and there is more to follow. The challenge for the analyst is to assess the effects of his public statements and his actions, recognising the gap between talk and actions, and to assess the differences between Obama and Trump policies.

TRUMP THE CAMPAIGNER AND TRUMP THE PRESIDENT

It is hard to fathom the precise character of Trump's strategic design to create a new US-oriented world order which is based on dissatisfaction with the Obama foreign policy. This difficulty arises because there are major gaps between Trump's rhetoric – often inflammatory – and the cautious actions by the Trump team, with a few missteps thus far (as of time of writing this article, March 2017). His rhetoric was outrageous on the campaign trail. Mexicans were rapists, drug dealers, illegal immigrants, and felons who were protected by the sanctuary cities which Obama encouraged and protected the illegals against deportation. Trump's target were the 11 million illegals in the US, although the exact numbers are not known definitely. He urged extreme vetting of immigrants and refugees from Muslim-majority countries in north Africa and southern Middle East, but the targets were not the 40-plus Muslim countries in the world, which included US allies such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Pakistan. Trump propagated the importance of fair trade deals and objected to free trade deals with Mexico and China in particular, which had created trade imbalance against the US and led to job losses for the American workers in Trump's view. 'Make America great again' became his slogan even as he emphasised policies – trade re-negotiations, build-in-America programs, and tax and immigration reforms – which created incentives for and pressures on

American companies to avoid outsourcing and to build factories in America and threatened to impose heavy tariffs on those who did not comply. Trump railed against NATO, calling it an obsolete alliance, and complained that the allies had a free ride with America because it bore the main burden of defence of NATO countries, as a majority – with the exception of five, such as UK, Estonia, and Poland – did not and had not paid their 2% share of the gross domestic product (GDP) of NATO costs as they had agreed. Among the delinquents are Germany, Canada, and France, and Trump noted that he would adjust America's commitment to defend these who had not paid their fair share. He promised to cancel US commitment to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which had been a key Obama plan to create an anti-China pivot by bringing 12 Asia Pacific nations into a trade pact in the region. In his campaign, he seemed open to letting Korea and Japan develop their nuclear weapons for their defence against North Korea, and he threatened to declare China a currency manipulator and an expansionist force in the South China Sea, which threatened international navigation and regional security.

Three points stand out about Trump's campaign. First, he was man with a business background and no political and government experience who openly opposed Washington's – Democratic and Republican parties – establishment and the entrenched bureaucracy. He claimed that he would drain the swamp, and he won the nomination and the election using this rhetoric and this pathway; he was clearly unconventional, widely regarded by CNN as one who could not win, up to the day of the election. They were all wrong as they had predicted a Hillary Clinton victory and they were committed to her cause and have remained anti-Trump even after his inauguration as president. Second, he did something that the conventional politicians failed to do. He correctly and intuitively understood that middle America, the rust belt which had lost the jobs, was dissatisfied with policies of the mainstream political parties – which lived in the elitist world of Washington, New York, and the West Coast – and wanted major changes in American policies. Not surprising, Hillary Clinton won the popular vote

in California, New York, and a few others, and the liberal media gave it the validation based on the political culture of the New York, Washington, and West Coast business and political culture, but Trump had captured and touched the heart and soul of the poor middle class, which had lost jobs and which had not seen a pay raise in the Obama years. The theme of change became a core slogan and a winning one for Trump. Third, Trump made a connection between his domestic and his foreign policy agenda, which resonated with his supporters. TPP was not good for America, said Trump, because it took away American jobs. Outsourcing was not good because it took jobs away from America, it enriched the big corporations, and tax and immigration reform was required to make America safe, along with other policy changes.

TRUMP IN ACTION

Following his installation as president, he has shown an amazing capacity to make inflammatory statements and to further polarise a divided nation. Even his Republican colleagues are aghast at his public declarations. There is a view that Trump believes in the 'chaotic' theory, which is to create disruption with a view to disorient others and to use chaos as a form of creative destruction of old norms and to build new ones. This view is a basis of Western capitalism to destroy the weak players in the world of capitalism and to find new opportunities for one's own ascendancy. This view relishes the importance of increasing uncertainty in the mind of the opposition, and it rests on the analogy of American football: you are either on the offensive or on the defensive, and it is better to have the possession of the ball and to be on the offensive because the exercise of initiative is the basis of a winning strategy. Trump's favorite words are the 'art of the deal' and 'winning' on the basis of gaining the initiative and creating uncertainty. This is a strategy based on psychological warfare and the importance of creating distractions for the enemy, who has to be on his or her toes, not knowing what Trump's next move will be. In modern

international relations, countries value predictability or at least the presence of agreed parameters of international discourse. Trump appears not to value this aspect of international relations in his public announcements.

Trump has created a lot of chaos and enmities by his statements, and at a time that countries try to manage and limit their enemy fronts, he seems to relish enlarging his opposition. Consider the following. In his campaign, he announced that he would have a ban against Muslim immigration into the US. This alienated the Muslim world as well as US constitutional provisions which bar discrimination on the basis of religion, race, identity, origin, and so on, of the affected person. By declaring that NATO was obsolete, he appeared to undermine the basis of trans-Atlantic unity and alignment following the end of the Second World War. He showed a soft corner for Putin and sought to find common ground with Russia even though Russia had annexed Crimea, it had expanded its strategic presence in the Black Sea and in the Middle East and in East Europe, and it had apparently interfered through cyber attacks in the 2016 presidential elections. He took a hard line against China as a currency manipulator and as an expansionist power in the South China Sea and questioned its position as a responsible international player because of its ambivalence towards North Korea's nuclear and missile program and because of the massive trade imbalance with the US. By taking the congratulatory phone call from the Taiwan president, he broke with US diplomatic tradition and implicitly raised doubts about the United States' One China policy, a red line for Beijing. He criticised Germany for keeping the Euro weak, which he said favoured Germany's trading position. He delayed taking Angela Merkel's phone call but had the time to receive UK's Theresa May at the White House and this move seemed to indicate a preference for May rather than Merkel as the United States' main European partner. He indicated a reluctance to support South Korea and Japan in a crisis and seemed to want them to either pay more for their defence or to go nuclear. India escaped Trump's wrath, and his call to Narendra Modi revealed that Trump saw India as a friend and ally. His call to the Australian

prime minister showed his irritation with the secret agreement he had signed with Obama which required the US to take in 1,250 refugees who were being held in a detention centre offshore by Australia. Trump called this a ‘dumb deal’ and abruptly ended his call with the Australian PM, a significant departure from protocol with a valued ally in the region. His position against Mexico was well known, and he insisted that Mexico would pay for the wall and he maintained his opposition to the immigration problem south of the US border. His latest target is the American media and the ‘low-life’ leakers from the intelligence community in the US.

A question to consider is whether this pattern of inflammatory statements and actions is the work of a deranged, mentally unstable person or whether it is a sign of a calculation in each case which is meant to result in a new transactional arrangement. There is a book *A First Rate Madness*, by Nassir Ghaemi, a US MD, published by Penguin in New York (2011), which assesses convincingly the links between leadership and mental illness.

Ghaemi argues that ‘in times of crisis, we are better off being led by mentally ill leaders than by mentally normal ones’ and that ‘non-crisis leaders succeed in ordinary times’ (p. 2). Ghaemi notes that mentally disturbed people are creative and they have a specific tool set. ‘Make them fear and dread us’ (chap. 1) and ‘work like hell and advertise’ (chap. 2). These are the mantras in the link between mental illness and leadership. For the purpose of our discussion of Trump’s foreign policy, let us accept that America is a deeply divided country and its polarities are on party lines, between the rich and the poor, between different geographical regions (e.g., California and New York versus the middle America rust belt), and between a melancholy view of America’s (Trump’s) current domestic and international position and optimism of the future and, on the other hand, the Obama/Hillary Clinton view that America is on the right path of progressive liberalism and globalism. From Ghaemi’s description and analysis, it appears that Trump’s personality fits into the narcissistic type – self-centred, self-glorifying, and prone to impulsiveness, propagating

falsehoods or half-facts, and some rash actions. But on the other hand, note that it took Trump – an outsider in the Washington political establishment and a political novice without practiced lawyerly and establishment skills – a mere 18 months to capture political power in the most important position in the world. He is making people fear, for example, the illegal immigrants; he works like hell, tweeting late into the night and disrupting the American and world leaders from Europe to Asia-Pacific and the Middle East; he advertises his plans and achievements; and it is amazing that he is dominating the daily news cycles with mainstream media and the experts in CNN and other networks do not know what is coming next and each day he moves on to a new topic. Undoubtedly, he is unconventional and unpredictable. However, his unpredictable statements carry messages and through his cast of experienced cabinet officers and the vice president, he is able to send negotiable messages. NATO is obsolete, says Trump, but US commitment to NATO defence against aggression is firm, but most of NATO members except for five (the US, the UK, Poland, Estonia, and Greece) have not paid their dues and the US may, in the words of the defence secretary, ‘moderate’ its NATO commitment. Furthermore, why has NATO done nothing about the terrorism which has been raging in the Middle East for years, asks Trump. Clearly the NATO secretary general and European leaders like Angela Merkel have a lot to answer and to think about their leadership qualities and abilities in a troubled world. Here Trump is the unpredictable, dangerous, and irresponsible speaker who does not use the practised art of diplomacy, but his choices about his cabinet appointments and his important advisers, like the new national security adviser, a warrior-scholar, shows that he understands the importance of good governance. Sun Zhu would be impressed that Trump’s ‘irrational’ statements and his rational choice of senior officials put pressure on world leaders and opponents to figure out which way the Trump administration will actually move forward. This duality is a challenge for the strategic analyst. For example, by threatening the Mexicans with dire actions and abuse and then by sending his defence

