



The Debt of Blood

Sami Ullah Malik

The Debt of Blood

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنكُمْ وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي
 الْأَرْضِ كَمَا اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ وَلَيُمَكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِينَهُمُ
 الَّذِي ارْتَضَى لَهُمْ وَلَيُبَدِّلَنَّهُم مِّن بَعْدِ خَوْفِهِمْ أَمَانًا يَعْبُدُونَنِي
 لَا يُشْرِكُونَ بِي شَيْئًا وَمَن كَفَرَ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ
 ﴿النور: ٥٥﴾

Allah has promised those who have believed among you and done righteous deeds that He will surely grant them succession [to authority] upon the earth just as He granted it to those before them and that He will surely establish for them [therein] their religion which He has preferred for them and that He will surely substitute for them, after their fear, security, [for] they worship Me, not associating anything with Me. But whoever disbelieves after that - then those are the defiantly disobedient.

Attribution

**In the name of the holy blood of
martyrs who sacrificed for
Pakistan**

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-:Preface:-



Sami Ullah Malik

The history of the world has revolved around power, authority, and vested interests, and buried within the dark corners of this history are tales like those in "**The Debt of Blood.**" These are the stories of the oppressed who have suffered under the tyranny and exploitation of imperial powers, of nations that have been deliberately denied development and independence under the label of the "Third World," and of war-torn regions where the sanctity of humanity has been desecrated in blood and chaos. This book seeks to uncover these narratives and bring to light the grim realities of global politics, which are often intentionally obscured.

"**The Debt of Blood**" delves into the complex conspiracies and exploitative strategies devised by foreign powers to seize the resources and financial reserves of the Third World. The aim of these schemes is not merely economic exploitation but the creation of political anarchy to install puppet rulers who dance to their tune. This game not only plunges nations into internal chaos but also inflicts irreparable damage on their social fabric.

Regions such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Palestine, and Kashmir stand as stark examples of the ruthless policies of these foreign powers. Afghanistan, embroiled in continuous warfare since the Cold War, has been left ravaged by conflict. Iraq, once a stable and prosperous nation, now symbolizes civil strife, terrorism, and political turmoil. Libya, which was among Africa's wealthiest countries, is now plagued by tribal disputes and uncertainty. The Syrian civil war has claimed the lives of millions and displaced countless others. The oppressed people of Palestine and Kashmir have been struggling for their basic rights for decades, yet imperialist interests continue to exacerbate their suffering.

This book attempts to understand the root causes of these issues and expose the conspiracies behind the wars, civil conflicts, and human tragedies that result from them. It is not just a narrative but an echo of the voices of those who have suffered these circumstances yet refused to remain silent.

"**The Debt of Blood**" does not only analyse historical events but also endeavours to uncover the future ambitions of these powers. The purpose of this book is to enlighten readers with the reality that the devastation and destruction witnessed in various parts of the world are not mere coincidences but the result of meticulously planned actions.

Through this book, we aim to comprehend how imperial powers impose wars on Third World countries to hinder their development and exploit their resources by subjecting them to instability. This process not only damages the economies of these nations but also destroys their social and cultural structures.

This book also tells the stories of unsung heroes who emerged as beacons of hope amidst such circumstances, who raised their voices against oppression, and fought for their rights. It speaks of the dreams that were buried, the innocent lives lost in the name of power, and the cries of the oppressed who still await justice.

"**The Debt of Blood**" is not merely a reminder of the wounds inflicted by imperial powers on the oppressed people of the world but also a call to action to unite against this exploitative system. It is a mirror that reflects how the game of power, greed, and resources plundering in global politics tramples human rights and morality.

Each chapter of this book contains the tale of a new tragedy, compelling us to raise our voices against these injustices and to understand the schemes that are seeking to enslave the people of the Third World.

"**The Debt of Blood**" is not just a book but a pledge that we will advocate for the rights of the oppressed and struggle against this cruel system. It is a beacon of hope that, one day, this world might break free from these conspiracies and walk the path of peace, justice, and equality.

Sami Ullah Malik

London UK

2030Hrs

23 January 2025

Did We Fulfill the Dream? An Assessment of the Creation of Pakistan

The Debt of Blood: The Memory of Martyrs and Their Sacrifices

The study of the Pakistan Movement has always been a passion of mine. Reading about the invigorating events of this movement, along with the struggles, dedication, and sacrifices of its workers and leaders, fills me with a sense of pride and excitement. This year, as August approached, I once again delved into the topic of the Pakistan Movement to refresh my memories. While studying, I came across several new facts and insights, opening up new avenues of reflection.

However, as always, I also encountered numerous distressing stories of the helpless Muslim men, women, children, and the elderly who were subjected to brutal violence by Hindus and Sikhs. Some of these stories were so heart-wrenching that they stuck in my mind. Despite trying repeatedly to shake them off, I couldn't, and I thought of sharing these events and the resulting questions with my fellow countrymen, hoping it might lighten the burden on my heart.

On June 3, 1947, the announcement of India's independence and the creation of a separate Muslim state called Pakistan was made. The time set for this transition was midnight on August 14-15, 1947. This significant moment also coincided with the holy night of **Laylat al-Qadr**, and the next day was the 27th of **Ramadan**, followed by **Eid al-Fitr** three days later. For Muslims, this was a blessed moment in every sense – a blessed night, a blessed day, a blessed month, and a blessed year. Muslims all over India, whether they were to be part of the proposed Pakistan or not, were overjoyed. Celebrations were being planned, congratulations were exchanged, and chants of “Allahu Akbar” echoed everywhere. The slogans “Pakistan Zindabad” and “Quaid-e-Azam Zindabad” reverberated across streets, villages, and cities.

But on the other side, the Hindus were consumed by rage. They could not fathom how their vast majority, their powerful religion, their prominent leaders, their large number of Congress-affiliated Muslim scholars, and their overt and covert British support could be defeated by a single frail leader, **Muhammad Ali Jinnah**. Using his intelligence, honesty, strong character, legal expertise, unwavering stance, and relentless leadership abilities, Jinnah had successfully won Pakistan. For the Hindus, this was equivalent to splitting “**Bharat Mata**” (Mother India) into two. They mourned, and grief enveloped them. Out of rage and hatred, they unleashed a storm of violence against Muslims, and the atrocities that followed were so horrific that humanity will forever lament them.

As Muslims from areas near the proposed Pakistan, fearing the grave situation, left behind their homes and belongings to migrate to Pakistan, Hindus and Sikhs attacked them with swords, daggers, and spears. Entire cities, towns, villages, and neighborhoods were cleansed of Muslim presence. Men, women, the elderly, and children were slaughtered, while young girls and women were subjected to mass rape before being killed, burned, dismembered, or taken as slaves. More than a million Muslim men, women, children, and elders were killed, while millions were injured or left disabled for life. Nearly 150,000 young Muslim girls and women were kidnapped. Stripped of safety, millions of Muslims from different regions of India, suffering losses, violence, and despair, migrated to Pakistan with nothing but the clothes on their backs.

Now, let's reflect on a few of the countless tragic incidents that occurred during this period.

One such story is narrated by a victimized Muslim woman herself:

"Following the announcement of Pakistan's creation, communal riots erupted across northern India. Basic human decency vanished, and neighbors who had lived together for years turned into each other's enemies. In this situation, my father, after consulting other villagers, decided to migrate to Pakistan. However, even this decision was intolerable to the Hindus and Sikhs. Just as we were about to leave, armed groups from neighboring villages arrived and, within moments, slaughtered all the men. The young girls were raped in front of their mothers. Even today, when I recall those horrific scenes, I cannot believe that human beings could sink to such levels of depravity.

My innocent younger brother stood frozen in fear like the other children. When he saw several of these beasts advancing towards me, ignoring my pleas, he ran in front of me to shield me. That's when a frail Hindu struck a powerful blow with his axe on my brother's neck, severing his head, which rolled away. Laughing demonically, the murderer said, 'If I had known your neck was so weak, I wouldn't have tainted my axe with your filthy blood. Now I'll have to cleanse it with Ganges water.' He then rejoined the group, continuing his savage acts. Despite all this, the earth did not split, and the heavens did not fall.

After killing all the elderly women, the girls were taken to a mansion where they stood in line. One by one, the men took turns showing what it meant to be 'the best of creation.' Newcomers stood at the back, waiting for their turn. By some fortune or misfortune, I was among the few who survived. After that, I was passed from one man to another. Finally, a man named Sohan Singh took me into his home and married me. Seven years later, when Sohan Singh passed away, his younger brother Mahinder married me."

This was just one of the many stories of unimaginable horror faced by Muslims during the partition of India and the creation of Pakistan. The price of Pakistan was paid in blood, suffering, and unspeakable loss.

A Painful Incident from Hoshiarpur:

The night in Hoshiarpur was incredibly long—the second night after the attack on Chowk Sirajan. The number of attackers was increasing. On the first day, fifty young men were martyred: on the second day, sixty. Before evening, a few heart-wrenching incidents occurred that greatly boosted the resolve and spirit of the Muslims. Even the elderly and the youth began joining the battlefield. From the afternoon, hand-to-hand combat was ongoing. A young Muslim fell, with blood spurting out. His house was directly in front of the battlefield, and a small child from the house witnessed the scene. The women were in shock, and the child, crying "Father, Father!" ran out towards the Hindus and Sikhs. The Sikhs caught the child and shouted, "Look at what we will do to this Muslim's child today." The Muslims were dumbfounded, unable to comprehend how the child had reached there. The Sikhs tossed the child into the air and impaled him on a spear as he came down. The child's scream was so piercing that even the heavens seemed to tremble, and the child died there, writhing in agony.

(Source: Urdu Digest, 2016)

A young man, who migrated to Pakistan with a convoy, described what he witnessed on the journey in these words:

"Along the way, we encountered a few scattered Muslim women, whom we brought along with us. The Sikhs and Hindus had fully unleashed their cruelty. As we left Hoshiarpur, we found a woman lying wounded. My father lifted her, only to discover that her legs and chest had been mutilated. She was from a well-known family. When my father realised this, he couldn't hold back his tears. The woman only said, 'Go on, Uncle, don't be sad. Despite everything, Pakistan has been made. I'm glad that I could be of some use to the Ummah.'"

"As we crossed the canal, we were shaking with emotion. From one side, we heard someone groaning. An elderly doctor, Nasiruddin, approached. He asked, 'Who is it?' A woman's voice replied. He rushed over and found a woman drenched in blood. He gave her water and tried to dress her wounds, but it was of no use. Before dying, the woman said, 'In the battle of Sham Chaurasi, my father and seven brothers, my uncle and his four sons were all martyred. My three sisters drowned in the canal, fighting to protect their honour. My mother was killed. I hid, but they found me. When they got close, I injured two of them with a knife and sickle. In a fit of rage, they did this to me.' Before taking her last breath, the woman said, 'Send my salaam to Pakistan.'"

"The Muslims of Jalandhar made tremendous sacrifices and worked with an unparalleled sense of duty and pain for the cause of Pakistan. Their efforts are a shining chapter in Pakistan's history. In the Jalandhar camps, there were many heart-wrenching incidents. I remember a woman who was on the verge of death. When she found out that we were heading to Pakistan with a convoy, she called an elder over and said, 'These are my jewels. All the men in my family have been martyred. Please deliver these jewels to Quaid-e-Azam. Perhaps they can be of use to Pakistan.'"

(Source: Urdu Digest, August 2016)

The flood of blood that swept through East Punjab can be somewhat understood from three reports based on the personal observations of Ian Morrison, a correspondent for the London Times, which he sent from Jalandhar and Amritsar to his newspaper in August and September 1947. In his first report, he writes: "The Sikhs are actively engaged in clearing East Punjab of Muslims. Every day, they mercilessly massacre hundreds of people and drive thousands westward at swordpoint. They are setting fire to Muslim villages and homes. This violence and oppression have been organised by the Sikhs' higher leadership, and this horrific work is being carried out systematically, region by region."

In his second report, Morrison writes: "After 8 August, Muslim neighbourhoods in Amritsar started burning rapidly, and people began fleeing for safety. By 13 and 14 August, all of Amritsar was engulfed in flames. On 15 August, India's 'Independence Day' was celebrated in a bizarre way in Amritsar. In the afternoon, a mob of Sikhs paraded naked Muslim women through the streets of Amritsar. They were raped, and some were hacked to pieces with kirpans, while others were burnt alive."

In his third report, he sends a story about a twenty-mile-long convoy of Muslims with these words: "This convoy had more than 20,000 people, most of whom were walking on foot towards Pakistan. Similar convoys were moving westward from the east. Footsore, exhausted, starving, and weary from the journey." Two months later, he writes, "More than seven million refugees have staggered into Pakistan. They were utterly destitute, with nothing but the clothes on their backs, and even those were often in tatters. These were the victims of misfortune, who had witnessed the slaughter of

innocent children, the mutilation of bodies, and the dishonouring of women with their own eyes. At every step along the way, death lay in wait for them. Thousands perished along the way due to hunger and disease or were cut down by bloodthirsty Sikh mobs. Many breathed their last upon reaching the border of Pakistan."

(Source: Khoon-e-Muslim Arzan Hai, by Dr. Saeed Ahmed Malik)



The refugee trains heading towards Pakistan were also repeatedly attacked. Many trains had all their passengers killed, young girls abducted, and their lives reduced to something worse than death. Out of the countless incidents, two are mentioned here. The first is recounted by the assistant railway master at Ganda Singh Wala railway station himself. He says:

"A refugee train was coming from Ferozepur towards Kasur. It stopped at Ganda Singh Wala station. Mr. Majeed Yazdani was on the platform to greet it. When the train halted, he saw that all the carriages were soaked in blood and filled with piles of bodies. This was a common sight at that time. A different scene was unfolding up ahead. As he peered into each carriage, when he reached the last one, the sound of crying and moaning children caught his attention. When he looked inside, he was met with a horrific sight. The carriage was filled with countless children, aged between one and five, writhing in their blood-stained bodies like living corpses. These children had not been slaughtered but had their limbs cut off and were sent towards Pakistan as living corpses. Could there be a greater example of cruelty and barbarity in history?"