secretary and secretary of state to Mexico, Trump seems to be moving towards a negotiated settlement with the Mexicans. On the other hand, by telling the Australian prime minister that the Turnbull-Obama deal to send 1,250 refugees to the US was a 'dumb deal', he is putting Australia, a reliable US partner in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region, on notice that they should not take him for granted. By taking the call from the Taiwan president, he has put Beijing's Xi on notice that Trump has an option to put Taiwan into play and to undermine Xi's position as the core leader and China's so-called core interests, which keep expanding and which bother China's neighbours who all have territorial disputes with China. In other words, is Trump a shrewd manipulator of the insecurities of other nations and the polarities in the world system or is he a political and strategic neophyte who does not know what he is talking about? This paper explores the former proposition on the premise that he is a divider, not a unifier, as divisions – within America and on the world scene – help him to exploit deals to his advantage, and America's. His guiding principle is his and the national interest, not ideology, because he is a token Republican, having been a Democrat in the past, and he will deal with the Republican Congress to secure his legislative agenda and his electoral promises. The 'Art of the Deal' remains his Bible in government.

RUSSIA AND CHINA IN TRUMP'S ACTIONS

Currently, at the time of writing this article, Russia is a hot political potato in American domestic politics but in the long term, China and North Korea and the South China Sea are the pivots which Trump may be able to develop, as Obama clearly could not despite his soaring rhetoric, which shifted from his search for the Arab Spring to his pivot in Asia Pacific. Trump's world view in the East appears to consider a pivot towards the Indo-Asia-Pacific world, which brings India into play along with the Indian Ocean and which increases the size of the basket of issues which Xi and his associates must grapple with. These are discussed below.

TRUMP, CHINA, AND NORTH KOREA

Members of the Trump administration – Defence Secretary Mattis, Secretary of State Tillerson, Ambassador Nicki Haley, in the UN, and Vice President Pence – have made it clear in public statements in Europe that they will hold Russia to account for its actions in Crimea, Ukraine, and the cyber attacks in the US elections and future cooperation depends on actions by Putin. Because Russia policy is now a hot political potato in Washington's politics, movement in the policy sphere is unlikely in the foreseeable future. On the other hand, even though the context of Trump's approach to China and North Korea is complicated by North Korean missile tests and by Xi's red line against change in the One China policy, there is fluidity in the volatile East Asian situation, which indicates prospects of movement on the US side and the possibility of movement by China and North Korea towards Trump as well. Chinese spokespersons claim that as a result of Trump's withdrawal from the TTP, China is the likely successor to American leadership in Asia. This claim has an element of bravado, and it fails to recognise that Xi and China are in trouble. North Korea is no longer a Chinese client and recent events – North Korean missile tests; China's refusal to accept a large coal shipment from North Korea, which is its main export and source of foreign exchange; and the killing of Kim Jong NAM, who had China's protection – shows that Xi faces a dilemma about North Korea. It cannot deliver North Korean restraint in the missile sphere, it cannot pressure the North too much for fear that it may implode, and the North Koreans may enter China as refugees and its current policy of applying limited pressure on North Korea has not borne results. Kim Jong II is holding out for direct talks with Trump administration – Trump has not ruled that out – and a deal between the two could lead to the unification of the Korean peninsula and the establishment of a permanent US presence in the area across the Yalu. This would bring the Korean war to an end and create a nightmare for China in the north when its expansion

of power and influence has been towards the south – in the South East Asian region and in the South China Sea. Having solidified its alliances with Japan and South Korea as per the recent visits of Abe to the US and the visits of Defence Secretary Mattis to South Korea and Japan and the reaffirmation of US protection to their interests in East Asia, an extension of American influence in North Korea would terminate the buffer status of the north and open up a powerful front against Xi. The stalemate of the Korean war because of People's Republic of China's intervention, the alignment between China and North Korea during the Cold War and thereafter, and the retreat of Russian influence in the Far East following the end of the Cold War and the end of the Soviet Union freed Beijing to expand to the south, to consolidate its position in Tibet and Xinjiang, to expand its influence in Pakistan and build a position in Gwador, to mount naval patrols in the Indian Ocean, to expand into South China Sea, and to build commercial and political ties with South East states. But if Trump is able to make a strategic deal with North Korea, China's strategic calculus could be upset. Whether or not Trump can do it or does it, the possibility that Trump's attitudes towards Taiwan and North Korea are unpredictable creates uncertainty for Beijing's leaders and strategic planners. In short, Trump has three options to consider: (1) Build up a de facto Two China policy with the presence of a strong Taiwanese economic and democratic life without formal declaration of independence and strong US economic links and military aid under the Taiwan Relations Act, which is mandated by the US Congress and possibly supplemented by US maritime presence in the region. (2) Open a direct dialogue with North Korea, bypassing China as the intermediary or the filter of messages from the North, and in effect shaming Xi for its double-faced approach of acting in the name of the world community and regional security and protecting its alliance with the North. (3) Show Beijing's crowing that it is the successor to American leadership in Asia Pacific as a bubble which may burst if the US develops its narrative that its aim is to build commercial and strategic links in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region, which has a vast

geographical, economic, and strategic canvas. This way Trump may be revealed as a crafty fox rather than an out-of-control public tweeter. However, the reader should be aware that this is a scenario, not a fact, and a possibility, not an established trajectory, in Trump's Asia policy.

DOMESTIC POLITICS AND FOREIGN POLICY OF THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

There is an intimate connection between the two because Trump's loosely worded and at times inaccurate tweets make him an object of adverse media commentary which has reached appalling limits. The media has been relentless in hammering him every day and mostly publishes and comments in a negative way, and there is a nexus between the Democratic opposition to Trump and the Republicans and the mainstream media, especially CNN and the *New York Times*, and intelligence leakers; this nexus was in place during the campaign and has carried over after Trump's inauguration as president. This means that Trump's political capital is being consumed in dealing with a negative press and the Democratic party opposition, which has adopted a policy of resisting Trump on all issues. Clearly, the Democrats have declined to accept defeat in the presidential election and intend to mire the Republicans in endless controversy. Trump's foreign policy is consequently being developed in a highly polarised political environment, and American democracy is now a broken system and hardly a model for other countries to consider. This indicates considerable reputational damage to the American brand, and the fault lies not only with Trump and his sharp statements, but also with the refusal of the Democratic Party that middle America accepted the Trump message while Hillary Clinton's popular support came from California and New York.

The effect of domestic politics on foreign policy is clear in three major cases:

First, Trump administration's harder stance on immigration – the deportation of undocumented criminal people who have had sanctuary in the US for

years, if not decades, under Obama and previous administrations – has had a negative effect on US-Mexico relations. By deporting Mexicans and threatening to tax their remittances to families in Mexico, Trump is affecting the flow of many billions of dollars. This in the long run will bring down the costs of medical and other benefits to the undocumented workers and negatively affect the social peace of Mexicans. Building of the wall between Mexico and the US – apart from the cost – is not a solid solution because such walls deter or diminish the flow of migrants but will not end the dedicated smuggling cartels and individuals who need to return to America to connect with their US-born children. In short, the deportation issue has external implications, and these have to be resolved between Mexico and other hemispheric countries. Many undocumented workers in the US come from countries south of Mexico, who were allowed to enter Mexico on short-term visas and who then crossed over to the US illegally. At some point, if this pattern of migration continues, Mexico will need to build a wall to protect its southern border to control the migration from central American and other south American states, and this may be an issue for the hemispheric countries to address as a regional and human security issue in the long term.

The second domestic issue with international implications concerns Trump's temporary ban to pause the flow of refugees and immigrants from seven Middle Eastern countries: Libya, Somalia, Syria, Iran, Iraq, and others. Trump's first attempt at the ban was stayed by the US courts, but he intends to issue a revised executive order which is likely to be challenged in US courts. The US Constitution forbids discrimination on a religious basis, and since Trump had called for a Muslim ban in his campaign speeches even, if the new ban is successful it has sent a signal to the Muslim world that Trump is anti-Muslim although he denies it and he has cast his policy as president in terms of national security and the inability of the US government to verify the background of applications from these Middle Eastern countries. It remains to be seen if this tempers Islamic terrorist activity directed against the US or whether it inflames the ISIS and increases jihadi recruitment.

The third domestic issue concerns Russia. Trump, in the past, saw the possibility of a deal, but US politics has prominent personalities in the US Congress, such as Senators John McCain and Lindsay Graham, who have long Cold War memories, which were revived by the evidence of Moscow's meddling in the US presidential elections, which is seen to have hurt Hillary Clinton's campaign because of the release of the e-mails relating to the bias of the Democratic National Party against Bernie Sanders and in favour of Clinton. As a result, the Trump administration is on the defensive about Russia policy and the pressure from the press was intense enough to lead to the resignation of General Michael Flynn as the national security adviser because of his Russia contacts before the installation of President Trump. These matters are now the subject of investigation by the FBI and various US congressional committees.

But beyond the issue of meddling lies a bigger debate about Putin's interventions in Ukraine, his takeover of Crimea, his opposition to NATO expansion, and his cyber warfare activities in the US and in Europe. There are two major lines of thinking in American politics which precede the rise of Donald Trump. The first, propagated by Henry Kissinger and George Kennan, is that one should respect Russia's strategic interests in the region and one should not poke the Russian bear. The second, propagated by Z. Brzezinski, Carter's strategic adviser, urged that the end of the Cold War was an opportunity for the US to build a transatlantic community that went from Washington to Ukraine and expanded NATO. This was the framework and intellectual justification for NATO expansion and this rationale was the basis of Obama's European NATO and EU policy. Trump was leaning towards the first point of view, but the domestic controversies have stalled his effort to build a constructive relationship with Putin until the basis for it emerges in American politics.

TRUMP FACES TWO COLD WARS

The American political system now features two cold wars. The first one has a domestic base. It involves Trump and his cabinet members and his

baggage is that he is not a Washington insider and he criticised the 'swamp' in the US government and elected politicians in both political parties. The swamp includes the 'deep state' – the faceless and powerful intelligence community and the liberal media – and these elements have enjoyed the patronage of the Obama government and felt humiliated by the Trump victory and surprisingly many had expected publicly a Clinton victory. Obama and the tenured officials in the intelligence world are regarded as the source of the leaks against Trump and his appointees, but it is a fact that the Trump administration's tendency to speak in an undisciplined manner has produced self-inflicted wounds in the press and congressional criticisms. The first cold war also includes two senior Republican senators, John McCain and Lindsey Graham, two well-known anti-Russia cold warriors from the pre-Trump years, and they have two motives to question Trump's Russia orientation and links. One is personal because Trump savaged Graham and McCain on his road to the presidency and one can understand the anti-Trump animus for this reason. But the second reason concerns Trump's Russia policy. They question Putin's and Trump's motive(s) in making nice with each other and Trump's refusal to release his income tax records, which create doubts about his dealings with the Russians. The policy differences over Russia policy blend into the revival of the second cold war, which involves the two Republican senators, the Democratic party (which wants an issue to bring down Trump or his cabinet members), and the intelligence community and the foreign policy bureaucracy, which stand to lose billions in budgetary support if the cold war was to end. These cold warriors have a legitimate policy reason to avoid the end of the second international cold war. They point to Putin's belligerence in Europe and Ukraine and in the takeover of Crimea and the expansion into the Mediterranean and in Syria and the rise of Russian influence in Turkey and growing prospects of its increase in Libya.

The public issue concerns Russian meddling in the recent presidential elections, but these cold wars have deep roots and history. After the USSR's collapse, the Cold War took a different turn, but it did not end in

terms of bureaucratic politics in Washington, DC. The Democratic Party believed that Russia was a defeated political system and Obama called Russia a 'regional power'. This did not sit well with Putin, with his memory of Russian glory. More importantly, Russian interests in Europe and Ukraine were ignored. There was regime change in Libya, which had not been authorised by the UN resolution, which sanctioned the use of NATO air power but not a regime change. This occurred as a result of Secretary Clinton's aggressive action, which gained Obama's support. During this time, NATO also expanded into eastern Europe, which was counter to private Washington assurances to the Kremlin, but the US took a legal view that the expansion was for self-defence and there was no formal undertaking by the US government against expansion. Then from 2004, the US government and some government-supported NGOs started a process of regime change in the Ukraine, which led to the ouster of the pro-Moscow Ukraine president and with the confidence, rather overconfidence, Secretary Clinton and members of the State Department and the US ambassador Paul McFaul supported street demonstrations in Moscow to bring reform and democracy to Russia. Putin blocked, McFaul was sent packing, and as a professor at the Stanford University, he is busy commenting on Russian policy. He claims to love Russia, but he cannot return there because he is on the sanctions list of Russia since 2014. The evidence about US interventions came from intercepted and publicised (by Moscow) phone calls from the US assistant secretary of state for European affairs, who felt confident enough to propose names of Ukrainian leaders who would serve Ukraine's and America's policy ends. As a result of the pattern of such activities over a number of years since the end of the Cold War, in 1989–1990, Moscow lost trust in Washington's statements and actions and then took countermeasures, which in its view were justified to protect Russian interests and international prestige. It gained on both grounds as a result of its diplomacy to isolate the US in the Middle East by building Russian ties with Syria and Turkey and its effort to do the same in Libya by cutting Obama's US out of the loop.

This history of the pattern of US actions against Russian interests and Russian actions against Western interests produced bad blood between the two powers. The current investigations in Washington, DC, about Russian involvement in the election campaign and the hype surrounding this created by the liberal media do nothing to address and resolve the root causes of the two cold wars. Trump's desire to make nice with Putin and to find common ground in some areas was the straw which broke the proverbial camel's back of American cold warriors and produced the strong anti-Russian reactions which fit nicely into the narrative about the history from 1945 to 1989–1990. Our readers, however, should carefully evaluate the causes/effects of interactions and remember that for many political and media operators in Washington, DC, in the words of an ex-congressional committee chair, the only exercise these people get is to take a leap because of a leak by a faceless and an unnamed source to a predetermined conclusion! The reader should stay tuned to further developments in the Washington political arena, where the gladiators are fighting.

Pakistan Organisations Involved in Terrorism in India

RAHUL BHONSLE

*Organisations are instruments for the implementation of national policies; thus before undertaking a survey of Pakistan's organisations involved in conduct of terrorism in India, an overview of Islamabad's policy on terror is necessary. Pakistan's use of terror as an instrument of state policy has been well established. While there was a level of denial by the establishment – the Pakistan Army and the intelligence agency Inter-Services Intelligence, popularly known as the ISI, also known as the deep state – Pakistan's political and former military leaders have openly accepted use of terrorism as state policy. Former president Asif Ali Zardari, who is presently the co-chairperson of the main opposition party Pakistan People's Party, in a speech to civil servants in Islamabad on 8 July 2009 (as president of the country) stated, 'Militants and extremists emerged on the national scene and challenged the state not because the civil bureaucracy was weakened and demoralized but because they were deliberately created and nurtured as a policy to achieve short-term tactical objectives. Let's be truthful and make a candid admission of the reality.'*¹

THE POLICY AND ORGANISATIONAL LINKAGE

Pakistan's former army chief and president has been open in admitting that terrorist groups were formed to target India in Kashmir. In an interview to the German magazine *Der Spiegel*, Musharraf after he had relinquished office said in 2010, 'They [underground militant groups to fight against

India in Kashmir] were indeed formed,' and added, 'Yes, it is the right of any country to promote its own interests . . . when India is not prepared to discuss Kashmir at the United Nations and is not prepared to resolve the dispute in a peaceful manner.'² Again in October 2015, in an interview with the Pakistan television news channel Dunya News, Musharraf stated, 'In 1990s the freedom struggle began in Kashmir . . . At that time Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and 11 or 12 other organizations were formed. We supported them and trained them as they were fighting in Kashmir at the cost of their lives.'³

That terrorist groups are instruments of state policy is also evident by the lack of action to neutralise these even when so required by international law or demanded by major allies of the country as the United States of America. In *Country Reports on Terrorism 2015*, the State Department states, 'Pakistan has also not taken sufficient action against other externally-focused groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), which continued to operate, train, organize, and fundraise in Pakistan.' These groups are active in Jammu and Kashmir, while the LeT operates in the hinterland as well.⁴

Most recently a report by an Indian website *First Post* stated that special instructions were given to then the ISI DG Rizwan Akhtar and national security advisor Nasser Janjua to travel to provinces and instruct ISI sector commanders not to interfere if action was taken by the civil government against terrorist groups operating in the province. These groups were hitherto considered hands-off for the civilian government. The instructions were given reportedly after the chief minister of the province of Punjab Mr. Shabaz Sharif, who is also the brother of the prime minister, complained that they were not able to act against groups due to restrictions by the ISI.⁵ Thus, evidently, groups like the Lashkar-e-Taiba operate as a state within a state, over which provincial governments have no control.

India has from time to time highlighted the pursuit of terrorism as an instrument of state policy by Pakistan. Most recently, exercising the

right of reply in response to the statement by Pakistan under Agenda Item 4 at the 34th Session of the Human Rights Council on 15 March 2017, India highlighted the danger of terrorism emanating from Pakistan, ‘world’s terrorism factory.’⁶ Speaking at the 3rd Counter Terrorism Conference in New Delhi on 14 March 2017, the vice president of India, Mr. Hamid Ansari, outlined how Pakistan’s use of terror as a state policy has been acknowledged globally. He said, ‘A case in point is Pakistan’s use of extremist groups as an instrument of foreign policy that is well documented, with the U.S. State Department’s Country Report on Terrorism for 2015 stating that some United Nations-designated terrorist organizations continue “to operate within Pakistan, employing economic resources under their control and fundraising openly.” Essentially, the Pakistani military has reared “good” terrorists for cross-border missions while battling “bad” militants that fail to toe its line.’⁷ In instances of assertions on other occasions, Home Minister Rajnath Singh, on a visit to Bahrain in October 2016, highlighted Pakistan’s active support to terrorist groups. Rajnath Singh appraised Bahraini interior minister Rashid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa of support and glorification of terrorists such as Hizbul Mujahideen leader Burhan Wani by Pakistan.⁸

INTER-SERVICES INTELLIGENCE: INSTITUTION FOSTERING TERROR

The ISI is the main institution which is actively engaged in supporting terrorist groups in Pakistan as well as in the region, with the main objective of ‘bleeding India with a thousand cuts’. While the ISI first supported insurgent groups in the North-East, this was gradually extended to terrorism in Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir and in the 1990s attained a pan-Indian footprint. Mumbai 26/11 or the complex terrorist attack launched on the commercial hub of India on 26 November 2008 remains the largest strike in the hinterland in India as well as one of the biggest globally. The ISI is accused of nurturing the terrorists who belonged to the LeT, the group

behind the attack. The ISI's Joint Intelligence/North (JIN) and Joint Intelligence Miscellaneous (JIM) are actively involved in fostering militancy in Jammu and Kashmir and conduct intelligence operations across the border. The Joint Signal Intelligence Bureau (JSIB) provides the monitoring and intelligence communication support.⁹ These bureaus are officered and manned by the Pakistan Army. In addition, retired ISI officials are actively involved in supporting terrorist activities as well as political subversion within Pakistan – giving the ISI the profile of a state within a state.