(Source: Jaddojehad-e-Azadi Mein Punjab Ka Kirdar, by Dr. Ghulam Hussain Zulfiqar)

The Second Incident

Another tragic event occurred in November 1947. One evening, a large crowd gathered at Wahga Railway Station in Lahore, eagerly awaiting the arrival of a train carrying refugees from Kalka, traveling via Amritsar to Pakistan. After a long wait, a black spot appeared on the horizon, gradually approaching the waiting crowd. It was the train's engine. A wave of joy spread through the crowd. They began to inspect the water jars and food trays they had prepared to welcome their migrant brothers and sisters arriving in the homeland.

As the train drew closer, the crowd's enthusiasm increased. They raised slogans of "Allahu Akbar," "Nara-e-Risalat," and "Long Live Pakistan," but there was no response from the train. The train slowly entered the station and halted at the platform, but no doors opened, nor did any passengers emerge. A sense of dread crept over the people. When they peered through the windows, what they saw made their hair stand on end. Severed necks by kirpans, bullet-ridden chests, dismembered arms, and ripped-open stomachs narrated a grim tale of brutal violence.

The young men divided the train compartments among themselves, and with tear-filled eyes, they respectfully began to unload the bloodied, mutilated bodies, offering their tributes to the martyrs.

(Reference: 1947 Ke Mazalim Ki Kahani Khud Mazlomon Ki Zubani by Hakeem Muhammad Tariq Mahmood Chughtai)

Witness Reports from London's Daily Mail

In those same days, Mr. Ralph, a special correspondent for London's Daily Mail, traveled from Karachi to Delhi. In the August 27, 1947, issue of Daily Mail, he wrote:

"My story can only be heard by those with a strong heart. When I traveled from Karachi to Lahore in route to Delhi, I saw no scenes of brutality nor any dead bodies on the way from Karachi to Lahore. However, upon reaching Lahore, the signs of terror and cruelty in East Punjab became evident, as a blood-soaked train had arrived that day. The train consisted of nine carriages, capable of holding about 1,000 passengers. The passengers of this train were mercilessly massacred at Bathinda Junction. Our train departed for Delhi on Sunday morning. After crossing Pakistan's border, I witnessed scenes even more horrific than those from Lahore's looted train. Vultures gathered along the railway tracks near every village, dogs were gnawing at human corpses, and flames were still rising from the houses in Ferozepur.

When our train reached Bathinda, I saw a pile of human bodies a little distance from the train. As I watched, two policemen arrived with another cartload of corpses and added them to the pile. Among the pile, a man was still alive, groaning in pain. The policemen saw him, but after unloading their cart, they left the groaning man there." He continues:

"A fleeing caravan from Ferozepur, while resting at a stop, was suddenly attacked by Sikhs. A woman was holding a five- or six-month-old baby in her lap. A savage snatched the baby from her arms, tossed it into the air, and then struck it down with his kirpan. The innocent child's pure blood dripped onto the face of the savage attacker. Waving the baby's writhing body before the mother, the attacker said, 'Here is your Pakistan.' When the mother saw her beloved child impaled on a blade, her heart stopped beating."

The special correspondent from Daily Mail further recounts:

"The final sight we witnessed at Bathinda Station was the most ghastly and inhuman. As our train departed, we saw four Sikhs brutally assaulting and raping six Muslim girls. Before our eyes, they slaughtered two of the girls."

(Reference: Khoon-e-Muslim Arzan Hai by Dr. Saeed Ahmed Malik)

The Situation in Amritsar

The situation in Amritsar was no different from other places. Everywhere there was chaos, with widespread murder, looting, and arson. On the morning of August 15, at around nine o'clock, about 500 rioters, supported by Hindu and Sikh police and military personnel, attacked Kocha Rangrezan, slaughtering all its Muslim residents. The next day, when the area was inspected with a magistrate, the streets and alleys were littered with bodies. Inside the houses, too, only corpses were found. In a mosque, they discovered numerous bodies—these were the naked bodies of 46 young Muslim girls. Their throats had been slit. Their condition indicated that they had been raped before being slaughtered.

People coming from the villages reported that troops from the princely states of Kapurthala and Patiala would arrive in motor vehicles and forcibly abduct our young women. Some women, trying to save their lives, were heading from Darwaza Mahan Singh to Sharifpura but were abducted by the rioters and soldiers in broad daylight. No one knows what became of those daughters of the Muslim nation.

Massacre in Delhi

By September 3, 1947, riots had also spread to the outskirts of Delhi, and soon Delhi itself was engulfed. The massacre of Muslims had begun in Delhi as well. Streets and neighborhoods were strewn with the bodies of Muslims. On September 5, Muslim children who had gone to appear for their matriculation exams outside the Karol Bagh examination hall were murdered. Everywhere, Muslims were being killed, their belongings looted, and their homes set ablaze. In the Sabzi Mandi area, under the orders of Vallabhbhai Patel, Gurkha soldiers massacred 3,000 Muslims.

An eyewitness reported that by September 9, a pile of at least 10,000 corpses had accumulated between Delhi's Water Works and Feroz Shah Kotla. These bodies had been brought in trucks. At 7 p.m., petrol was poured on all the bodies, and they were set ablaze. The light from the burning human bodies could be seen from far away.

Between September 4 and 14, between 20,000 to 25,000 Muslims were killed. A Muslim who managed to escape and reach Pakistan shared his experience, saying that at one place, he saw Hindu rioters dancing around a pile. Can we imagine what that pile was? It was a heap of severed breasts of Muslim women. ***(Reference: Khoon-e-Muslim Arzan Hai by Dr. Saeed Ahmed Malik)***

The story of the massacres of 1947 is long and deeply tragic. It is estimated that at least one million Muslims were wiped off the face of the earth. According to the 1941 census, there were 833,000 Muslims living in the princely states of Patiala, Kapurthala, Faridkot, Jind, and Nabha. Most of them were exterminated during August and September 1947. From Patiala alone, 250,000 Muslims disappeared without a trace. In Kapurthala, hardly any Muslims survived, despite them being the majority there. The 1941 census records their population at 213,754.

On 15 September 1947, a caravan of 100,000 Muslim refugees set out from Ardeseh. Such a large number was not easy to eliminate, so attempts were made to kill them with spears, swords, and rifles. Thousands were slaughtered, but still, many survived. Hindu and Sikh soldiers were then sent in trucks to systematically carry out a massacre for an hour and a half. Out of the caravan of 100,000, only a few thousand made it to Pakistan. 96,000 Muslims were killed.

(Reference: Khoon-e-Muslim Arzaan Hai by Dr. Saeed Ahmed Malik)

Friends, the Pakistan Movement is not just about a few incidents like these. These are just a handful of thousands that are recorded in books. There are countless others that have been told and retold but never made it to the pages of a book or a journal. And then there are thousands more that were taken to the graves by those who were never given the chance to tell their stories.

Reading or hearing these accounts, the first question that comes to mind is: for what purpose did our forefathers make such immense sacrifices of their lives, honour, and possessions? Was it all for the establishment of a secular society? Was it for economic security or development? And if that was the case, was the proposed Pakistan flowing with more rivers of milk and honey compared to India? Were there more economic institutions, lands, factories, and job opportunities here, eagerly waiting for people? Could any slogan other than "Pakistan ka Matlab Kya? La Ilaha Illallah" ***(What is the meaning of Pakistan? There is no god but Allah)*** have inspired Indian Muslims to unite so passionately in such numbers?

Could any group of people—especially those living in extreme poverty—give such sacrifices with such fervour for wealth, economy, secularism, or nationalism? No, absolutely not! Such great sacrifices can only be made for the protection and sanctity of one's homeland and faith. It was surely the high and noble goal of acquiring a separate homeland where they would be in the majority and free from subjugation, where there would be peace and security, and where honour, dignity, and justice would be preserved. A land where they could live their lives and govern their political, social, economic, and administrative affairs in accordance with the principles and guidance of their religion. It was for this elevated purpose that the Muslims of India gave up their lives, their honour, and their wealth in such large numbers, and they did so willingly, without complaint or regret, but with pride.

Now, the question arises: today, when the third generation born after the creation of Pakistan has reached adulthood, have we achieved that purpose? Is this the Pakistan that our forefathers envisioned? Have we created the Pakistan of their dreams, thereby repaying the debt of their sacrifices of life, honour, and wealth that they left upon us? If not, then isn't this a betrayal of the martyrs' blood? And will the severed heads, dismembered bodies, the fathers, brothers, and sons, the mothers, sisters, and daughters whose honour was violated, and the innocent children impaled on spears and swords, forgive us for this betrayal?

Monday 23rd September 2024

Islam and Human Dignity: Background of the Two-Nation Theory

Pakistan: A Blessing from Allah SWT

God has instilled love for one's homeland and home not only in humans but also in animals and birds. This is why wild animals protect their dens, and birds fiercely guard every twig of their nests. Every living creature instinctively returns to its home by evening. No creature willingly leaves its home or homeland. However, when one is tormented to the point that their life is at risk, they become ready to leave everything behind. This is the same sentiment that drives people to seek comfort when overwhelmed with homesickness in foreign lands, hoping to find a shoulder to rest on and lighten the burden of their hearts.

In this context, some friends initiated a beautiful gathering on "Ex Space" to reminisce about the homeland. They decided to change the trend on social media by sharing authentic historical evidence about the homeland. Their aim was to educate the younger generation about important facts, such as what the Two-Nation Theory is, why Pakistan came into being, what would have happened if Pakistan hadn't been created, the conspiracies at the time of Pakistan's establishment, the role of Pakistan's leaders, the unprecedented migration during Pakistan's creation, and the immense suffering and sacrifices involved. August was dedicated to discussing these issues, with Dr. Fareed Akhtar proposing this unique program. Brother Shakir Qureshi later urged me to give lectures on this platform. I not only congratulated him but also began preparing myself for it.

As the program began, interest soared, and discussions with thoughtful, educated friends led to the emergence of many new topics. The program continues to this day. Participation from numerous friends, spread across more than half a dozen countries, until late at night is testimony to the fact that:

نہیں ہے ناامید اقبالؔ اپنی کشت ویراں سے
ذرا نم ہو تو یہ مٹی بہت زرخیز ہے ساقی

*"Iqbal has not lost hope in his barren land;
With a little moisture, this soil is very fertile, my friend."*

Prominent contributors included respected Naeem from Canada, Najeeb Butt, Mr. Mirza from the US, Ahsan Yaqub from Saudi Arabia and UAE, and Mr. Naveed Ahad with his strong arguments. Their enthusiasm spurred several knowledgeable individuals and institutions to request that this series continue, and it still does, Alhamdulillah.

History bears witness that the decision to create Pakistan on the foundation of the Two-Nation Theory was the correct one. Today, time not only validates the soundness of this decision but also shows that all citizens of Pakistan remain deeply grateful for the invaluable contributions of its founders.

When the time came for the British to leave India, the Muslims, who had ruled the subcontinent for several centuries, were forced into British servitude through conspiracy. However, our leaders anticipated the joint friendship between the British and Hindus and their shared animosity toward Muslims. This led to the demand for a separate homeland based on the Two-Nation Theory, as our leaders foresaw that after the British left, we would have to contend with the Hindu nation, whose self-created religion had already divided humans into castes. This division caused daily humiliation for humanity.

We are all aware of the caste-based system in India, which highlights the deep class divide in Hindu society. The caste system, brought by the Aryans, evolved over time into different forms. This system strengthens the privileges of so-called higher castes (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas) while legitimizing the degrading treatment of lower castes (Shudras, Dalits), reserving for them menial and inferior jobs.

In the modern era, Hindus are still divided into four main categories, with Brahmins at the top. Below them are Kshatriyas (warriors and rulers), Vaishyas (farmers and traders), and at the lowest rank are the Shudras (labourers). These definitions are drawn from sacred Hindu texts, particularly the "Manusmriti." The Shudras or "untouchables," now called Dalits, represent the lowest caste, subjected to inhumane treatment. With a population of over 200 million, they represent a minority constantly facing discrimination and barriers to social progress. India's ruling party, the BJP, is not only distorting the country's history but is also failing miserably to protect minorities. Every day, Dalits face violence due to their low caste.

The national policy to trap Dalits in the dirtiest jobs ensures they remain powerless and unable to rise. Despite legal prohibitions, Dalits are still forced to clean human waste from drains, sewers, or septic tanks by hand, which often leads to fatalities. Their settlements are segregated from the cities. A report by Human Rights Watch states that those who refuse to perform such degrading tasks face threats and violence from the upper castes.

Moreover, these lower caste individuals have no representation in any political party, and thus, their issues are never heard. It is religiously considered wrong to eat with them or to marry them. This minority is denied the right to higher education, preventing them from reaching higher positions. If any of them ever dares to aspire to such positions, Hindu extremists subject them to severe persecution. The extent of the cruelty is such that, even today, in some parts of India, if a Shudra hears the sacred verses (shlokas) from Hindu scriptures, molten lead is poured into their ears. The rape of their women is justified by claiming that these women are "fortunate" to have been touched by the body of a Brahmin. In many areas of India today, Shudras are still not allowed to wear shoes or new clothes.

Frustrated by the brutality of Hindu extremists, these people are either forced to migrate to other countries or choose to convert to another religion for their survival. According to a foreign news agency, nearly 300 Dalit families in the village of Samadhiala near the town of Una in the Indian state of Gujarat, tired of caste-based discrimination and violence, have left their religion and converted to Buddhism.