With this organisational network, the ISI provided financial support to the militant groups in the North East in the 1950s. In the 1980s the ISI raised pro-Khalistani groups in Punjab and also pro-separatist groups in Jammu and Kashmir. The ISI evolved support to the Indian terrorist groups into an institutionalised process which comprises control of cells, financing, equipping, arming, and coordination with the Pakistan Army for infiltration across the border and the Line of Control (LoC). In addition the ISI supports criminal groups such as the Dawood Ibrahim network, which carried out a series of bomb explosions in Mumbai on 12 March 1993, leading to a large number of fatalities. Dawood has been rewarded by the ISI with a sanctuary in Karachi and operates from there, apart from having a footprint in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The Indian government's efforts to seek extradition of Dawood have failed to yield result as the Pakistan government claims that he is not residing in the country.

The ISI constantly widens the scope of operations to open new fronts against India. The support provided by the agency to the LeT to operate from Myanmar, exploiting the disaffection amongst the Rohingya community, has come to notice. Indian intelligence agencies revealed that the ISI has set up a terrorist camp in Marisot, on the Thailand-Myanmar border, to train Rohingya Muslims to launch terror attacks. The ISI used the Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami Arkana (HuJI-A), headed by Maulana Abdul Kuddus, a Rohingya Muslim of Pakistani origin. It is believed that the ISI could be using these groups and infrastructure to support terrorist groups in north-east India.¹⁰

KEY TERRORIST GROUPS

GENERAL

The strategy for organisation of cross-border terrorism by the ISI envisages creating a number of parallel groups of varied hues with the core ideology of enmity against the Indian state. The aim is to have options to trigger violence through a number of arms rather than placing all the eggs in the same basket, so to say. For instance, to foster terrorism in Punjab in the 1980s, the ISI supported at least four major groups: Babbar Khalsa International (BKI), Khalistan Commando Force (KCF), Khalistan Zindabad Force, and International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF). Many of these groups are dormant at present, yet their leadership and skeleton organisation are being supported with the aim of expanding the base as and when opportunity is presented. A similar approach is followed in the case of groups operating in Kashmir. Some of the main groups supported by the ISI are covered as per succeeding paragraphs.

LASHKAR-E-TAIBA/PASBAN-E-AHLE HADIS

The Lashkar-e-Taiba, along with its overt grouping Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD), based in Muridke near Lahore in Pakistan, nominally headed by Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, has been the largest and most favoured terrorist group supported by the ISI in fostering terrorism in J&K and rest of India. The group has been active since 1993. The LeT is banned by India under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, included in the Terrorist Exclusion List by the US government on 5 December 2001 and designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) on 26 December 2001. It is also a banned organisation in Britain since 30 March 2001 and proscribed by the United Nations in May 2005, and even the military regime of General Pervez Musharraf banned the Lashkar-e-Taiba in Pakistan on 12 January 2002. However, the outfit operates with impunity, changing names each time the sanctions committees catch up. In February this year, Pakistan placed Hafeez Saeed under house arrest, believed to be to avoid sanctions under the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) process.

The LeT's professed ideology has manifested beyond the narrow aim of challenging Indian control of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The Lashkar's 'agenda', as outlined in a pamphlet titled 'Why are we waging jihad', purportedly now includes the restoration of Islamic rule over all parts of India and bringing about a union of all Muslim-majority regions in countries that surround Pakistan. Osama bin Laden and Abdullah Azzam, the godfather of international jihad, are said to have supported the LeT to establish training camps in Afghanistan's provinces of Kunar and Paktia.¹¹

Lashkar-e-Taiba has an active profile in Jammu and Kashmir. The group has also carried out attacks in other parts of India. Ajit Kumar Singh, writing in the *South Asia Intelligence Review* in 2010, states, 'The LeT's current objectives, described in a poster at a March 23, 2010, rally, in slogans superimposed over an image of the burning Taj Mahal Hotel in Mumbai, are to "free Kashmir, Pakistan's lifeline, from the enemy"; work for the "freedom of the Muslims of Gujarat, Hyderabad, Ahmadabad and the rest of India"; and to "save Pakistan's parched rivers".'¹² Founders of the LeT, Hafiz Mohammed Saeed and Abdur Rehman Makki, 'deputy' to Jamaat-ud-Dawa, are now seen as mentors of the organisation.

The cadre strength of the LeT in Pakistan and support organisations is estimated to be in thousands, which operate under the umbrella of a charity group. The numbers in Jammu and Kashmir vary and at present could be estimated to be below 100. The cadres are well armed with AK series rifles, LMGs/HMGs, hand grenades, rockets, pistols, mortars, explosive devices, and a sophisticated communication system.

In the hinterland, the Lashkar-e-Taiba has been active mainly in the metros, including Mumbai, Kolkata, New Delhi, Bangalore, and Hyderabad. It is also reported to be having cells in Uttar Pradesh. As per Ajit Kumar Singh, 'Indian missions in Bangladesh and Nepal are also under threat by the LeT and Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI) combine while within the country the group has extended operations to the hinterland in Delhi, Pune and Kanpur.'¹³ It was also reported by India's then minister of state

for home affairs Ajay Maken in Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) on 27 April 2010 that the LeT was developing links in the Maldives and other neighbouring countries, while Admiral Robert Willard, commander of the US Pacific Command, in his testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on 27 March 2010, expressed fears of the LeT operations in South Asia in general, including Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives.¹⁴

JAISH-E-MOHAMMAD/TAHRIK-E-FURQAN

The JeM is formed, controlled and manned by Pakistani fighters. The group was launched on 31 January 2000 by Maulana Masood Azhar in Karachi after he was released in a hostage swap following the hijacking of the Indian Airlines Flight IC814 in the end of 1999. The JeM's operations were mainly confined to Jammu and Kashmir; however, the terrorist attack on the Pathankot airbase on 1–2 January 2016 is attributed to the JeM. The 13 December 2001, the Parliament attack in New Delhi is also attributed to the JeM. As per the *Long War Journal*, the US government has listed JeM as a foreign terrorist organisation and its leader, Masood Azhar, as a specially designated global terrorist for their ties to al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups. In a 2010 designation of Masood Azhar, the US Treasury Department said, 'JeM recruitment posters in Pakistan contained a call from Azhar for volunteers to join the fight in Afghanistan against Western forces.'¹⁵ Most recently India has sought UN sanctions on Masood Azhar. However, a technical hold by China has prevented the same, indicating the clout that the outfit enjoys in Pakistan, for it is believed that Beijing is blocking action in deference to Islamabad's request.

HARKAT-UL-MUJAHIDEEN/HARKAT-UL-ANSAR/KARKAT-UL-JEHAD-E-ISLAMI

The Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM), also known as the Harkat-ul-Ansar (HuA) at different times, is an outcome of the ISI's efforts to keep the terrorist

groups under the thumb by providing varying support to each. The HuM's operational capabilities were curtailed after formation of the JeM by Masood Azhar. JeM had weaned away several HuM cadre and other resources. The group has been listed by the US as a foreign terrorist organisation and the leader, Fazle-ur-Rahman Khalil, is a specially designated global terrorist by the United States. HuM is also linked to al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), the announcement of establishment of which was made in September 2014. The HuM has a global profile and yet is sheltered by the ISI.¹⁶

HIZB-UL-MUJAHIDEEN/HIZB-UL-MUJAHIDEEN PIR PANJAL REGIMENT

The Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (Hizb or HM) was formed in the Kashmir Valley in September 1989, with Master Ahsan Dar as its chief, as the militant wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), an active radical party which spans the Indian subcontinent. Hizb was formed by the ISI to counter the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), which advocated independence for the state of J&K. The outfit supports accession of Kashmir to Pakistan. The Hizb is headquartered at Muzaffarabad in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) and is the largest indigenous Kashmiri outfit, which is headed by Syed Salahuddin, who is also head of the United Jihad Council (JUC), an umbrella organisation for terrorist groups active in the Valley. HM is the most active terrorist group in Jammu and Kashmir and draws a large number of Kashmiri youth. These are increasingly from the younger generation and today are even active on the social media. The last major leader of the group was Burhan Wani, who was killed in an encounter with the security forces on 8 July 2016. The group has huge public support, and the killing led to a period of civil unrest that lasted almost six months. Pakistan's prime minister Mr. Nawaz Sharif openly declared Wani a martyr, confirming support to the insurgency in the Valley at the highest level. The HM has separate subdivisions in the Valley as well as in the Jammu region, though its presence is mainly restricted to Kashmir. The present cadre strength is estimated to be between 200 and 400.