The rape and murder of a Dalit woman in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh has further highlighted the deep caste divisions in Indian society. Analysts say that under Modi's BJP, Uttar Pradesh has become India's 'rape state.' Hindu extremist organizations are treating these lower caste people and other minorities in an inhumane manner. India's governmental policies and actions are systematically oppressing Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, and Dalits. Discrimination against these minorities is widespread, and the caste system is the very foundation that sanctions this oppression. This caste system has turned Indian society into a social and psychological sickness, where the possibility of any meaningful thought is diminishing day by day. The hope for a thriving society is fading.

What kind of psychological depression must women endure when their rape is justified solely because they belong to a lower caste? What kind of children will they give birth to? What kind of citizens can those children become who are denied the right to education simply because they are Dalits, and instead, are forced to clean filth? Their mental growth is stunted before it even begins. How can those who have spent their lives being raised under the stigma of being Dalits, Shudras, or untouchables—who have only ever carried corpses, cleaned streets, opened sewers, and served Brahmins—be expected to be patriotic? How can they be accused of rebellion when they have been denied their legitimate and basic rights? All these inhumane practices are carried out right under the nose of the ruling party, and Hindu nationalist movements further fuel this game with their extremist acts and slogans.



The greatest hindrance to the dignity of human beings is the Hindu caste-based class system. In Hinduism, people are divided into high and low castes based on birth, with their religious texts like "Manu Shastra" presenting fabricated stories about human creation that dehumanize individuals. Consider the following excerpt as an example of how these beliefs demean humanity:

"In the beginning, there was only one spirit. This spirit looked around and saw nothing but itself. It called out, 'Here I am,' and at that moment, the concept of 'woman' emerged. This spirit desired a companion, so it created a man and a woman in a single form, then divided them into two parts. The man became the husband, and the woman became the wife. In the beginning, the man and woman were one body. Then marital relations occurred, and from that union, creatures were born. However, the spirit thought that creating offspring from one soul was wrong, so it hid itself and became a cow, while the husband became a bull, and from their union, cows and bulls were born. Then the spirit became a mare, and the husband became a horse, and horses were born from their union. In this way, all living creatures were created, including insects." Such a belief is enough to degrade humanity.

Allah, who is the creator and owner of the universe, has made humans His vicegerents on Earth. Islam teaches that...

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ (التين:4)

We have certainly created man in the best of stature.

By commanding the angels to bow down to Adam in a gesture of respect, humanity was elevated to the highest level of dignity, making mankind the "Ashraf-ul-Makhluqat" (the most noble of all creations). In contrast, according to Hindu belief, it was the soul of Eve that existed first. She felt afraid in her solitude, and to console her, a man was created for her. In other words, man and woman were created from the same body. However, the Qur'an guides us on this matter as follows:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَىٰ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ (الحجرات: 13)
O mankind, indeed, We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.

Allah Almighty has honoured and elevated mankind above other creatures. As stated in the Holy Quran:

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَىٰ كَثِيرٍ مِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا (بنی اسرائیل: 70)
And We have certainly honoured the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, with [definite] preference.

In Islam, no one has superiority over another as a human being, while the caste system in Hinduism establishes a hierarchy of high and low. Islam defines dignity and superiority based on piety (taqwa), whereas in Hinduism, dignity is attributed to those born into Brahmin families, while being born into a Shudra family is considered a symbol of disgrace and humiliation.

Muslims are still regarded as impure (meleech) and deemed deserving of treatment even worse than that of the Dalits. It has been 77 years since the partition of India, and even today, where such discrimination exists, Dalits are treated as part of Hinduism, leading to such treatment against them. If, God forbid, Pakistan had not been created on the basis of the Two-Nation Theory, what would have been the condition of Muslims? Those mentally afflicted here believe that if Muslims were living better lives due to being in the majority in India, they should realize that both Muslims and Dalits are praying day and night to escape the tyranny of the Hindu mindset. If they still refuse to acknowledge the existence of Pakistan despite these circumstances, it would be better for them to lay their bedding at the feet of Hindu Mata. Furthermore, consider this news: those hundred individuals from Sindh who had left Pakistan to join their relatives have, after a year of continuous humiliation, started to see Pakistan as a paradise and have returned to their village after seeking forgiveness and restitution.

Under Modi's prejudiced government, Muslims in certain areas of India continue to suffer such atrocities that cruel and ruthless Hindus do not spare even Muslim women and innocent children. As a result, men, women, and children are crying out in anguish:

وَمَا لَكُمْ لَأْتَقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَالْمُسْتَضْعَفِينَ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ وَالنِّسَاءِ وَالْوِلْدَانِ الَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا أَخْرِجْنَا مِنْ هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةِ الظَّالِمِ أَوْلِيَاءُ
 وَاجْعَلْ لَنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ وَلِيًّا وَاجْعَلْ لَنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ نَصِيرًا ﴿النساء: 75﴾

And what is [the matter] with you that you fight not in the cause of Allah and [for] the oppressed among men, women, and children who say, "Our Lord, take us out of this city of oppressive people and appoint for us from Yourself a protector and appoint for us from Yourself a helper?"

This prayer not only presents the plight of weak Muslims but also clarifies the obligation of jihad for Muslims to extend their sympathy and assistance. It is important to note that there are fundamentally three types of Islamic jihad: 1. Defensive. 2. Assisting oppressed Muslims and humanity. 3. Defeating the rebels against Allah and upholding the flag of Islam, for the earth and all

that is in it belongs to Allah; thus, it is the responsibility of the righteous to subdue and maintain the rebellious.

As for the matter of assisting oppressed humanity, Muslims hold an unparalleled history compared to other nations, as they have made invaluable sacrifices solely for the pleasure of Allah and the support of humanity, rather than for their own interests.

The history of Spain bears witnesses that when the Christian ruler Roderick violated the innocence of his own governor's daughter, the governor, compelled by circumstance, wrote a letter to his Muslim counterpart, the border governor Musa bin Nusayr. In response, Tariq bin Ziyad launched an invasion of Spain, resulting in Spain becoming a cradle of peace and security for nearly 800 years. Spanish historians regard this as the golden age of Spanish history.

A similar situation occurred in Sindh when the thugs of Dahir attacked Muslim travellers. In desperation, a Muslim daughter called for help in the name of the governor of Iraq, Hajjaj bin Yusuf. Hajjaj sent his nephew, Muhammad bin Qasim, to assist the oppressed, which led to the flag of Islam being raised in India for nearly a thousand years, fostering unity in the country. With political and intellectual awareness, peace and tranquillity were achieved, ultimately leading to the creation of Pakistan. This jihad was articulated in Qadisiya, which was then the capital of the Iranian government (as recorded in Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah), where Hazrat Rabi' (RA) expressed it before Rustam in these words.

إِنَّا قَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا نُخْرِجَ النَّاسَ مِنْ ظُلُمَاتِ الْجَهَالَةِ إِلَى نُورِ الْإِيمَانِ وَمِنْ جُورِ الْمُلُوكِ إِلَى عَدْلِ الْإِسْلَامِ

We did not come ourselves; we were sent to bring people out of the darkness of ignorance and stand them in the light of faith. To provide the masses with an opportunity to live under the just system of Islam, freeing them from the oppression of the powerful.

It is essential to inform today's youth so that they can understand the reality of the "Two-Nation Theory" and recognise the existence of the God-given state of Pakistan as a blessing, appreciating its value.

وَإِنْ تَعُدُّوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ لَا تُحْصُوهَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَعَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ (النحل: 18)

And if you should count the favours of Allah, you could not enumerate them. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.

Thursday 26 September 2024

Changing Social Mentality: A Challenge

The Impact of Tyranny and the Responsibility of the Pakistani Nation

Typically, translating the word "human" as "Insaan" (person) in Urdu leads to the assumption that a human is simply a human, whether from the East or the West. However, this matter is not as straightforward as it seems—it is, in fact, more complex. Every civilization, or system of life, has its own distinct concept of individuality. The foundation for determining this concept lies in answering the question, "Who am I?" (Answers to questions like the purpose of life, what is good, what is evil, etc., are also derived from answering this fundamental question). Historically, the most commonly accepted and valid answer to this question has been, "I am a servant (Muslim)," and for a long time, this concept of individuality was considered the legitimate expression of humanity. While there have always been societies and individuals who gave contrasting answers to this question, the majority of societies (especially religious ones) were based on this religious concept of individuality.

In European societies of the 17th and 18th centuries, under the influence of the Enlightenment, a new answer to this question began to emerge (and is now deeply ingrained in those societies): "I am not a servant, but rather free and self-sufficient." (The origin of this notion of selfhood can be traced back to Descartes' famous statement, "I think, therefore I am." According to this idea, the only being in the universe that justifies its own existence and is beyond doubt as the source of knowledge is the "I," meaning "I exist.") In Enlightenment thought, this free and self-sufficient concept of self is referred to as "human." The human denies its servitude and claims self-sufficiency—in other words, the "human" is a concept of self or person that rebels against Allah.

The famous Western philosopher Michel Foucault states that the "human" was born for the first time in human history in the 17th century—not in the sense that humans did not exist before, nor in the sense that this was a more intelligent form of human while earlier humans were ignorant. Rather, it means that before this time, no human civilization or system of thought considered freedom to be the legitimate expression of individuality. (In a way, this was a new form of disbelief or atheism.) Prior to this, the term "mankind" (God's subjects and creatures) was used for humanity, while the concept of "humanity" was developed in the 17th century. The discourse of humanism actually stems from this concept of the "human," in which the fundamental trait of humanity is to be free and self-sufficient, and reason is understood as the acceptance of increasing human freedom (i.e., making humans practically self-sufficient) as the purpose of life. Humanity is a crucial concept in modern Western atheism, and the various schools of thought that emerged from Enlightenment thinking (such as liberalism, socialism, nationalism, etc.) are different interpretations and justifications of this concept of humanity.

Those who, out of ignorance of the fundamental role of faith in determining individuality, say that "a human is simply a human," are making an overly simplistic claim. (Concepts such as the purpose of life, good and evil, knowledge, truth, justice, the formation of social and political order, etc., all change dramatically based on how this question is answered.) To use an easy analogy, consider that the figure of Jesus (Isa) is a common figure shared between Muslims and Christians (both historically recognize the same person as Jesus), but the reason for disagreement over the past 1,400 years has been the "concept of Jesus," not the "person of Jesus." (For one, Jesus is the son of God, while for

the other, he is a messenger of God.) If someone were to say, "Jesus is just Jesus, and Muslims and Christians are fighting over nothing," they would certainly be making an uneducated statement. Similarly, to refer to a "human" as just a person, and to also refer to a Muslim as a person, creates the same kind of confusion. Clearly, a person who considers themselves a servant of God and one who sees themselves as God cannot possibly build the same kind of life (society or state).

They will tell you, "First, become a human, then a Muslim." (This is a long-standing and attractive argument used by secularists to lure the masses.) You should ask them, "Alright, tell me, what does it mean to be a human before being a Muslim?" You see, being a Muslim means that "I am fundamentally and truly a servant of God." Is there some reality outside of or prior to this truth that you want me to affirm?

إِنَّا خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ أَمْشَاجٍ نَّبْتَلِيهِ فَجَعَلْنَاهُ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا- إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَإِمَّا كَفُورًا (انسان: 2-3)

Indeed, We created man from a sperm-drop mixture that We may try him; and We made him hearing and seeing. Indeed, We guided him to the way, be he grateful or be he ungrateful.

In reality, the majority of people who make this claim do not even understand its true meaning. The question "Who am I?" has two dominant answers in the modern era. One is that "I am a servant of Allah (Muslim)," and the other is that "I am free and self-sufficient." The invitation to be "human" before being Muslim essentially seeks to make one admit, "I am inherently free." The idea is that identifying oneself as a Muslim or anything else is merely a set of beliefs adopted by this free being through its own will, but they are not the ultimate reality. The true reality, according to this view, is my will, which creates reality itself.

وَاللَّهُ أَخْرَجَكُمْ مِنْ بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ شَيْئًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ، لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ (النحل: 78)

And Allah has extracted you from the wombs of your mothers not knowing a thing, and He made for you hearing and vision and intellect that perhaps you would be grateful.

It must be thoroughly understood, absolutely and completely, that being human is not my true essence; rather, it is just one of the possible forms of "being a servant of Allah." The potential forms of my existence could have been that I might have been a tree, an animal, a mountain, a stone, or even an angel or a jinn. However, in every possible form of my existence, I would have still been a servant (creation) of Allah. In this universe, there is no possibility of my existence where I am anything other than fundamentally a servant of Allah. Being human is not my true essence; rather, it is an accidental aspect of my existence, in the sense that Allah created me in whatever state He willed. He was not compelled to make me human—this is purely His grace. Therefore, the question, "Am I fundamentally Muslim or human?" has a very clear answer: fundamentally and in essence, I am a servant of Allah (Muslim), and I am human incidentally. My essential state is to be "with Allah," not an independent existence beyond Him. There is no other reference point for defining my humanity except to claim autonomy.

The moment I attempt to answer the question "Who am I?" without reference to Allah, I inevitably assume myself as existing independently of and before Allah, and this is the root of atheism. The existence of Allah precedes my human consciousness, and the declaration "La ilaha illallah" (There is no god but Allah) affirms this reality. The statement "Become human before becoming Muslim" is a denial of this very declaration (as if saying "There is no god but the human").

Now that it has been made clear that my true essence is not being human but being a servant of Allah (Muslim), it is appropriate to also clarify the true meaning of faith and disbelief, and why being a servant of Allah is synonymous with being Muslim.

وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا - فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا - قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَن زَكَّاهَا - وَقَدْ خَابَ مَن دَسَّاهَا (الشمس: 7-10)

And [by] the soul and He who proportioned it. And inspired it [with discernment of] its wickedness and its righteousness, He has succeeded who purifies it, And he has failed who instills it [with corruption].