AL-UMAR-MUJAHIDEEN

Al-Umar-Mujahideen (AuM) is another group in the Valley which was formed in December 1989 due to a split in the JKLF, by Mushtaq Ahmad Zargar. The AuM is linked with the moderate separatist leader Maulvi Umar Farooq, after whom the outfit is named. The leadership at its peak was elaborate with a ‘chief commander’, two ‘deputy chief commanders’, a ‘military adviser’, a ‘publicity chief’, an ‘intelligence chief’, and ‘district commanders’ and ‘regimental commanders’. However, at present the cadre strength is low and the group is virtually defunct.

Al Badr

Al Badr, formed in June 1998, advocates the right of self-determination in accordance with the United Nations resolutions. Al Badr has roots to the 1971 Pakistan Army–led massacre in the then East Pakistan. The group also operated as part of the Hizb-e-Islami (HIG), of warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, in Afghanistan during the 1980s. The Al Badr is reportedly a breakaway faction of the Hizb and is known to have active support of the ISI. The group also fielded foreign mercenaries operating in Kashmir in the late 1990s. The outfit was reportedly headquartered at Mansehra in Pakistan, with a camp office in Muzaffarabad, PoK. At its peak, the Al Badr was active in the Anantnag, Baramulla, Budgam, Srinagar, and Kupwara districts of the Kashmir Valley. However, at present the group’s activities are low key, with only occasional terrorist attacks attributed to it.

Babbar Khalsa International

BKI is one of the terrorist outfits supported by the ISI and some non-resident Indian Sikh groups who continue to propagate the ideology of Khalistan after terrorism was completely eliminated from the Indian state of Punjab. This is amongst the oldest and most organised Khalistan terrorist groups based on the ideology of establishment of an independent Sikh state. The group has support base across the world, from Sikhs based in the US, Canada, the UK, Germany, France, Belgium, Norway,

Switzerland, and Pakistan. The main activities of the group include serial blasts and other similar disruptive activities and are presently low key.

Khalistan Commando Force

The KCF is a remnant of the original terrorist group propagating Sikh separatism. The KCF, along with the BKI, the Khalistan Liberation Force, and the Bhindranwala Tigers Force of Khalistan, clashed repeatedly with the Indian Army forces during the 1980s and early 1990s, as well as with the Punjab police. The KCF is presently defunct.

International Sikh Youth Federation Formation

The ISYF, proscribed in India under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) on 22 March 2002, was founded in the United Kingdom (UK) in 1984 after Operation Blue Star, conducted on 5 June 1984, to flush out Sikh terrorists from the Golden Temple complex, in Amritsar. Amrik Singh and Jasbir Singh Rode, a nephew of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, founded the ISYF. The ISYF has a footprint in many countries with Sikh migrant population, though terrorist activities of the group have not been evident of late and it mainly indulges in propaganda and fund collections.

THE FUTURE

AQIS & THE ISIS

Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent and the Islamic State of Iraq and al Shams (ISIS) are the latest entrants into the sphere of terrorist groups attempting operations in India. Their status at present is unclear, yet there are concerns that the ISI is using these to promote terrorism in India. In response to a question in the Rajya Sabha, the Ministry of Home Affairs on 17 December 2014 outlined that ‘interrogation of arrested terrorists by the investigation agencies has disclosed that Pakistan Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) is promoting terror activities in India by providing shelter, patronage and funding to terrorists of all hues.’ The response is based on

a video uploaded on 3 September 2014 containing the speech of Sheikh Eyam Al-Zawahiri of al-Qaeda, in which he announced the establishment of a new wing of al-Qaeda, namely al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS). Asim Umar and Usama Mehmood have been appointed as the 'amir' and 'spokesperson' respectively of AQIS.¹⁷ AQIS is an umbrella organisation which has affiliates owing allegiance such as the Indian Mujahideen (IM), thereby providing a footprint in many parts of the country.

The encounter on 7 March 2017 in the heart of Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh, and a bomb attack on a train in Madhya Pradesh, which was attributed by some to youth-inspired by ISIS propaganda have led to concerns over the influence of the group in the country. However, the Ministry of Home Affairs has not categorised this as an ISIS strike. The Government of India has vide a notification of 16 February 2015 banned the ISIS, including all the nom de guerre used by it, such as Islamic State, Islamic State of Iraq and Levant, and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria/ Daish.¹⁸ The Ministry of Home Affairs claims that there are only 75 youth who have been arrested by the National Investigation Agency and others are being kept under surveillance to prevent them from joining the global terrorist group. The minister of state for home affairs, Shri Hansraj Gangaram Ahir, in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha on 15 March stated, 'As per available information, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) and States Police have registered cases to investigate the alleged links of individuals with ISIS and 75 individuals (Kerala – 21, Telangana – 16, Karnataka – 9, Maharashtra – 8, Madhya Pradesh – 6, Uttarakhand – 4, Uttar Pradesh – 3, Rajasthan – 2, Tamil Nadu – 4 and 1 each from Jammu & Kashmir and West Bengal), have so far been arrested.'¹⁹

In an input which has been derived from a number of sources 22 youth from Kerala who moved out the country to join the ISIS are currently in Afghanistan.²⁰ Recent reports indicate that one of these was killed in an American drone attack. Reports of the number of Indians fighting for

the ISIS in Iraq and Syria has not been confirmed. There are some indications that 23 Indians are in the ISIS, of which 17 are from southern states. Four belong to Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, four are from Kerala, three from Tamil Nadu, four from Maharashtra, one from Jammu and Kashmir and one from Uttar Pradesh said a report by a mainstream news channel, News 18.²¹ The spread of Salafism in southern India appears to be the main reason for youth from this belt joining the group. However, estimates on the numbers fighting can be relied upon and more youth fighting in Syria and Iraq cannot be ruled out.

Some analysts in India, such as Sushant Sareen who works with the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), believe that the Pakistan agency ISI could exploit the ISIS to launch attacks in India. ‘. . . India could see attacks that are either inspired or directed by the ISIS, or attacks that are launched by the ISI (through its auxiliaries commonly referred to as “non-state actors”), or even an attack that is carried out by people who think they are working for ISIS or AQIS, but who actually have been working inadvertently for the ISI,’ writes Sareen in *Mail Today*. Sareen believes that for the ISI the outfit is not as important as the cause of disruption in India and is willing to provide support to the ISIS, particularly in setting up a base in India. He writes, ‘While the ISIS will have some difficulty in setting up base in India, the ISI has a network and capability to provide weapons, explosives, training, funding and take care of logistics much more efficiently and effectively than the ISIS.’²²

Abhinandan Mishra, writing for Sunday Guardian Live, on the basis of the arrest of suspects and their interrogation, states that the ISI is working towards ‘strengthening the presence of the terrorist organisation Islamic State of Iraq and the Syria (ISIS) in India.’ The ISI is believed to be using the conduit of Ansar-ul-Tawhid fi Bilad al-Hind (AuT). AuT is formed by former IM fighters who pledged allegiance to the ISIS in September 2014.²³ It would not be farfetched to infer support of the ISI to anti-India outfits, including the global militia the ISIS.

SUPPORTING GROUPS IN INDIA & NEPAL

Support to terrorist groups and fissiparous organisations operating against the Indian state remains one of the core strategies of the ISI. Maloy Krishna Dhar, a former joint director, Intelligence Bureau, and author of *Open Secrets and Fulcrum of Evil-ISI-CIA-Al Qaeda Nexus* has listed a large number of such outfits which he has classified as Pakistan-inspired Tanzeems, some of which have a terror profile, such as the Students Islamic Movement in India (SIMI) and the IM. Their span the country, and Dhar lists at least 10 which are based in southern India and 14 in the east and the north-east. In addition, Dhar has identified a number of organisations supported by the ISI in Nepal for anti-India activities.²⁴ Interestingly, a recent report of ISI hand in a train accident in Kanpur on 20 November 2016 outlines the possibility of Nepal-based criminal gangs being supported by the Pakistan intelligence agency under the tutelage of Dawood Ibrahim.²⁵

CONCLUSION: WHY SUSTAINMENT OF TERROR GROUPS BY PAK IS THE WAY AHEAD

The terrorist organisations outlined above may seem to be having a low profile at present, with many either partially defunct or having very low cadre strength. Yet there is a need for caution for these represent the underpinnings of the strategy of sustainment of terrorism by the Pakistani state and deep state. This motive is not likely to go away soon. As per noted American scholar on Pakistan, C. Christine Fair, the Pakistan Army has three aims in pursuing terrorism against India: contest India's dominating influence in South Asia, gain strategic depth in Afghanistan, and liberate Jammu and Kashmir. This is not a short-term strategy as per Fair but is underpinned by the national ideology of 'two-nation theory'. Terrorist groups, some of which have transnational footprint beyond India, are proxies in pursuit of the strategy.²⁶

Terrorism is an inexpensive option for Pakistan to achieve its ideological objective of a nation divided on the basis of religion and can

be calculated in terms of millions of dollars in single or double digits as compared to a defence budget that exceeds \$7 billion. Conservation of combat strength of the military, deniability, and cover provided by nuclear weapons to prevent conventional retaliation by India are other well-established advantages accruing to Pakistan from cross-border terrorism. Pakistan has also been virtually blackmailing the international community. Thus calls for a dialogue by both countries persist even when there is a major terrorist attack sponsored by Pakistan in India.²⁷ Given these truisms, Fair believes that the terrorist attacks such as that in Pathankot on 1–2 January 2016 are not just attempts by the Pakistani establishment to derail the peace process but a part of the long-term strategy of ‘revisionist agenda against India’.²⁸

The involvement of the state in pursuit of the strategy is all pervasive and includes the army, the ISI, and the diplomatic corps. The latter provides the information and intelligence cover for subversion and sabotage. This was evident in 2016 as a Pakistan High Commission employee in New Delhi was arrested and later expelled on charges of spying. He named 16 other ‘staffers’ who were also allegedly involved in an espionage ring as per police reports.²⁹ The penetration of the spy ring is evident, with some of the personal staff of political leaders also tapped by these agents. Indian foreign secretary S. Jaishankar warned Abdul Basit, high commissioner of Pakistan to India, that diplomatic officials should not indulge in inimical activities against India.³⁰

Thus India cannot let the guard down and has to relentlessly pursue a comprehensive strategy to counter terrorism from across the border.

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Pangs of the Dragon: China's Involvement in India's Internal Security Threats

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The internal security scenario of India is troubling; challenges are numerous, and the extent and scope of threats are complex, varied, and vast. No other country in the world confronts so many threats, with so much intensity, all at the same time. Since independence, India has confronted at least one major upheaval every decade that threatened its internal security in a major way. In the late 1940s, immediately after independence, it was the massive refugee flows into and out of the country and the bloody communal violence that shook the young nation. In the 1950s, problem erupted in the north-east of the country in the form of Naga insurgency. The third decade of independent India (the 1960s) witnessed 'Naxalism', which continues to recur from time to time in various parts of India. In the 1970s, insurgency in the north-east of India took firm root, gradually engulfing the whole of the region in the subsequent years. Punjab exploded in the 1980s, to the extent of claiming the life of an incumbent prime minister of the country. In the 1990s, militancy took birth in the state of Jammu and Kashmir and it continues till date; Naxalism also recurred, especially in the state of Andhra Pradesh, around the same time. In the 2000s, a new form of violence in the name of 'jihadi terrorism' came to haunt India. In the present decade, Naxalism, also now popularly known as left-wing extremism (LWE), has spread to other parts of India, especially the tribal-dominated central India.

Overall, more than 50 per cent of India is said to be affected by one or the other of the threats, which are not just 'law and order' problems. They have an increasing external dimension, falsifying conventional wisdom that internal security threats are caused mainly by internal sources. External support, with the intent to destabilise India, has added to their complexity. In the external abetment, how far has China been involved? What were the motives behind? Was it to create a 'million mutinies' in India, or just to deter India from behaving in a manner that is in opposition to Chinese national interests? What has been the *modus operandi*?

PANGS OF THE DRAGON

China's strategy towards India has three elements: encirclement, envelopment, and entanglement. 'Encirclement' is a kind of 'strengthened Chinese strategic presence in Tibet, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Burma and in the Indian Ocean island states.' 'Envelopment' is essentially 'integrating all of India's neighbours into the Chinese economy.' 'Entanglement' is 'exploiting India's domestic contradictions and multiple security concerns.'¹ The 'entanglement' part of the strategy is what threatens the internal security of India the most. However, unlike Pakistan, the involvement of China in meddling with India's internal security is not a simple story of sub-conventional warfare. It is more nuanced and complex in both direct and indirect forms. The role of China in India's internal security threats can be analysed broadly in three phases: Mao's era, Deng's period, and the recent phase.

I MAO'S ERA: 'EXPORT OF REVOLUTION'

Under Mao Zedong, China supported revolutionary insurgencies throughout the world. China felt that it was the obligation of the Communist Party of China (CPC) to aid 'all fraternal parties which are struggling for a just cause and for their liberation.'² A report to the Ninth National Congress of the CPC in 1969 asserted that

The revolutionary movement of the proletariat of the world and of the people of various countries is vigorously surging forward. The armed struggles of the people of southern Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Burma, Malaya, Indonesia, India, Palestine and other countries and regions in Asia, Africa and Latin America are steadily growing in strength. The truth that 'political power grows out of the barrel of a gun' is being grasped by ever broader masses of the oppressed people and nations.³

The spirit of *Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai* pervaded between India and China, and the former was tagged as 'neutrals' in the initial years. Yet, what made China take interest in 'national self-determination struggles' in various parts of India? Partly it was Beijing's perception that its southern neighbour had been turning into an 'anti-China base'.⁴ Nor did the Chinese take lightly Indian sympathy to Tibetan refugees, who were fleeing the state repression. China also suspected India's covert hand in the Khampa rebellion in Tibet.⁵ But the actual support by China to rebel movements of India gradually commenced after the 1962 Sino-Indian conflict, when bilateral relations between the two countries hit rock bottom. China preferred to have a chain of friendly buffer states all along the boundary with India, in addition to the existing ones: Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan.⁶ In the east, it thought that by supporting north-east secessionist groups, the buffer envelope would be complete.

For Beijing, patronage to insurgent groups in north-east India looked ideal not only because of geographical proximity but also due to the region's isolation from the Indian mainland and the existence of an external support network created and sustained by the then East Pakistan. Most importantly, the north-eastern militant groups had also looked towards countries like China and Pakistan, with whom India had unfriendly relations, for support. Rebel groups thought China was better, since it had won the 1962 conflict, compared to Pakistan, which lost the 1965 war to India.

China also was preferred, especially by Naga militants, to internationalise their cause.⁷

The first to reach out to the Chinese for help were the Nagas. In a letter dated 5 May 1966, Scato Swu, 'kedhage' (president) of 'Federal Government of Nagaland', wrote to the president of People's Republic of China (PRC),

... as it has become impossible for us to resist unaided the military might of Indian Armed Forces, we have to look to your Government and to your people for any possible assistance in any form so that we may properly safeguard our sovereignty through the liberal hand of your people. Our government feels the paramount necessity of your kind recognition of the existence of the Naga nation and the legality of the Federal Government of Nagaland.⁸

The letter identified T. H. Muivah as a 'plenipotentiary' of 'command' who was sent to China for training. Apart from providing military training, the Chinese imparted the Naga rebels with politico-ideological indoctrination and arms.⁹ Rebel leaders like Muivah and Swu participated in high-level meetings with the Chinese leadership in Beijing. They were told by the Chinese to follow the Vietnamese model of struggle to gain sovereign Nagaland – carve out liberated zones and gradually consolidate these before declaring a sovereign state. They were also promised all possible help.¹⁰

Taking cue from the Nagas, other groups in the region, especially the Mizos and the Meities, got hooked to China. The Mizo National Front (MNF), under Pu Laldenga, by and large depended on East Pakistan for its external support in the beginning. However, when East Pakistan fell in the 1971 war, the MNF initially took refuge in Myanmar and then turned to China in 1972. But the linkage gradually waned as peace process between the MNF and the Government of India commenced in the mid-1970s.

With the formation of a 'Coordination Bureau' in the late 1960s between Pakistan and China to coordinate the training, arming, and funding of insurgency movements in the north-eastern region, the joint venture got institutionalised.¹¹ However, when East Pakistan became Bangladesh, the north-east rebels found it difficult to enjoy the same patronage with India-friendly Mujib regime in Dhaka. As a result, north-east rebel groups' reliance on China got intensified post-1971.

Some of the rebels from Manipur, who got influenced by the Chinese ideology and support, started gravitating towards Beijing for help. Interestingly, the Manipuri rebels went via Nepal to reach Lhasa as against the 'Kachin corridor' (northern Myanmar) route taken by the Nagas and the Mizos. They were so influenced by the Maoist ideology during their stay in China that on their return in September 1978, they named their newly formed militant group 'People's Liberation Army' (PLA), the same name as that of China's army. The Chinese also found in Manipuri PLA more ideological commitment than other groups of the North East.¹² The extent of Maoist influence also got reflected in the objective of the PLA: to liberate Manipur through armed struggle and establish 'a society based on socialistic principles'.¹³ The group regarded China as the 'fountainhead of international proletarian revolution'.

However, when it came to China's involvement in Naxalism, it was more of inspirational than any sort of direct material support. The Naxalbari uprising in West Bengal of May 1967 was keenly noted by China. The official newspaper of the CPC, *People's Daily* (dated 5 July 1967), called the revolt a 'pearl of spring thunder [that] has crashed over the land of India'. It observed that the 'revolutionary group of the Indian Communist Party has done the absolutely correct thing' by adopting the revolutionary line advanced by Chinese leader Mao Zedong. The editorial went on to conclude that 'a single spark can start a prairie fire' and that 'a great storm of revolutionary armed struggle will eventually sweep across the length and breadth of India'.¹⁴

Charu Mazumdar, one of the pioneering leaders of the Naxalite movement, famously remarked: 'China's Chairman is our Chairman and

China's path is our path.'¹⁵ Even today, the Maoist China is regarded by the Indian Maoists as 'the rightful leader of the revolutionaries across the world' and Maoism as 'the perfect ideology' to deal with 'class enemies' and establish a 'New Democracy' through a 'protracted people's war'. Some call it as a 'proxy war by China being waged against India' although there is no evidence of China's direct involvement as of now.¹⁶

II. DENG'S PERIOD: 'SLOW DOWN'

Under Deng Xiaoping's leadership, Beijing launched the ambitious and comprehensive 'Four Modernizations' policy in 1978. His policy of 'reform and opening' subordinated the revolutionary and anti-imperialist elements of China's foreign policy to the overriding imperative of economic development. It was strongly felt that a shift in the focus of the CPC's external outlook – from 'supporting the left-wing groups and opposing the revisionists' to 'working for an international environment favourable for reform and opening-up and the modernisation drive' – was necessary.¹⁷

In due course, Mao's 'export of revolution' phase in the Chinese foreign policy came to a naught. Instead, China's foreign and security policy in the 1980s basically followed Deng's so-called 24-character strategy: 'Observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide our capacities and bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile; and never claim leadership.' China suspended its support for Communist insurgencies throughout the world, and its general approach to diplomacy became non-ideological.¹⁸ This perhaps partly explains why the intensity of China's support to the north-east insurgency dwindled in the late 1970s, if not dried out completely.