Understand that fundamentally and truly, every human being is a servant of Allah, whether they acknowledge it or deny it. No human's denial of this truth can alter their real status in the universe. If one admits this truth with both tongue and heart, they are called a believer and a Muslim; if they deny it, they are called a disbeliever (kafir). It is important to know that a disbeliever does not discover a new reality through their disbelief; rather, they are denying their own reality, which is why they are called "kafir" (one who conceals and denies the truth).

Once it is clear that I am fundamentally a servant, the next question arises: how can I, as a human, become a servant? The answer to this is:

إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ وَمَا اخْتَلَفَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا مِن بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْعِلْمُ بَعْغِيَ بَيْنَهُمْ وَمَن يَكْفُرْ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ (العمران: 19)

Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam. And those who were given the Scripture did not differ except after knowledge had come to them - out of jealous animosity between themselves. And whoever disbelieves in the verses of Allah, then indeed, Allah is swift in [taking] account.....And also this

وَمَن يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَن يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ (العمران: 85)

And whoever desires other than Islam as religion - never will it be accepted from him, and he, in the Hereafter, will be among the losers.

It should be understood that anyone who adopts a method other than Islam to express their humanity will find that such expressions of humanity will not be accepted by God. Therefore, my humanity will only be valid when I use it as a means to express servitude, and the only credible way to learn how to express servitude is through the message that Allah revealed to His last Messenger (peace be upon him). Apart from this single method, all other ways of expressing servitude are rejected.

Once it is clear that I am a servant of Allah, I remain His servant in both solitude (private life) and in my relationships with others (public life). It is logically untenable to suggest that in solitude, as a human, my wife and I are servants of Allah, but as soon as we establish relationships, we are no longer bound to obey His commands. Such a notion can only be accepted by someone who has lost their rationality. If I truly am a servant of Allah, then I am that in every aspect of my life. I have no basis or reference to address anyone outside of myself, nor do I have any sphere outside of the message revealed by Allah in which I can engage in dialogue with others. Whenever I address someone, I do so based on what Allah's command requires of me. When I speak to a non-Muslim, I invite them to this right, rather than engaging in a dialogue within a framework of rights that is beyond that. Therefore, I do not acknowledge the right to life of a non-Muslim simply because "every human being, as a mere human, possesses certain natural rights that I must respect." Rather, I

acknowledge it because it is Allah's command, which I am obliged to uphold. I hold no right to determine what is right or wrong in my personal life or in the collective; this is the meaning of acknowledging "Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah."



Now, when they refer to "humanity" instead of "Islam," it seems appropriate to present the fundamental issue they are often unaware of. I can hold various fundamental references regarding my humanity, for instance, I might say that I am fundamentally a Rajput, or that I am fundamentally Punjabi, or that I am fundamentally Pakistani, or that I represent the labour or capitalist class, or that I am fundamentally a Muslim, Hindu, or Christian. Whatever reference I choose for my identity, I hold a moral justification to strive for its survival and dominance.

They might tell you that you are not fundamentally any of these, but that these are merely expressions of your identity. You can then ask them, "What, then, am I fundamentally?" They would reply that fundamentally, you are a free and autonomous (self-sufficient) being who has the right to define good according to their own will. Hence, being a Muslim is not the essence; it is merely a way of defining a good under one's own will. This is not the only good, but just one of the countless concepts of good. In other words, abandon the reference to Allah and adopt the references to good that you create on earth, and strive for that. This, in their view, is the true meaning of being human, which they consciously or unconsciously want you to acknowledge.

"Human rights" are the rights of "humans." The belief of humans is that a human is a self-sufficient and autonomous existence. Someone who holds such a belief about humanity is referred to as an atheist. This atheist's premise is that in order to understand the principles of justice, every person must first deny their religion and assume themselves to be a self-sufficient existence. That is, to find the answer to "What is justice?" it is essential for everyone to become an atheist (from Locke to Rawls, all humans believe this). Clearly, the principles of justice and the details of rights established in this atheistic context will also be atheistic. This atheist (human) insists that justice and fairness are the names of the very rights that we atheists have established, and that every religion and tradition in the world is as valid as it confirms these principles. Therefore, it is necessary for all humans who hold the various religions and traditions to make decisions in accordance with these principles. If any religion or ideology suggests suspending the rights determined by these atheistic principles, it is deemed coercive and oppressive. Yet, these atheists themselves attempt to impose their principles on all religions and traditions by force, as human rights are principles established within an atheistic framework. Thus, the promotion of human rights leads to the dominance of atheism.

Final Remarks on Some Lessons of Faith

It is essential to thoroughly understand the few lessons of belief mentioned here, as modern atheism has caused devastation in beliefs due to such attractive claims and terminologies that mislead people themselves and cause them to mislead others as well. The details presented above are aimed at refuting and clarifying the errors in the argument put forth by secularists that society and the state should be based on something that is common among all humans. Since we are fundamentally

human, not Muslims, Hindus, etc., it follows that religion is not a fundamental trait or common value of humanity.

Based on this key argument (whether one is first and foremost a human or a Muslim/Hindu), these individuals raise the case for expelling religion from social life. If one understands what has been stated, the fundamental error of the secular discourse will become clear.

مِنْ أَيِّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ- مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ خَلَقَهُ فَقَدَرَهُ- ثُمَّ السَّبِيلَ يَسَّرَهُ- ثُمَّ أَمَاتَهُ فَأَقْبَرَهُ- ثُمَّ إِذَا شَاءَ أَنْشَرَهُ (عبس: 22-18)

From what substance did He create him? From a sperm-drop He created him and destined for him; Then He eased the way for him; Then He causes his death and provides a grave for him. Then when He wills, He will resurrect him.

Now, let us take a look at the situation in our homeland after all these arguments.

The question is, how can we change the current mindset of society? In Pakistan, the civil service is a legacy of the British era. It was established by the British to implement their rule, which considered itself superior to the public in all circumstances. However, we have neither been able to reform this system nor has there been any commendable role played by politicians. Present-day Pakistan is not in a position to compete economically on a global scale, nor can it compete with other countries in the region based on various social indicators. The terms used by the elite towards citizens are derogatory. There is a pressing need for a well-defined social contract between the state and its citizens that applies equally to rulers, owners, and the general populace.

In Pakistan, it is often lamented that the country has been under military rule for a long time, but it is also a fact that the most prosperous periods of the country are often attributed to those military rulers. One factor behind China's success is that most individuals in governance are experts in their fields. For instance, the current President of China is a chemical engineer. During the British Raj, merit was strictly observed. Now, however, we face political appointments and pressures for all government employees. Most of us follow the notion that the standard of respect in society is linked to acquiring dollars, and in this desire, no distinction is made between what is lawful and unlawful. In the pursuit of dollars, even government employees are not exempt. After the "pursuit of dollars," how can we expect decisions based on competence, integrity, justice, and merit? Therefore, we need to change the mindset of society.

Let's try to understand the ground realities. Divine assistance did not come during the time of Spain, nor did it arrive to save the Ottoman Caliphate, nor to stop the establishment of Israel, nor during the Babri Masjid incident, nor during the situations in Iraq and Syria, nor in Myanmar, nor during the Gujarat riots, nor for Kashmir. Yet, voices are raised in homes and mosques for divine assistance? Divine help came in the Battle of Badr when 313 faced 1,000 in the battlefield. It came in the Battle of the Trench when the Prophet ﷺ tied two stones around his belly and himself dug the trench before entering the battlefield. Divine assistance came in Afghanistan when hungry, thirsty Muslims entered the battlefield in a state of utter helplessness.

Dressed in the world's finest attire, hoarding wealth, sitting in luxury air-conditioned vehicles (utilizing products made by those disbelievers), bowing and kissing the hands of people, seeking their admiration, and sitting on the pulpits of mosques, they await divine help? Satisfied with the systems of tyranny and then expecting divine assistance??? Instead of striving for the implementation of Allah's and His Prophet ﷺ's system on Allah's earth, they are merely awaiting divine help while engaging in poetry recitals, gatherings of celebration, or spinning prayer beads in vain?

Rather than making themselves and other Muslims strive for Jihad, they choose to be mere bystanders, full of their bellies and awaiting divine help? Observing the oppression and hardships faced by Muslims, they merely pray, "O Allah, drown the enemy, or O Allah, destroy the enemy... or O Allah, help the oppressed, or grant guidance to the enemies, and if guidance is not in their fate, drown them." They are satisfied with such desperate prayers and continue to enjoy their meals before returning to a deep sleep, all while expecting divine assistance? Are they placing everything in Allah's hands while retreating from action and merely waiting for divine help?

They fear stepping into the battlefield while waiting for angels to descend from the heavens to assist Muslims? In such a situation, there will be no divine help, only punishment, which we are experiencing in the form of our short-sighted rulers, corrupt officials, hoarding, unjust profiteering, lying, cheating, malpractices, selfishness, and other economic and social evils! It is time to awaken from the slumber of ignorance, seek knowledge, embody good character, and strive continuously towards our merciful Lord for help. Only then will you understand the meaning of being "the best of creation" and know "who you are."

Saturday 28 September 2024

The Greater Israel Plan: What Follows the Division of Lebanon

Israeli Strikes in Lebanon: Prelude to a Major War?

The global media is currently presenting Israel as a nation fighting in self-defense, effectively covering up the atrocities it is committing. Many believe that Israel has been given a sort of mandate to carry out anti-Muslim violence to prevent the younger generation in their own countries from converting to Islam. This concern arises particularly after reports from France began to indicate that by 2050, due to current electoral processes, the Muslim population will be so large that it will be difficult to keep them from gaining governmental power. After this, the trend could spread across other European countries and stopping it would be nearly impossible. Today, the situation in Gaza, Palestine, and Lebanon must be viewed from this perspective.

Lebanon is a country where freedom of expression is relatively more prevalent than in other Middle Eastern nations. As a result, support or opposition to Hezbollah remains a major topic of both public and private discussion. Heated debates often take place about Hezbollah's political influence and its military capabilities. However, the undeniable fact is that Hezbollah is the only organization currently standing up against Israel, giving it the toughest resistance, especially in light of Lebanon's weak military. Many people believe that due to Lebanon's feeble military, Hezbollah's continued strengthening and accumulation of power is necessary.

Israel first invaded Lebanon in 1982, and it still occupies parts of southern Lebanon today. Over the past few decades, Hezbollah's military has been the only effective force to challenge Israeli forces. The Lebanese army is disorganized, weak, and equipped with outdated and limited weaponry. It heavily relies on the U.S. and other Western countries for ammunition and weapons. As a result, even those in Lebanon who don't generally sympathize with Hezbollah find themselves supporting the group in this context.

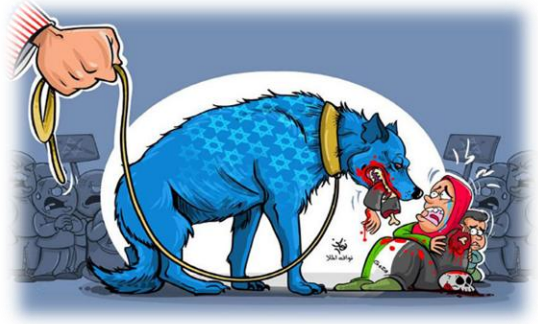
Until recently, one of Hezbollah's key political allies was the largest Christian party of that time, the Free Patriotic Movement. For many years, Hezbollah and the Free Patriotic Movement had an agreement to support each other. This alliance gave the Free Patriotic Movement a strong Shiite partner, while Hezbollah gained Christian political backing. Importantly, the Christian party did not immediately demand the disarmament of Hezbollah. Although foreign powers have played a significant role in ending this alliance, aiming to weaken Hezbollah and eventually erase its presence from Lebanon, the evolving situation after Israeli attacks suggests that various factions in Lebanon are uniting along religious lines. This trend could lead to stronger support for Hezbollah and an eventual failure of the nefarious plans devised by global powers backing Israel.

The heavy aerial bombardment of Lebanon indicates that, under the guise of targeting Hezbollah, there is an effort to push forward a formula for Lebanon's division. After Israeli jets bombed southern Lebanon and the Baka'a Valley, Netanyahu addressed the Lebanese people, stating, "Israel's war is not with you, but with Hezbollah." Now, the question remains: What will be the response to Israel's atrocities, and how will the natural alliances forming within Lebanon react? Hezbollah's ability to maintain its internal support may hinge on whether the border crisis escalates or spreads further.

This is why the intricate web of loyalties, enmities, and political alliances in Lebanon continues

to shift during this crisis. Many individuals and groups in Lebanon have set aside their differences. Even those who had criticized Hezbollah's decision to attack Israel in solidarity with Gaza and blamed it for dragging the country into a serious crisis are now showing solidarity with the group.

The recent explosion of walkie-talkies, pagers, and wireless devices in Lebanon resulted in the deaths of 38 people and injured over 3,000. Hezbollah blamed Israel for the attack, although Israel has yet to claim responsibility. However, clear evidence points to Israel's involvement. According to international media, an Indian national named "Renson Jose," founder of a Bulgarian company called Nortra Global, is suspected to be behind the attack. He had also obtained Norwegian citizenship and allegedly sold these pagers to Hezbollah in Lebanon. Norway has since issued an international warrant for his arrest. It is rumoured that after the incident, "Renson Jose" fled to Boston, USA, where he has either gone into hiding or vanished entirely.



Support for Hezbollah intensified after the large-scale Israeli airstrikes on southern Lebanon and the Baka'a Valley, as well as the targeting of Dahiya, a densely populated southern suburb of Beirut. These attacks led to the deaths of many civilians, including numerous children. In the aftermath, a significant number of people relocated from the affected areas, leading to a natural rise in support for Hezbollah.