At around the same time, it should be noted that there was gradual normalisation of Sino-Indian relations. In July 1976, both countries restored ambassadorial-level relations. Higher political contacts were revived with the visit of the then Indian external affairs minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, to China in February 1979. Huang Hua, vice premier and foreign minister of China, reciprocated Vajpayee's visit in June 1981. It was the first visit

by a senior Chinese leader to India since 1960. During the visits, the two governments agreed to commence negotiations on mutual understanding, boundary, and other issues. But the full normalisation of bilateral ties at the summit level commenced only in December 1988, when the then Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi visited China. During this visit, both sides agreed to develop and expand bilateral relations in all fields on the basis of the 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence'.

From the Chinese side, Premier Li Peng visited India in December 1991. Prime Minister Narasimha Rao visited China in September 1993. The Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the India-China Border Areas was signed during this visit. President R. Venkataraman paid a state visit to China in May 1992. This was the first head of state-level visit from India to China. President Jiang Zemin's state visit to India in November 1996 was similarly the first by a PRC head of state to India. The four agreements signed during his visit included the one on confidence building measures (CBMs) in the military field along the LAC, covering adoption of concrete measures between the two militaries to enhance exchanges and to promote cooperation and trust.

Beijing also became more realistic in its support to insurgencies. As Julian Paget points out, 'No one likes backing a loser, particularly in an insurgency.'¹⁹ Naga insurgency got diluted after the Shillong Accord of 1975. But China-trained Thuingaleng Muivah and Isak Chisi Swu, who opposed the Shillong Accord, went underground and formed the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) in 1980. Its linkage with China, although at a low-key level through Burmese territory, continued. Muivah, during his stint in China as a trainee and as a representative of Naga National Council (NNC), was influenced by the socialist philosophies and guerrilla warfare methods of Mao.²⁰ However, a split in the NSCN between Isak-Muivah (IM) on the one side and Kaplang on the other in 1988 led to loss of base for the IM faction in Burma. This factor *inter alia* gradually forced NSCN-IM to declare ceasefire and open talks with the Indian government in 1997.²¹

However, at around the same time, in the mid-1970s, the north-east militant groups got an alternative support base in Bangladesh. The military leaders of the newly independent state, who usurped power after assassinating Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, 'revived the Pakistani policy of sheltering, arming and training rebel groups from north-east India.'²² At a later date, in the early 1990s, militants of the region, especially United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), and Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO), found Bhutan as an alternative base for operation. Had it not been for Bangladesh and Bhutan, the north-east insurgents would have tried to gain at least unofficial access to and support of China. For sanctuary, militants always prefer a proximate place rather than a distant base.

III. THE RECENT PHASE: 'REVIVAL, BUT A DELICATE BALANCE'

The revival of Chinese involvement in India's internal security threats commenced roughly in mid-1998, when Sino-Indian relations witnessed strains in the wake of nuclear tests by India. Earlier, the then defence minister George Fernandes' remarks identifying China as 'potential threat number one' did not go well with Beijing. But what made China more upset was Indian prime minister A. B. Vajpayee's letter to the then US president Clinton, explicitly linking the nuclear tests *inter alia* to threat from China. Although India tried to downplay the 'China Threat Theory', the dip in the level of confidence resulted in the cancellation of the Joint Working Group meeting scheduled later that year. Bilateral contacts did resume gradually from the very subsequent year, but the nuclear tests and the terms of reference clearly revealed 'some of the deep and enduring cleavages between the two countries, but also the high costs and dangers for both countries associated with too direct or intense confrontation' in a nuclear environment.²³ It was plausible that Beijing considered reviving the sub-conventional warfare strategy against nuclear India at this juncture.

Some experts identify 2005 as yet another tipping point of China's outlook towards India when the US and India signed the 'New Framework

for the India-U.S. Defense Relationship' on 28 June 2005. The scope of the engagement was vast enough to cover various aspects of defence cooperation. As Stephen Cohen puts it, 'India suddenly seemed more attractive to the United States as a balancer to China.'²⁴ The Bush administration's decision to accommodate India on the issue of nuclear cooperation that accesses space-related and dual-use high technology was justified on the premise that it 'would speed up India's pace for economic transformation and growth and strengthen its geopolitical importance, buttress its potential as a hedge against a rising China and encourage it to pursue economic and strategic policies aligned with US interests.'²⁵

However, New Delhi has dismissed the idea that India could ever be used as a bulwark against China. At best, it is considered that a close partnership with the United States would allow India to stop closing the economic gap with China and also force China to take India seriously. In doing so, New Delhi has not walked into 'a US trap by becoming overtly anti-Chinese' and has tried to maintain a balance between the two countries by maintaining that 'our aim is to have cooperative ties with both China and USA. It is not zero-sum game. I do not think that large and dynamic countries like China can be contained.'²⁶ Months before signing the Indo-US Nuclear Deal, India inked a joint statement with China in April 2005 establishing a 'Strategic and Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Prosperity', reflecting the 'readiness of the two sides to resolve outstanding differences in a proactive manner without letting them come in the way of the continued development of bilateral relations.' Subsequently, during the Chinese president Hu Jintao's visit to India in November 2006, both sides issued a joint declaration containing a 'ten-pronged strategy' to intensify cooperation in all areas and to give greater content to the India-China strategic and cooperative partnership. In January 2008, Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh visited China; a joint document entitled 'A Shared Vision for the 21st Century of the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China' was issued, outlining common positions on a number of international and some bilateral issues.

Despite India's conscious balancing act, Beijing has been looking at the developments in the strategic landscape with utmost concern and suspicion. More than the nuclear deal, China was far more concerned about the increasing defence cooperation between India and the United States. Beijing came to a firm conclusion that defence ties between the two democracies would have tremendous implications for the military balance in Asia. China came to the conclusion that in achieving its aim of 'building indirect threats to India', it was better to 'use Pakistan, India's main adversary, as a frontline surrogate'.²⁷ Beijing and Islamabad shared the same objective but only differed in the methodology: if you can do it by proxy, then avoid direct involvement. This was considered to be a viable low-cost option. China thought, 'India's definition of national security is confined to the traditional spheres of military and territorial security'²⁸ and the window of nontraditional security threats was considered left wide open for exploitation. This is when India's north-east and the militant groups of the region came to be seen as a 'soft underbelly' to 'dismember or to bleed'.²⁹

Reflecting this view, an article by one Zhan Lue, titled 'If China Takes a Little Action, the So-Called Great Indian Federation Can Be Broken Up' argued that 'China in its own interest and the progress of Asia, should join forces with different nationalities like the Assamese, Tamils, and Kashmiris and support the latter in establishing independent nation-States of their own, out of India.'³⁰ Even if one could dismiss this as a private view of some 'nationalist Chinese bloggers', one cannot miss the line of thinking that China could employ a strategy of 'murdering with borrowed knives' against India.³¹ The article did not go unnoticed by Indian secessionist groups and had its own impact on their thinking.³²

The rebels of the North East, apart from their nuisance value to the Indian security forces deployed in the region, are also amenable to motivation by the Chinese to attack key Tibetan leaders in exile based in India and to gather vital intelligence information about Indian long-range missiles that are directed towards China and troop deployments along India-China

borders.³³ In the present period, Chinese intelligence agencies have taken over the role of Mao's CPC. Chinese intelligence, in a matter of pragmatic manoeuvring, 'sends agents to meet with rebels to assess the ground realities and needs of its anti-Indian clients and likely forwards them discarded arms stock as the People's Liberation Army continues to modernize in a bid to raise China's military stature in the Asian realm.'³⁴

Apart from reviving contacts with old militant groups like the NSCN and the PLA, China's linkage has now extended to touch new groups, like the ULFA, the NDFB, and the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF). In the wake of crackdown on anti-India militant groups by the Awami League government under Sheikh Hasina in Bangladesh, the ULFA's military chief Paresh Barua fled to China in early 2009.³⁵ This means that the Chinese-ULFA connections would have been present much before. According to Bertil Lintner, sometime in the mid-1990s, 'ULFA units trekked through northern Burma to the Sino-Burmese border areas and even managed to open an unofficial "office" in the Chinese frontier town of Ruili' and 'managed to buy weapons from Chinese dealers as well as former rebel groups that also had made peace with the Burmese government.'³⁶ Barua reportedly based himself in Yunnan and guided operations of the ULFA, although a section of the militant group under Arabinda Rajkhowa is in talks with the Government of India. The 'anti-talk faction' of Paresh Barua has been getting Chinese assistance in terms of arms transfers and training to its cadres.