Recently, former U.S. President Joe Biden, in his speech at the United Nations, once again proposed the two-state solution for the region, demonstrating his hypocrisy. But who doesn't know that the main force behind the devastation in the region is the United States itself, with its allies echoing U.S. support for Israel? The Western imperialists are now making every effort to divide Lebanon into two parts, but even Western analysts are emphasizing that any internal division should be set aside for the time being, as preventing the ensuing destruction will be nearly impossible.

There is also an emerging concern that the crisis will not end with the division of Lebanon. The next target is likely to be Jordan, as Israel continues to pursue its long-planned territorial expansion towards the so-called "Greater Israel." By assassinating Hezbollah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, Israel has triggered a major war. The question now is how long the other Muslim countries in the region, along with their leaders, will remain silent, trapped by political expediency, as Israel — the Western-backed rogue state — continues its unchecked aggression. Will they act to rein it in, or will they simply wait for their turn?

Tuesday 1st October 2024

Israel's Greater Dream: Reality or Fantasy

Greater Israel: A Fantasy Concept or Practical Threat

In my previous column, after mentioning "Greater Israel," I received numerous messages, particularly from young people, asking for more details. Many readers dismiss it as a mythical narrative aimed at boosting Israel's unchecked power and propaganda. It is important to remember that a writer's responsibility is to thoroughly research and share information with their audience, with readers' feedback holding significant value. The concept of Greater Israel first emerged after the Arab Israeli war of 1967, but Israel remained silent on the matter, never outright denying it. However, in the past two decades, Jewish advocates have openly supported this controversial plan in writings and electronic media. In January of this year, an interview with Israeli author Avi Lipkin, which went viral globally, further brought the "Greater Israel" project into the spotlight. Lipkin expressed his vision, stating, "Across the Euphrates are the Kurds, our friends. Behind us is the Mediterranean Sea, and in front of us are the Kurds... Lebanon needs Israel's protection, and I am certain we will also take over Mecca, Medina, and Mount Sinai to cleanse them." He further predicted, "A day will come when our borders stretch from Lebanon to the vast deserts of Saudi Arabia and from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates River in Iraq."

The idea of Greater Israel gained more attention when, during ground operations in Gaza, Israeli soldiers wore badges featuring the map of "Greater Israel" on their uniforms. At the same time, right-wing Israeli ministers advocated for a "Promised Land" that includes the territories of Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and parts of Egypt. Many Jews in Israel refer to this region as "Eretz Israel" or "Land of Israel," which encompasses a much larger geographical area than Israel's current borders. It is important to note that the concept of Greater Israel is not a new idea. However, to understand where this concept originated and which areas are included in the "Promised Land," we must look back several centuries.

The open war between Hamas and Israel in October of last year had not yet ended when, after Lebanon, Yemen also became a target of Israeli aggression. This followed the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh during an Israeli targeted attack while he was attending the inauguration ceremony of the newly elected Iranian president. This event sparked a new wave of conflict in the region. Recently, in Lebanon, several key leaders of Hezbollah, including their prominent leader Hassan Nasrallah, were also assassinated, among them a general from Iran's Revolutionary Guards.

Despite calls for a ceasefire by the United States and several Western countries in the United Nations, primarily to pacify global outrage, Israeli operations have intensified, and the talk of "Greater Israel" has grown louder. According to Theodor Herzl, the founder of Zionism, the map of the "Promised Land" or Greater Israel includes territories stretching from the Nile River in Egypt to the Euphrates River in Iraq, encompassing Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Egypt, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia.

In 1947, the United Nations approved the division of Palestine into two separate states, one Jewish and one Arab, while designating Jerusalem as an international city. Following this decision, Israeli politician and former Prime Minister Menachem Begin declared that the partition of Palestine was

illegal, stating, "Jerusalem was and will always be our capital, and the borders of Eretz Israel will be restored forever."

In an article titled "Zionism 2.0: Themes and Proposals of Reshaping World Civilization" published in the Times of Israel, author Adrian Stein explains that the concept of Greater Israel holds different meanings for different groups. For Jews living inside and outside Israel, the term "Greater Israel" refers to extending Israel's sovereignty up to the West Bank (Jordan River), including areas mentioned in the Bible such as Judea, Samaria, and possibly territories occupied after the 1948 war, along with Sinai, northern Israel, and the Golan Heights.

According to Taqi Nasirat, a policy analyst based in Washington with a deep understanding of the Middle East, "The idea of Greater Israel is deeply ingrained in Israeli society, and many elements of Israeli society, from the government to the military, are its advocates."

According to Taqi Nasirat, Israelis believe that they are entitled to the lands mentioned in biblical references and historically claimed by them, which stretch "from river to sea" and even "from river to river"—that is, from the Euphrates River to the Nile River, covering all areas in between. While the original idea behind the concept of Greater Israel may be this expansive claim, today's more pragmatic view in Israel includes the areas outside its current borders that it has long occupied, namely the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights.

However, Umar Karim, a Middle East expert at Birmingham University in the UK and an associate fellow at the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, regards the concept of Greater Israel as "merely a mythical notion." According to Jewish religious teachings, Greater Israel refers to all the ancient territories in the Middle East that were part of the Ottoman Empire, where Jews had once lived. When the Israelites left Egypt, their central base was Palestine, where they settled. The Israeli government still considers this region part of Judea, and Greater Israel also includes all the areas where Jews once resided.

Umar believes that Greater Israel is more of a fantasy that is impractical, but it holds significance in Zionist politics rather than among Jews. In practical terms, Israelis view the entire occupied Palestinian territories, including the West Bank and Gaza, as part of their country. However, if one speaks in terms of "fantasy," Greater Israel would include the Arabian Peninsula, which is now Saudi Arabia, parts of Iraq, Jordan, and Egypt.

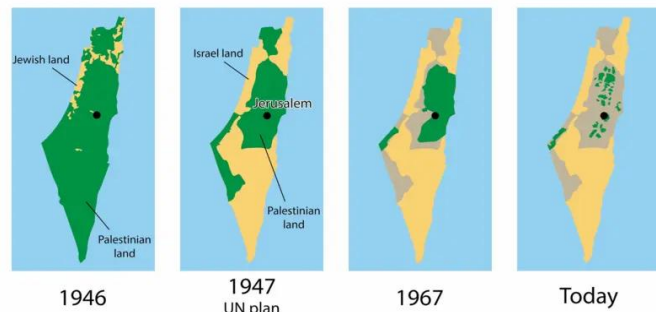
Regarding the "Promised Land," Umar Karim explains that during the time of Prophet Joseph, the Jews settled in Egypt, and their rule extended from Palestine to Bilad al-Sham (modern-day Syria) and parts of the Euphrates River. Since there were no Arab states at the time, their influence reached various regions, and the idea of Greater Israel stems from the belief that "the descendants of Israel should claim all the areas where their forefathers lived." However, this is not practically achievable today, and the current understanding of Greater Israel refers to the occupied territories, including the West Bank and Gaza.

It is also important to mention the map of Greater Israel presented by right-wing Israeli minister Bezalel Smotrich in 2023, which included Jordan and caused a diplomatic dispute. During a speech in

Paris, the Israeli minister displayed a map of Greater Israel that incorporated Jordan and the occupied West Bank into Israel's territory. Jordan strongly protested, accusing Bezalet of violating the peace agreement between the two countries. The truth is that whether it's Smotrich or Ben Gvir, the groups they represent view this idea as Israel's legitimate future. This idea has been made a reality in the current Netanyahu government by arming illegal Israeli settlers, supporting and protecting them. These settlers have been burning Palestinian olive groves, displacing Palestinians from their homes, and forcing them to flee for their safety, while establishing new settlements in the West Bank.

After Hamas's October 7 attacks on Israel, these (illegal armed Israeli settlers) have gained even more influence and power. Under the protection of the Israeli military (IDF) and Netanyahu's ministers, they are advancing this agenda. Although they are often referred to as "non-state actors," whatever one may call them, the truth is that they have direct support from Prime Minister Netanyahu, who, in July of this year, approved the construction of 5,300 new settlements. Certainly, every nation has extremists who dream in the same way as the far-right Zionists in Israel. After the establishment of the state of Israel, Jews found themselves with a religious state, similar to Pakistan, where the identity of the nation is based on religion.

For the first time, much like Pakistan, Jews were able to realize the idea of a religious state with the creation of Israel, where their religion forms the foundation of their nationality. From this idea arose the notion that, since we have established our religious state, we should now extend it to its traditional boundaries. In contemporary Israel, there are very few people—an extreme minority—who talk about such ideas, but they believe that practically it's not possible, especially since Israel has diplomatic relations with neighboring countries like Jordan, which means it recognizes their borders.



However, the ground realities indicate that one cannot trust the cruel and oppressive Israeli rulers, even with the existence of diplomatic relations. Egypt and Jordan both maintain diplomatic ties with Israel, yet Israel continues its illegal occupation of their territories. Similarly, Israel has established diplomatic relations with the Gulf countries and the United Arab Emirates, and its relations with Saudi Arabia are not strained. Additionally, regarding Syria, Israel only has a dispute over the Golan Heights, and aside from that, there are no significant issues between the two nations.

Some may believe that discussions of the establishment of Greater Israel are merely fantasy, and that serious politicians and analysts in Israel do not talk about this. However, this fantasy does exist among certain factions who hold the idea of a Jewish renaissance across the world.

What would the West's reaction be if Israel tried to implement the Greater Israel plan? So far, the West, especially the U.S., has shown a weak response to changes in ground realities and the expansion of Israeli settlements. Earlier this year, when Israel approved the establishment of settlements by some violent settlers, the Biden administration condemned the move in a very

measured manner.

There has been no serious reaction from Israel's Western allies regarding these actions. Therefore, some believe that, in a way, Israel has received a green light from Western nations to fulfill its dream of Greater Israel, and many influential Israeli leaders are working to bring this dream to fruition. However, the establishment of Greater Israel will neither be acceptable to the West nor to the Jewish communities living in Western countries.

When the state of Israel was founded in 1947, the prevailing thought was that Jews had faced oppression worldwide, and they deserved a separate country where they could live free from such persecution. Today, all Western nations and the United Nations still recognize the West Bank and Gaza as occupied territories, and this is acknowledged by both the U.S. and the UK.

Setting aside the discussion of Greater Israel, even areas like the Golan Heights, which Israel has occupied since 1967, are considered occupied territories by all Western countries and international organizations.

Omar Kareem believes that Greater Israel has no legal standing, nor does Israel have enough military capacity to turn such a plan into reality in the future. However, if Israel were to attempt such a move, it would not be possible without the political and military support of the West.

Some people in Pakistan dismiss Israel's malicious intentions, claiming that "Greater Israel" is merely a fantasy used by various extremist groups as a political lifeline, helping them sustain their ideologies and assert their importance within society. This is similar to how some in Pakistan hold onto the concept of a global caliphate and ruling over the world.

To address this misconception, let me draw attention to some ground realities. After the defeat of Russia in Afghanistan, remember the statement made by Henry Kissinger, the former U.S. Secretary of State and architect of the "New World Order." He stated clearly, "After defeating Russia as a global power against America, our next and greatest enemy is Islam and Muslims, and it is imperative to deal with this threat."

This is the same Henry Kissinger whom Pakistan helped connect with China, yet in 1971, all his sympathies lay with our enemy, India. He has also been accused of causing massive bombing in Cambodia and Laos due to his policies.

Kissinger played a crucial role in the overthrow of Chilean President Allende's elected Marxist government. He supported U.S.-backed military dictatorships in Africa and Latin America. He also approved Indonesia's forced occupation of East Timor. He threatened Pakistan's Prime Minister Bhutto with severe consequences if he did not completely abandon his nuclear program. Kissinger's ruthless brand of pragmatic diplomacy is believed to have led to the deaths of millions of people, and his diplomatic successors later honed this approach.

In 1977, he stated that the protection of Israel is the shared responsibility of all free people. Just three months before his death, in an interview with Israeli newspaper Ma'ariv, he said, "I am a Jew. Therefore, the survival of Jews and Israel is my personal issue."

In 2014, the World Jewish Congress recognized Henry Kissinger's extraordinary abilities and awarded

him the Theodor Herzl Award, named after the founder of the Zionist ideology. On this occasion, Israeli President Isaac Herzog praised Kissinger for his sympathy and love for Israel.

According to Theodor Herzl, the founder of Zionism, the Promised Land for Jews includes areas beyond Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan, encompassing parts of Iran and Turkey as well. In 1947, the United Nations divided Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state, declaring Jerusalem an international city. However, former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin claimed that this division of Palestine was illegal, asserting that Jerusalem belonged to the Jews and would remain so forever. The idea of Greater Israel has been fostered in Israel through generations. Jewish Israelis are made to believe that all the lands mentioned in the holy books rightfully belong to them and will one day be part of Greater Israel.

Despite all these facts, if Muslim leaders continue to turn a blind eye to these realities in order to preserve their power, they should remember that shutting one's eyes, like a pigeon, will not save them from the predator.

Thursday 3rd October 2024

Global Recognition of Pink Salt: When Will Pakistan Take the First Step? *Pakistan's Pink Salt: National Treasure or Global Conspiracy?*

The process of outsourcing all the airports in the country is almost complete, and an announcement could be made at any time. It will be declared that we first sank our own airline with our own hands and left those earning foreign exchange for the country in foreign lands helpless. Now, why would we need these airports anymore? Let's mortgage them too; after all, it could bring us some personal profit.

We are being told that this is how things work in other countries. Well, other countries have many best practices, but you don't follow those, do you? You're selling off Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), practically giving away the Karachi Steel Mill spread over 19,000 acres and worth billions, for pennies. Deals are being made to sell the ports, the sale of National Bank is in the works, and you're selling Civil Aviation. You're even selling Pakistani assets in the US and UK. Rather than informing the nation, you've turned Parliament into a mere rubber stamp. Based on a false sense of superiority in Parliament, you're determined to sell off the entire country. Recently, a tsunami of constitutional amendments was ready to drown us, but Maulana, despite being in the minority in Parliament, displayed his influence just as his late father did when he secured the Chief Minister ship of the province, despite being from the third but minority party. Similarly, in Punjab, Pervez Elahi, with just ten seats, turned the Chief Minister ship into his household's servant.

For many years now, this mockery has been made of the nation, and no one is questioning what sort of joke is being played on us. For the past seven decades, I've been hearing that the country is in grave danger, but those responsible for putting it in danger face no accountability. There is another issue I want to highlight, which is equally important:

You can research on the internet yourself to see that three major countries currently export seafood to the whole world, one of them being Vietnam, whose coastline is much smaller than Gwadar's. Vietnam exports \$10 billion worth of seafood, whereas our exports from Gwadar are so minimal they are shameful. With just a little effort, we could easily export \$12 billion worth of seafood. Vietnam has provided employment to 4.5 million people through its coastline, while how many have we employed? They have no answer to that either.

God has blessed us with countless resources, yet a handful of powerful individuals are looting these resources during their turn in power, transferring their wealth to foreign banks. Despite the bounties given to us by the Almighty, due to the incompetence of governments and ongoing corruption in administration, we are suffocating under mountains of debt, while our people are being handed over to the monster of inflation, which is sucking the very life out of them. When our Prime Minister, in an interview with a foreign lady, begs for help from the world like a pauper, perhaps he feels no shame, but those of us living abroad, who still send remittances to the country, have started to feel embarrassed. Can you find any other example in the world where, after a person in Pakistan pays income tax on their salary, they are forced to pay yet another tax on their earnings at the end of the year? In other words, after paying income tax, a new, separate tax is imposed.

Now, listen to another injustice. Pakistan currently has 22.2 billion tons of natural mineral

Reserves. Let me just mention the Khewra salt mine. We are currently extracting 370,000 tons of salt from it annually. The details will be fascinating for you and all your readers. These reserves stretch from Jhelum to Mianwali, Kalabagh, and Kohat Bahadur Khel. The total length is 300 kilometers, the width is 30 kilometers, and the depth is 2,400 feet. This entire area is filled with pink salt. Let me also add that this pink salt is only found in Pakistan across the entire globe, a blessing bestowed upon us solely by God. It is such a great bounty that the world calls it "pink gold." Before telling this story, I used the word 'injustice,' which was incorrect. In fact, we are committing countless injustices. Now, with full responsibility and evidence, let me briefly point out this injustice.



The First Injustice is that India, Pakistan's eternal adversary, is selling this pink salt around the world under its own name. We have yet to register and protect this precious resource under the Geographical Indications (GI) law. According to this law, since this salt is only found in Pakistan, no other country can place their label on our valuable asset. What is it that prevents or incapacitates us from getting it registered? Could there be a hidden reason behind this, where certain individuals are quietly earning commissions from the process?

The Second Injustice is that the traditional and dangerous mining methods currently in use not only put the lives of miners at risk but also waste an enormous amount of salt. I would also like to draw the attention of the readers to a report published in *Dawn* on 14th May 2023, which mentioned that the Pakistani Ambassador in Washington, Mr. Masood, was approached by an American firm that expressed an interest in investing an initial sum of 200 million dollars in pink salt. This investment could potentially increase to 1 billion dollars. The firm also mentioned that using modern technology, we could increase the annual production of pink salt to 10 million tonnes by 2030.

Let me inform you that, according to global experts, this is the only unique salt in the world that contains a large amount of natural iodine, which is not only useful for consumption but can also be used in various medicines and preserved foods, making it highly beneficial for health. Moreover, this pink salt can be used in various products, and it has a natural fragrance that not only preserves various food items but also eliminates the typical unpleasant smell of such products. However, the sad reality is that we have not been able to rid ourselves of the stench of corruption here.

Today, with a heavy heart, I present Pakistan's case to you all: our country's priceless treasures are being looted. Through your platform, I would like to ask the Pakistani elite why Pakistan is not listed among the world's top 20 salt-exporting countries. Secondly, why has Pakistan not yet taken any steps to stop India's illegal activity in selling our pink salt under their label? This question is for all past governments: why have they not been held accountable for this criminal negligence?

Thirdly, why have we not yet addressed the dangers to the lives and health of the miners extracting this salt? Why has the government remained silent about the massive amount of salt being wasted due to current methods? What are we waiting for before we take steps to protect our valuable resources? Why are we delaying the use of modern technology, and who is responsible for this

failure? Would these elite "big fish" show the same sluggishness in their own private businesses? Absolutely not! Because this is national wealth, owned by the people, and the public should know about the injustices being inflicted upon them for which they are paying a heavy price.

There was an incident involving a government minister dining at a restaurant in DHA. When he asked the waiter for the bill, the waiter pointed towards an individual sitting at a nearby table and informed the minister that the gentleman had already paid the bill. The minister shook hands with the young man and asked why he had paid the bill. The young man replied, "I recognized you as a minister." The minister nodded in acknowledgment. Before the minister could say anything further, the young man boldly said, "Since we already pay for your electricity, gas, and phone bills, and the salaries of the police guards who accompany you for your protection come out of our pockets, why shouldn't we pay for your meal as well?"

Friday 4th October 2024

Iran-Israel Conflict: Waves of Change in Global Politics

Iran's Military Strategy: Possible Impacts of Intervention in Lebanon and Gaza

For several years, Israel had been looking for excuses to attack Iran, and particularly since October 7th of last year, its brutal actions in Gaza have been part of a broader effort to drag Iran into the conflict. Israel has long been issuing threats to attack Iran's nuclear program, which has finally culminated in success for Israel. Earlier this year, in April, two senior commanders of Iran's Revolutionary Guards were killed in a missile attack on the Iranian consulate in Damascus, Syria. While Israel did not officially claim responsibility, it is widely believed that Israel was behind this attack.

On July 31st of this year, at around 2:00 PM Iranian time, Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh was martyred alongside his personal bodyguard in a missile attack on a military guesthouse after attending the oath-taking ceremony of Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian. And now, on September 27, 2024, following the martyrdom of Hezbollah's 64-year-old popular leader Hassan Nasrallah and Iranian Revolutionary Guard General Abbas Nilforoshan in an Israeli missile attack, Iran's patience has finally run out. In response, on Tuesday night—the first day of the Jewish New Year—Iran rained down 200 ballistic missiles on Israel in just 400 seconds. This sudden escalation has once again drawn the world's attention to the Middle East, where the bloody conflict is becoming increasingly dangerous with each passing day.

It is important to note that from stock markets to global analysts, everyone is trying to predict the next steps of the involved parties, but amid all this, the three major powers—the U.S., China, and Russia—seem unable to find a solution to the conflict. Since the October 7th attacks, the rising tensions in the Middle East have now spread from Gaza, Lebanon, and Yemen to include Iran as well. Israeli attacks have so far killed thousands, including senior leaders of Hamas and Hezbollah.

Throughout this war, Israel appears to have conducted successful operations against its enemies, including Hezbollah, Hamas, and Iran. Last week, in Israeli strikes on Lebanon, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and several other senior leaders were killed. Furthermore, numerous senior Hezbollah commanders have also lost their lives. Now, the United States has openly entered the fray in defense of Israel, and it is certain that America's allies are backing Israel in its actions against Hezbollah, Hamas, and Iran.

On the surface, the U.S., the U.K., and several countries in the European Union are trying to broker ceasefires, not only in Gaza but also in Lebanon. However, these efforts have not yet borne fruit. Many nations, including the U.S., fear that the ongoing conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon could spread throughout the Middle East. Last week, in his speech at the United Nations General Assembly, U.S. President Joe Biden stated that "an all-out war is in no one's interest. A diplomatic solution is still possible and is the only way to ensure long-term security." But despite these appeals, Israel has continued its attacks on Gaza and Lebanon, and following the Iranian missile strikes, Israel has once again threatened to strike Iran.

Since October 7, 2023, according to Gaza's Ministry of Health, the continuous Israeli bombardment on Gaza has claimed at least 40,602 lives, with 93,855 people wounded and millions displaced.

Meanwhile, Israeli airstrikes on Lebanon in September 2024 have killed more than a thousand people. On the other hand, during the ground operations in Gaza against Hamas over the past year, dozens of Israeli soldiers have been killed or wounded. Hezbollah, since October 7, has continued to launch rockets into Israel, and the Israeli Prime Minister has claimed that more than 8,000 rockets have been fired at various parts of Israel over the past year. Yemen's Houthi fighters have also been targeting Israeli ships in the Red Sea since the Gaza war began.

Earlier this year, in April, two senior commanders of Iran's Revolutionary Guards were killed in a missile attack on Iran's consulate in Damascus. Although Israel did not claim responsibility for the attack, it is widely believed that Israel was behind it.

Recently, in a speech at the United Nations, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that all of these actions in the Middle East are part of Israel's self-defence. "Israel desires peace," he said, "but we are faced with savage enemies who seek our destruction, and we must defend ourselves against them." Netanyahu harshly criticized Iran and said that Israel is defending itself on seven different fronts against threats from Iran. He concluded his speech by saying, "Israel will win this war because we have no choice but to win."

Meanwhile, before the situation in Lebanon heated up, the United States had been trying to negotiate a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, but those negotiations have stalled. Still, looking at the statements from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, it seems clear that Israel is not influenced by calls for a ceasefire or diplomatic efforts. Global analysts view U.S. statements with scepticism, but Netanyahu's continued stance suggests that Israel is not moved by the demands for a ceasefire or diplomatic attempts.

In a three-minute video message shared on the social media platform X on Monday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed the Iranian public, stating, "There is no place in the Middle East that Israel cannot reach, no location where we cannot go to protect our people and country." Speaking directly to the Iranian people, he added, "With every passing moment, the (Iranian) government is pushing the honourable Persian people closer to destruction."

Netanyahu further remarked that when Iran is "finally free," everything will change, and both nations will be able to live in peace. The Israeli Prime Minister urged the Iranian people not to let "the fanatic mullahs crush your hopes and dreams. You deserve better." He emphasized, "The Iranian people should know that Israel stands with you. Together, we will see a prosperous and peaceful future."

Following Iran's missile strikes, the question arises as to why the world's three major powers have been unable to convince the involved parties in this conflict to agree to a ceasefire. Aside from the United States, why have global powers like Russia and China failed to play an effective role in this matter?

Experts and analysts observing Middle Eastern and international foreign policy believe that the lack of cooperation between the U.S., Russia, and China, as well as internal American politics, are some of the reasons it has been difficult to persuade Israel to agree to a ceasefire. Are the differences between the U.S., China, and Russia the reason for failing to stop Israel? Or is there an attempt to

curb China's growing economic influence in the region? After all, China successfully played a key role in ending a bitter war between Iran and Saudi Arabia in Yemen, which resulted in significant losses for American arms companies. Despite global sanctions on Iran, China signed a 25-year strategic cooperation agreement with Iran on March 27, 2021. This long-term agreement covers various economic issues faced by Iran, which has been suffering under severe U.S. sanctions, and allows China to purchase ample oil from Iran.

This agreement with China is the first long-term deal Iran has signed with a major global power. Previously, in 2001, Iran signed a cooperation agreement with Russia, mostly in the field of nuclear energy, but the duration of that agreement was only ten years. Later, the agreement was extended twice for five years each, bringing the total duration of the Russo-Iranian agreement to twenty years.

There is significant warmth in the relationship between China and Iran, and in 2019, both countries participated in joint naval exercises with Russia in the northern Indian Ocean. The trade volume between Beijing and Tehran has reached approximately \$20 billion annually in recent years. In 2014, the annual trade volume was around \$52 billion, but it decreased due to U.S. sanctions and the sharp drop in oil prices in global markets. Therefore, it can be said to some extent that the U.S. will not allow any efforts for a ceasefire, particularly those led by China, to succeed in the recent conflict. Moreover, due to the Ukraine war, the U.S. will continue to be the biggest obstacle to Russia's involvement in resolving the situation.



An obvious example of this is that while the U.S. appears to be trying to prevent a major war in the Middle East, it is simultaneously providing billions of dollars to Israel to strengthen its military power. The U.S. has even ordered its forces to defend Israel, making it clear that it has become a party to this war. This exposes the contradiction in the U.S.'s recent statements about calling for a ceasefire. Last week, Israel announced that it had received an aid package worth \$8.7 billion from the U.S. to continue its military operations.

Einar Tangen, a senior fellow at the Chinese think tank Taihe Institute, remarked, "On one hand, the U.S. talks about a ceasefire, but on the other hand, it is providing Israel with weapons, ammunition, and intelligence support that is being used to kill thousands of civilians, including women and children." While the U.S. is now advocating for a ceasefire, in the past, it has vetoed ceasefire resolutions at the United Nations.

In this context, the British representative of the U.S. State Department, Margaret McLeod, told global media, "We opposed the same resolution that ignored Hamas's terrorism or disregarded Israel's right to self-defence." On the other hand, major powers like Russia and China have issued statements condemning attacks that increase tensions in the region, but no practical steps have been taken by these countries so far.

In recent years, China's influence has been rising globally. A prime example of this influence is the restoration of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia last year, almost seven years after severing ties, thanks to China's mediation efforts. Additionally, China is the largest economic partner in the region, despite intense border disputes. According to Indian news agency PTI, bilateral trade between the two nations, which was \$1.83 billion in 2001, has now surged to \$123 billion in just 11 months of this year.

After the Israeli attack in Lebanon, which resulted in the death of Hassan Nasrallah along with several senior Hezbollah leaders, China's foreign policy response has been cautious and measured. Beijing simply stated that it opposes any violation of Lebanon's sovereignty and security, condemning the operations against civilians. The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs mentioned that the rising tensions between Lebanon and Israel are linked to the ongoing conflict in Gaza, and expressed concern about the growing instability in the region. "China urges all involved parties, especially Israel, to take measures to resolve the situation and prevent this conflict from spiralling out of control," it said.