To please his new hosts, Barua had issued statements like 'With government of India preparing to install BrahMos cruise missile in Nagaland and Akash missile in Assam targeting China, the north-eastern region including Assam will become the target of Red China thereby jeopardising lives of the people of the region' and appealing to the people of Assam to 'resist India army from stockpiling missiles and aircrafts thereby converting it to a target of powerful China.'³⁷ According to a China watcher, 'Beijing doesn't mind him [Paresh Barua] being there, as a tit-for-tat for India allowing the Dalai Lama to have a base in McLeodganj.'³⁸ The

continuous linkage between the NSCN-IM and China reached to the extent of the militant group hosting a permanent representative, Kholose Swu Sumi, in China to act as a regular interface. According to Antony Shimray, nephew of NSCN-IM's general secretary, Thuingaleng Muivah, and the chief arms procurer of the group, who frequently travelled to China for the purpose, the Chinese suggested that the north-eastern guerrillas come together under one organisation to facilitate better interaction.³⁹ The Manipur-based People's Liberation Army (PLA) was in charge of evolving a 'United Front' that would be a 'conglomerate of militant groups comprising cadre strength of over 30,000 militants.'⁴⁰

The involvement of the Chinese intelligence agency People's Security Bureau came to the fore with the arrest of a 39-year-old Chinese woman, Wang Qing, for travelling illegally to Nagaland and meeting NSCN leader Muivah there.⁴¹ Wang had arrived in Delhi on 1 January 2011 posing as an employee of a Chinese timber company but later travelled without permission to Nagaland and met Muivah at NSCN-IM headquarters in Hebron in the guise of a Hong Kong-based TV reporter. The Chinese intelligence, apart from liaising with the anti-Indian militant groups leadership based in its territory, also sends agents to meet with rebels to assess the ground realities and their needs.⁴²

NSCN-IM leader T. Muivah himself admitted arms flow from China to the militant group.⁴³ Confessions of Antony Shimray threw more light on the arms linkage. Arms and ammunition were procured from Chinese arms companies like China Xinshidai and NORINCO and were transported in small consignments either through the sea route and delivered at Cox's Bazar or transited by land through Myanmar.⁴⁴ According to *Jane's Intelligence Report*, the arms transfers through Myanmar were facilitated by the United Wa State Army (UWSA), a Myanmarese militant group. The UWSA has found it lucrative to act as an intermediary. For the transshipment through sea, South East Asian gun runners are used and the north-east militant groups like ULFA 'use their own trawlers for reshipment of arms at the outer harbour and ferrying them to the Chittagong coast

for their own safety and security.’⁴⁵ The list included ammunition rounds, AK series rifles, M16 automatic assault rifles, sub-machine guns, pistols, snipers, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, light machine guns, and even RDX.⁴⁶

Although there is no evidence to suggest China's direct support to Indian Maoists, one cannot deny indirect or, more precisely, ‘passive’ links between the two. It is known that Naxals have good networks with several key militant groups of north-east India. In fact, with some groups, the exact modalities of working – formal, semi-formal, and informal – are spelled out through ‘memoranda of understanding’.⁴⁷ Chinese small arms find their way to the ‘Red Corridor’ mainly through the north-east militant groups.⁴⁸ Some suggest that ‘ultra-leftist elements’ in the PRC (like, for instance, ‘Mao Zedong Flag Net Executive Council’), claiming absolute loyalty to Mao Zedong and firmly against the present Chinese regime's reformist course both at home and abroad, are in favour of supporting Maoist groups in India and Nepal.⁴⁹

Also during the current phase, Beijing has gone beyond the traditional mode of support to Indian insurgencies and tried to explore fields like cyber space in its pursuit of sub-conventional warfare against India. There cannot be a better low-cost option with greater sophistication than cyber domain. Cyber warfare has turned out to be one of the serious threats to Indian security. In the past decade or so, China seems to have perfected the ‘art of cyber war’ aimed at ‘collecting sensitive information, but also on achieving military effects capable of causing economic harm, damaging critical infrastructure, and influencing the outcome of conventional armed conflicts.’⁵⁰ According to a report by the Munk Center for International Studies in the University of Toronto, more than 35 sensitive computers belonging to the NSCS, the Indian Air Force, the army's Military Intelligence, and Indian missions in Kabul and Moscow were accessed by a Chinese cyber network after they got infected by ‘GhostNet’.⁵¹ The methodology adopted by China is simple: use a network of cultivated and loosely controlled ‘patriotic’ and mercenary hackers, which allows the state to

deny responsibility, something similar to the method used in the case of small arms.

CONCLUSION

There is a blurring distinction between internal and external security threats.⁵² Some go to the extent of arguing that ‘India does not face an external threat in the conventional sense’ but only internal security threats from external sources. These external sources, consisting of both state and non-state actors, combined with those anti-state forces within India, have made the situation more complex on a day-to-day basis. External sources of threats to India’s internal security spring from almost all countries in its neighbourhood. China is not an exception. While analysing China’s involvement in India’s internal security threats, several findings come to the fore:

- It is generally understood that the ‘spirit of revolution’ during Mao’s period was high and Mao’s China indiscriminately exported and supported revolutions abroad. This is not fully true. Even when Mao was around, ‘national interest’ and ‘diplomatic needs’ were given preference over ‘revolution’. In the Indian case, ‘revolution’ was not at all a motivation for China’s involvement. In fact, most of the insurgent groups in the North East having Chinese connections are ethnic nationalists rather than Communists. The MNF pointedly refused to use Maoist rhetoric even though hundreds of its guerrillas were trained in China. Interestingly, China’s involvement in Naxalism was more of inspirational than in any sort of direct material support.
- While the policy of deliberate ‘stimulation’ to insurgents of South East Asia included an entire range of methods of practical support, China’s support to Indian militant groups was limited to training, arms, and funding to an extent. While the Chinese effectively transformed the Viet Minh from elusive bands of guerrillas into a formidable conventional army, the Indian militant groups were left on their own.

- Beijing wanted a peaceful Myanmar for its trade and transit. But in the Indian case, it did not do anything like that because China was not going to achieve anything by having a peaceful North East. On the other hand, it suggested a 'United Front' of north-east militant groups for easy handling.
- Involvement of China also depended on the character of the leadership and internal developments in China. While Mao enthusiastically gave a go-ahead for China's export and support of 'revolutions' abroad, Deng Xiaoping, through his policy of 'reform and opening', subordinated the revolutionary and anti-imperialist elements of China's foreign policy to the overriding imperative of economic development. The dynamics of involvement reflected the characteristics of 'third' and 'fourth' generation leadership as well. Their role was subtle.
- China's involvement was also based on the state of bilateral relations. In the initial years, China conducted its relations with India under the larger framework of 'Panchsheel', in which a policy of assurance against subversion was also included. But the course witnessed a U-turn in the late 1950s, when bilateral relations soured. When bilateral ties improved in the late 1970s and 1980s (roughly coterminous with Deng's period), the level of Chinese support to Indian militant groups dwindled. At the same time, one cannot assert that the Chinese fully abstained from their involvement during Deng's period; the meddling continued throughout, but with less intensity.
- Interestingly, loss of external assistance has forced some of the militant groups of the North East to negotiating tables, like the MNF, the NSCN, and the ULFA. When China's involvement was less in the late 1970s and 1980s, there was stability in the North East.
- Militants of the North East turned to China as and when they found it difficult to operate in the vicinity of India – Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Myanmar. It is, therefore, important for India to secure

fullest cooperation from its neighbours. Security forces in these countries are now willing to take on the Indian militant groups based in their territories. But they are not strong enough. India has to strengthen them through training, arms, and other requisite resources.

- China-trained militants got more of leftist ideological orientation. The dynamics of north-east militancy would have been different had Laldenga gone to China for training and got its support and had Muivah and Swu not gone to China and sought its help. In this context, Paresh Barua's presence in China now is a serious concern.
- Of the three phases, the present phase is the most dangerous because of diversification of China's involvement: arms, offer of sanctuary to Indian militant leaders, and cyber warfare. Earlier, China was supporting insurgent groups, especially those based in the North East. But now China has been adopting more of the 'Pakistani model' of involving its intelligence agencies in the sub-conventional warfare strategy. In the recent phase, the role is subtle but broad-based.
- Compared to Pakistan, China poses less threat to India's internal security. But the nexus between China and Pakistan to achieve the larger strategic objective of undermining India's growth is a matter of serious concern. At the tactical level, the aim of China and Pakistan is to tie down Indian security forces in counter-insurgency operations and weaken its conventional warfare potential.
- How did India respond? From time to time, India has taken up the issue of China's involvement with Beijing both diplomatically as well as through the aegis of counter-terror cooperation. However, China has categorically denied providing any help to Indian insurgent groups, particularly the ULFA, United National Liberation Front (UNLF), NSCN-IM, and PLA.⁵³ But what surprises is the low level of confidence at which the issue is raised and discussed with the Chinese. India's official position on the entire gamut of China's

involvement has been soft. One agrees that opinions and assessment on the state of China's involvement should be expressed after careful judgement based on the long-term interests of building a stable relationship between the two countries. But there is nothing wrong in having a structured mechanism to discuss this issue specifically.

Simultaneously, all routes of Chinese interactions with Indian militant groups should be blocked. This requires enhancement of India's border security apart from cooperation of India's other neighbours, like Myanmar, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Bhutan. Except Bhutan, none of India's neighbours are serious about or consistent in cooperating with India to tackle insurgents in the region.

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