On the other hand, Russia, which is a significant ally of Iran in the region, has not played an effective role in resolving the conflict either. However, like China, Russia has condemned the escalation. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov issued a statement on Monday condemning the death of Hezbollah's leader and warning that this could increase the chances of a larger war in the Middle East. Russia denounces any actions that would escalate tensions in the region further.

Barbara Slavin, a fellow at the American think tank Stimson Centre, said that after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the subsequent U.S. sanctions on Moscow, relations between the two countries have deteriorated significantly. She added that the current frosty relations between China and the U.S. are no secret either, or thus, it is unlikely that China would cooperate with the U.S. to resolve the Middle East conflict. Commenting on the situation, Einar Tangen said, "China is not in a position to dictate terms to the U.S. or nuclear-armed Israel." He further noted that "China has consistently called for ceasefires and supported negotiations aimed at achieving a two-state solution between Israel and Palestine."

For decades, it has been widely believed that Israel possesses nuclear weapons, although the country has never confirmed or denied it. China's statement highlights how difficult it is to dictate terms to a nuclear power. Has Pakistan's leadership ever considered the advantages of this divine blessing of nuclear deterrence?

In the United States, presidential elections are scheduled for November this year, with a closely contested race expected between Vice President Kamala Harris and Republican candidate Donald Trump. According to Barbara Slavin from the Stimson Centre, the Biden administration has maintained a pro-Israel stance. "We all know that Joe Biden has always been reluctant to apply real pressure on Israel by limiting arms supplies," she said. Biden's statement taking full responsibility for Israel's security strongly supports Barbara's claim.

"With the U.S. election just weeks away, I don't think either Biden or Kamala Harris would propose tough measures against Israel, as it could help Trump win re-election." It is worth noting that as

president, Donald Trump recognised Jerusalem as Israel's capital in 2017, a move that many countries criticised.

However, Barbara suggests that "if Kamala Harris wins, we might see increased U.S. pressure for a ceasefire in Gaza and Lebanon. But this will largely depend on where Israel and Iran draw the line in the current phase of the conflict."

Following the death of Hassan Nasrallah, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Nasser Kanani, stated that Iran would not send forces to Lebanon or Gaza. "There is no need to send Iranian volunteer forces because the fighters in Lebanon and Palestinian territories have the capability and strength to defend themselves against aggression," he said. Meanwhile, U.S. officials have acknowledged that American efforts for a ceasefire have been insufficient so far. U.S. State Department spokesperson Margaret McLeod admitted, "I wouldn't say the U.S. government has done enough until we see a ceasefire. We believe that the conflict between Israel and Hamas should be resolved through diplomacy."

She described reports from Israel and Lebanon as "concerning," adding that since October 7, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has made eleven trips to the Middle East, as the U.S. seeks a diplomatic solution to the conflict. However, the rapidly escalating flames of war that are pushing global peace to the brink appear to be the outcome of Blinken's repeated diplomatic missions.

It is important to note that Iran's attacks on Israel have come at a time when Israel has launched not only airstrikes on Lebanon but also initiated a ground offensive, alongside airstrikes on Syria and Yemen. This raises the question: Could a new and larger war break out in the region? And could a direct open conflict between Iran and Israel drag other seemingly neutral countries into the fray, especially as Iran has openly accused these nations of siding with Israel and has issued dire warnings of severe consequences?

Saturday 5th October 2024

Impact of American Sanctions: Response from China and Pakistan

Are Pakistan and China in the Crosshairs

The enemy missile defense system can be defeated by MIRV (Multiple Independently Targetable Reentry Vehicle) missiles, which contain multiple warheads capable of striking different targets simultaneously. In contrast, MARV (Maneuverable Reentry Vehicle) missiles have only one warhead but possess the ability to change their trajectory before reaching the target, thereby confusing the enemy's defense system. These are Pakistan's most advanced missile systems, which continue to undergo gradual upgrades.

The U.S. State Department has imposed sanctions on several companies, including Chinese research institutes and Pakistani entities, claiming they are involved in supplying equipment and technology for Pakistan's ballistic missile program. Pakistan, however, has labelled this U.S. action as "political" and "biased."

State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller, in a press briefing on 12 September 2024, stated, "The United States is committed to strengthening the international non-proliferation regime by taking action against networks involved in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. U.S. concerns regarding Pakistan's long-range ballistic missile program have been 'clear and consistent' for several years." Under the Arms Export Control Act (AECA) and the Export Control Reform Act (ECRA), the U.S. has imposed sanctions on three Chinese institutions, a Chinese individual, and one Pakistani entity due to their involvement in ballistic missile proliferation activities. The Pakistani entity, the National Development Complex (NDC), has been acquiring equipment for testing rocket motors for Shaheen III and Ababeel missile systems and possibly larger systems from Beijing's Research Institute of Automation for Machine Building (RIAMB). Other Chinese companies, including Hubei Huachangda Intelligent Equipment, Universal Enterprise, Xi'an Longde Technology Development, and Pakistani company Innovative Equipment, are also on the sanctions list. The Chinese individual affected by the sanctions is Lu Dongyi.

According to the State Department, the U.S. opposition to Pakistan's ballistic missile program has long been a part of its policy, even though Pakistan has been a long-term partner of the United States. However, differences remain between the two nations on certain matters. "Where we have disagreements, we will not hesitate to act on them in the interest of our national security," said the spokesperson. Historically, the U.S. has used such allegations to exert pressure for its own interests, and it continues to support its new regional ally, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, by providing extensive technology, components, and all the privileges of the civil nuclear club, highlighting the U.S.'s double standards.

The world is aware that India and Israel, which claim strict adherence to non-proliferation principles, have repeatedly ignored licensing conditions under the U.S. watch in the provision of advanced military technologies. Such double standards and discriminatory practices harm the credibility of governments working against global proliferation, increase military imbalances, and threaten international peace and security.

Earlier this year, in April, the U.S. imposed similar sanctions on three Chinese and one Belarusian company. In October 2023, the U.S. also sanctioned three more Chinese companies accused of supplying parts and equipment for Pakistan's ballistic missile program. Additionally, in December 2021, the U.S. administration-imposed sanctions on 13 Pakistani companies on 26 November 2021, accusing them of assisting Pakistan's nuclear and missile programs.

The Pakistani missile program currently targeted by these recent U.S. sanctions includes the medium-range ballistic missiles Shaheen III and Ababeel, both of which are classified as MIRV missiles. Global experts believe that these missiles are the most advanced in Pakistan's arsenal. Pakistan first tested the Ababeel missile in 2017 and, on 18 October 2023, successfully tested a new variant of the medium-range, surface-to-surface Ababeel missile. This missile was showcased for the first time during Pakistan Day Parade on 23 March 2024.

According to the Australian National University's Strategic and Defence Studies Centre in Canberra, Ababeel is the first missile in South Asia capable of carrying multiple warheads or nuclear weapons over a range of 2,200 kilometers, and it can target multiple objectives. Defense experts note that Ababeel can carry three or more nuclear warheads. This MIRV system is designed to defeat and neutralize enemy ballistic missile defense (BMD) shields. Each warhead within the missile can strike more than one target. Moreover, the significant aspect of this missile is its capability to launch a first or second strike against high-value targets protected by ballistic missile defense shields.

The unique feature of an MIRV (Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle) missile is that it can confuse an enemy's missile defence shield or ballistic missile system when approaching the target, similar to how a fast bowler swings the ball to break the batsman's defence by relying on speed, swing, and seam. An MIRV missile contains multiple warheads, each independently programmed and directed towards different targets, with each warhead following a separate flight path.

India has been working on ballistic missile systems for over a decade, conducting tests and publicly discussing them. Recently, India tested its first MIRV missile, Agni-V, with multiple warheads. This intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) has a range of at least 5,000-8,000 kilometres. Additionally, India's "Agni-P" is also an MIRV with a range of up to 2,000 kilometres, while Pakistan's Ababeel missile has a range of only 2,200 kilometres, making it the lowest-range MIRV in the world. However, the U.S. views Pakistan's development of such missiles for its defence as a violation, despite the fact that Ababeel is specifically designed to counter India. The U.S. has expressed concerns about Pakistan's Shaheen-III missile, which has a range of 2,740 kilometres, since 2021.

In fact, Ababeel is the next generation of the Shaheen-III missile. During the testing of Shaheen-III, Lieutenant General (R) Khalid Ahmed Kidwai, an advisor to the National Command Authority, stated that "this missile is designed solely to counter India, with the purpose of targeting strategic sites in India (specifically the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and areas in the east where nuclear submarine bases are being constructed), ensuring that India has no place to hide or operate with the misconception that there are locations in India where it can hide its systems for a counterstrike or first strike and remain untargeted by Pakistan."

India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and other Indian officials have frequently indicated that "India

has acquired the capability to carry out pre-emptive strikes against Pakistan." The supersonic BrahMos missile, which can be equipped with nuclear warheads, is among several systems India is developing to launch first strikes from land, air, and sea. It is noteworthy that in 2022, a BrahMos missile accidentally landed in Pakistan, and India's Ministry of Defence claimed it was unintentionally fired into Pakistani territory. Thus, it is entirely possible that "India may use BrahMos in a conventional counterforce (first) strike against Pakistan's strategic forces and command-and-control centres, claiming it as a conventional attack, but Pakistan would treat it as the first nuclear strike." Therefore, it is crucial that Pakistan remains fully prepared to deter any such attack, which is why Pakistan continues to showcase its capabilities with nuclear warhead missiles like Shaheen-III and Ababeel.



The question arises: why is the U.S. concerned about these missiles? According to the U.S. State Department, "RIAMB has collaborated with Pakistan for testing and acquiring equipment for rocket motors with diameters for Shaheen-III and Ababeel missile systems, and possibly even larger systems." The phrase "possibly even larger systems" implies that Pakistan may be working on the next generation of these missiles. Ababeel was first tested in January 2017, and its second test took place six years later in October 2023. During these six years, continuous work on this technology has taken place at NDC (National Development Complex). The U.S. believes that while Shaheen-III was already operational, the second test of Ababeel and its public display in March signals that Pakistan has reached a stage where research and development are complete, and Ababeel is now operational. The core concern for the U.S. is that Pakistan is potentially working on an enhanced version with more advanced capabilities.

Another U.S. concern revolves around Ababeel being a three-stage missile system and its mobile launcher, which provides significant strategic advantages. In the event of a surprise attack, these systems can be easily camouflaged and relocated to secret locations, making them hard to detect. Experts believe that any three-stage missile system could form the foundation for long-range systems.

The six-year gap between Ababeel's first and second tests indicates that Pakistan is now locally developing this technology. The U.S. contends that if Pakistan were acquiring all technology from China, why would there be such a long wait? Undoubtedly, there has been some new development in this system, prompting increased U.S. concern that Pakistan may be acquiring more capabilities, possibly enabling future versions of these nuclear missiles to carry larger warheads. Ababeel might even achieve the capacity to carry more than three warheads. Notably, in April, sanctions were imposed on mobile launchers for these systems. The U.S. fact sheet stated that the Minsk Wheel Tractor Plant in Belarus had supplied chassis for special vehicles used in Pakistan's ballistic missile program.

The U.S. sanctions also mention powerful rocket motors, indicating concerns beyond the extended range of Ababeel, such as Pakistan's space program. In April, the U.S. fact sheet accused China's Grand peak Technology Limited of collaborating with Pakistan's space agency, SUPARCO, in providing equipment for rocket motor testing, as well as supplying components for large rocket motors. The U.S. fears that Pakistan may develop its own domestic space launch vehicle (SLV), a technology vital for achieving nuclear deterrence by enabling precise targeting and surveillance capabilities. Through this, Pakistan could launch its intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) and secure both military and civilian objectives via its space launch program, aligned with its 2047 Space Vision.

The recent sanctions are not a new development; they are part of a longstanding trend that dates back to the 1970s, when Pakistan began its missile program in response to India's, which was aided by Russia and other sources. Additionally, Pakistan has always maintained close ties with China. The sanctions imposed on companies and individuals from China and Pakistan will have little impact on either country, as Pakistan's National Development Complex (NDC) does not rely on the West for missile technologies. Therefore, these sanctions will not affect it. North Korea serves as an example, having faced numerous sanctions without being hindered, whereas Pakistan's missile programme is entirely indigenous, reliant on local resources and expertise, and will remain unaffected by American sanctions.

Such actions by the United States are regrettable, and the most important point is that they disregard regional strategic realities, such as the defence and security needs of Pakistan and the growing intercontinental range of Indian missiles, which pose increasing threats to regional and global peace, security, and stability. The US State Department's statement also mentioned the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), a group of countries that regulate the export of missile technology. Neither Pakistan nor China has signed the MTCR, yet both nations respect its stipulations and have not exported any systems with a range exceeding 300 kilometers. However, instead of acknowledging this, it is stated that Pakistan and China are collaborating.

If the concern is about their cooperation, then it must be noted that India's entire missile programme has been developed with the cooperation and assistance of Russia, and now the US and its allies, notably Israel, are openly supporting it. An example of this is the BrahMos missile, initially developed using Russian technology with a range of 290 kilometers, but India has now extended this range to 800 kilometers. Israel is also assisting India in developing its hypersonic version, yet no one raises the issue of MTCR here.

It is worth remembering that the MTCR prohibits the export of missiles with a range exceeding 300 kilometers and warheads over 500 kilograms. At present, India's Agni-V missile, with a range of 5,000-8,000 kilometers, has the capacity to carry three to five, or possibly more, warheads. India is also developing versions of this missile to be mounted on nuclear submarines, whereas Pakistan does not even possess a nuclear submarine. Pakistan's efforts are aimed at maintaining strategic stability in South Asia. Instead of acknowledging Pakistan's restraint, the imposition of sanctions tarnishes the image of the United States.

The technology Pakistan has developed in response to India's missile capabilities should not pose an issue for the US. However, the real issue is that, for America, India is the most important member of

the "Quad". India has managed to integrate its people into every think tank in the West with the help of the US and other Western countries, influencing public opinion and government policies in these countries. It is important to note that the "Quad" is a group consisting of four countries: India, Australia, Japan, and the United States. The US has various geostrategic interests at play in international locations such as Ukraine-Russia, the Middle East, and the Taiwan-China situation, and as a result, it has made different promises to various countries. To counter China's influence in the South Asian region, the "Quad" was formed.

The tension with China is also a major reason behind the sanctions on Pakistan's missile program. The focus of the US sanctions is primarily on Chinese companies rather than Pakistan, with the aim of pressuring Beijing economically. Will the "Triad" (USA, Israel, India) succeed in this? The ground realities in this region have already sent a clear message of America's waning influence.

Monday 7th October 2024

Gulf Politics and American Military Power: A Free Hand for Israel

America and Israel: A New Battle for Influence in the Middle East

In the Middle East, following Iran's recent ballistic missile attacks on Israel, there is a "calm before the storm" in the region. On the one hand, Israel's reaction is being awaited, on the other hand, questions are being asked to American President Joe Biden, who is thousands of miles away, regarding its nature, while the turbulence of the American elections has also created a strange situation. The important thing is this. America has a close alliance with Israel and a historical role in the region in addition to its forces in the Middle East. It is no longer a secret that Israel's role in the region is that of a soldier of the United States, who is charging too much for American interests.

On Tuesday night, when Iran launched approximately 180 missiles at Israel, the US had already given Israel prior warning. President Biden and other key US officials monitored the situation live from the White House's Situation Room. In response to the attacks, the US quickly condemned them, labelling them as "unacceptable" and claimed that American naval ships had intercepted multiple Iranian missiles.

President Biden had already ordered an increase in US troop presence in the Middle East. Earlier, in late September, the US deployed the aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman to the Eastern Mediterranean, which is expected to be fully operational by the end of the week. According to the US Department of Defense, more than 40,000 American troops are stationed in various countries across the Middle East. But why are such large numbers of US forces positioned thousands of miles from home in the Middle East? Answering this question is crucial to understanding the complexities of the ongoing conflict and the impact US military presence has on the balance of power in the region.

In fact, the US's presence in the region dates back to the 1940s, specifically in the Persian Gulf, with a significant increase following the 2001 World Trade Center attacks. In 1945, the US established its first airbase in the region in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

According to the US Department of Defense, approximately 40,000 American troops are currently stationed in the Middle East. Before October 7, the US had around 34,000 troops in the region, but an additional 6,000 have been deployed over the past year. The largest US base in the Middle East is Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, which was established in 1996.

In addition to Qatar, US troops are present in Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Cyprus, and Iraq. The US has multiple bases in Kuwait and two bases in Saudi Arabia. "Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE, Oman, Kuwait, Jordan, and Bahrain also benefit from the protection provided by the US."

It may come as a surprise that over 2,000 American personnel are still stationed in Iraq, primarily around the Ain al-Asad Air Base and facilities like 'Union III.' Additionally, the US military's Tower 22 base in Jordan, located in the northeast near the borders of Syria and Iraq, came under attack on January 28 this year, resulting in the deaths of three US Army Reserve soldiers. The attack was attributed to the Iranian-backed Iraqi militia Kata'ib Hezbollah.

Besides military bases and troops, the US Navy is also present in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Oman, and the Mediterranean Sea. According to the US Department of Defense, two more American aircraft carriers are positioned in these waters. USS Abraham Lincoln is already near the Gulf of Oman, while USS Truman has taken up position in the Mediterranean, meaning all three branches of the US military—land, sea, and air—are present in the region.

But why are US troops stationed so far from home in this region? The answer lies in multiple reasons behind the US's longstanding presence in the Middle East. Located between Asia and North Africa, the Middle East is rich in natural resources and occupies a strategically crucial position on the global map, making it central to the foreign policies of many countries, especially the US.

Since the discovery of oil in the Saudi city of Dhahran in 1938, the value of oil in the global economy has steadily risen. "As oil became more significant in the global economy, its strategic importance also increased." Many mistakenly believe that the US is in the region solely for oil, but in fact, the US is largely self-sufficient and was the largest oil producer in 2022, surpassing Saudi Arabia by 30%. The real reason for the US's presence here is to monitor other nations, particularly European countries and China, and their access to Middle Eastern oil. However, there are several other crucial factors at play as well.

The Middle East has long been caught in the Cold War between Russia and the US, and the belief still persists in America that wherever it leaves a vacuum, Russia will fill it. However, historically, this notion has not always been accurate. The United States' sympathies toward Israel were evident just 12 minutes after the signing of the 1948 treaty, justifying it by saying that what happened to the Jews during World War II was wrong, and it sees it as its right to fulfil the dream of Jews for an independent state. In reality, the US has assumed the role of a "global policeman," and because the Middle East is a vital region through which global maritime trade routes pass, it considers its presence and dominance in the region a right.

On 14 May 1948, David Ben-Gurion announced the establishment of Israel, and following its creation, the United States, Britain, France, and China recognised it. Although India had secret relations with Israel from the beginning, it officially recognised the country in 1992.

Additionally, three Muslim countries, apart from the UAE and Turkey, have established full diplomatic relations with Israel, and Saudi Arabia allowed travel to the country in 2018.

Similarly, after the September 11 attacks in 2001, when the US decided to invade Iraq, more than 100,000 troops were sent to the Iraq war. However, the uncertainty that arose after the US occupation led to the emergence of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS), whose formation was even acknowledged by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. It is also a part of history that this organisation has waged war solely against Islamic countries. Moreover, one of America's major rivals, Iran, is also located in this region. According to a renowned American think tank, the US has significant economic, political, and military assets in the Middle East, and it deems it necessary to maintain a certain number of troops in the region to protect these interests. With multiple air bases in the region, the US can respond whenever needed, and often it influences the situation without taking any direct action. The US justifies its presence by blaming the growing influence of China and Russia in the region.

Due to the US military presence in the region, Israel's unchecked use of force has become a threat to the entire world. In this regard, Youssef Kain, the coordinator of the Middle East Programme at the Wilson Centre's Policy Institute in Washington, states that the US presence in the Middle East plays an essential role in shifting the balance of power in Israel's favour in four keyways. First, American political support helps legitimise Israel's actions, particularly in international institutions. Second, US presence in the region helps limit local and regional conflicts, bringing stability to countries like Syria that have been embroiled in conflicts for years, thereby giving Israel more freedom. Third, Israeli and American interests, particularly economic ones, align. And finally, Israel benefits from the security, intelligence sharing, and strategic support provided by the US.



Those with a deep understanding of US international policy believe that "Israel is a small state, and small states often face the issue of lacking 'strategic depth,' meaning they do not have the territorial expanse to fight against regional enemies like larger powers do. The US presence in the Middle East acts as a deterrent to Iran and its supported proxy groups. US naval fleets are stationed in the Red Sea, Mediterranean Sea, and the Indian Ocean, forming an integrated network. That is why whenever Iran attacks, the US is immediately aware, and either warns Israel or intercepts those missiles itself."

Throughout this century, the US has been directly involved in wars in Iraq and Syria and indirectly involved in several proxy wars in the Middle East. However, analysts believe that based on past experiences, the US would prefer not to be part of a major new war in the Middle East. The US's national interest lies in ensuring that the conflict remains limited and does not escalate. Iran also shows "strategic patience," and there was an unspoken agreement between Israel and Iran that they could attack each other's proxies but would refrain from direct conflict. The US would want this balance to be maintained.

However, Netanyahu has acted in the interest of Israel, not the US, and has used the US election season to expand the war, knowing that he would receive bipartisan support from both Democrats and Republicans. Once a new American administration takes over, particularly the Democrats, they may have a mandate to restrain Israel, while Trump has hinted at destroying Iran's nuclear plants. If you look at the US national security documents, their strategic goal is to contain the rapidly rising China, so any issue that diverts attention from this objective is not in their national interest. Remember, no matter how important China is to the US, America will always look for opportunities to assert its influence wherever it can globally.

This situation may change, but for now, the United States is fully supporting Israel, and as long as this remains the case, Israel will continue to pursue its ethno-nationalist agenda and expand its influence. According to the Executive Director of the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, "Despite the fierce competition from Russia and China, the U.S. is still the only global power with significant influence in the Middle East, which it uses to shift the balance in favour of Israel. The U.S. can influence most countries in the region, and it uses this leverage, when necessary, to protect Israel. This military and economic influence, combined with the public and private support of Israel,

emboldens Israel to violate international laws."

To remind the readers, on August 13, 2024, Pentagon Press Secretary Air Force Major General Pat Ryder said during a news conference that there is still time for diplomacy in the Middle East, but U.S. forces are being deployed to the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility as a deterrent. He mentioned that the U.S. Air Force has moved "F-22 Raptor" jets into the region, and the U.S. Navy has deployed the "USS Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group" along with "F-35C Lightning" aircraft. In addition, the guided-missile submarine USS Georgia is also on standby for any emergency.

Ryder stated that there are currently around 40,000 U.S. service members in the CENTCOM area, closely monitoring the situation in the Middle East. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin is in almost daily contact with Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant and other regional partners. Austin has reassured Gallant of America's firm commitment to take every possible step in Israel's defense. These adjustments in U.S. military posture across the Middle East, in light of increasing regional tensions, are meant to enhance force protection, reinforce support for Israel's defense, and ensure the U.S. is prepared to respond to various types of emergencies.

Iran and Iranian-backed groups have threatened to attack Israel, and the U.S. is taking these threats seriously. However, the focus remains on de-escalating tensions, facilitating a ceasefire, and securing the return of hostages. The U.S. seeks to prevent a large-scale regional war in the Middle East. No one wants to see further escalation, nor a broader regional conflict. Hopefully, we won't find ourselves needing to deploy these capabilities, but if required, we will act in defense of Israel.

The question now arises: what is the U.S. intending to do by giving Israel a free hand in the region, as indicated by Pentagon Press Secretary Air Force Major General Pat Ryder's news conference? Iran did not launch missile strikes on Israel until 50 days after Ryder's press conference, but during this period, why did the U.S. not curb Israel's increasing brutality?

Wednesday 9 October 2024

Israel: America's mercenary

The Jewish Lobby: Power or Deception

There is a widespread belief that Jews or Israelis are so clever and intelligent that even the world's only superpower, the United States, cannot act against Israel's will or make decisions independently. It is said that Jews control the world's economy, and no news or media topic can be broadcast without their approval. In America, no one can become a member of Congress or even the President without the financial and political support of the Jewish lobby. These impressions are reinforced when America supports Israel in the Middle East, disregarding opposition and showing no hesitation in violating its own principles. Additionally, tales of Freemasons, Israel's secret agencies, its military, and commandos give the impression that a small nation, the Jews, wields the real power, controlling the U.S., Europe, and all major global powers. This belief often leads people to think that Jews are behind every global conflict, and they are responsible for all the oppression faced by Muslims.

As a result, many Muslims begin to believe that the true evil is not the U.S. or its imperialist capitalist system, but rather Israel or the Jews. They believe that if Jewish power could be eliminated, Muslims would restore their lost glory. Islam instructs Muslims to establish the dominance of their faith over all other religions.

بِوَالِدَيِّْ أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ وَكَفَىٰ بِاللَّهِ شَهِيدًا ﴿الفتح:28﴾

It is He who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to manifest it over all religion. And sufficient is Allah as Witness.

To achieve this, it is essential to understand global politics, identify power centres, and pinpoint the true roots of issues. If we fail to correctly identify our enemy, our efforts will be wasted on the wrong target, and the real enemy will only grow stronger.

It is well known that a superpower is defined as a country whose influence governs most global affairs. Currently, the U.S. is considered the world's sole superpower because no other force can challenge its decisions on global matters. The U.S. economy represents 17% of the world's total economy, and its defence budget exceeds that of Russia, China, the UK, and France combined. Therefore, the question arises: how could Israel, which relies on U.S. military and political assistance for its security and depends on American aid for its economy, possibly control the U.S.? Or is it that the stories of Israel's immense power are simply unfounded?

It is commonly believed that U.S. policy in the Middle East is dictated by Israel. The U.S. supports military coups and authoritarian rulers, or sometimes democratic forces, to strengthen Israel or secure its interests in the region. It imposes sanctions on some countries and provides aid to others. It uses its political and military influence to enforce United Nations resolutions and international laws yet violates those same laws when necessary. Suggesting that the U.S. acts solely under Israeli pressure is a flawed argument. We can observe that the U.S. takes similar actions to serve its own interests in Africa, Latin America, and East Asia, just as it does in the Middle East and South Asia. If the U.S. acts similarly in regions where Israel has no vested interest, it implies that America has the power to implement its policies as it sees fit, regardless of others' opinions.

Moreover, the U.S. often defies global consensus on issues unrelated to Israel's security or interests, even when it faces harsh criticism. The entire world has signed agreements to ban landmines, establish the International Criminal Court for war crimes, and curb global warming, but the U.S. has refused to ratify these treaties. From this analysis, it can be concluded that the U.S. acts in the Middle East primarily to serve its own interests, not because it is under Israel's influence.

Another notion is that all American Jews unite to pressure the U.S. in support of Israel. This belief stems from a lack of information. While there are major Jewish organizations in the U.S., such as the **American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC)** and dozens of affiliated groups, there are also notable organizations like **Americans for Peace Now**, **Israel Policy Forum**, and **Brit Tzedek v'Shalom**, which, though not opposed to Israel's existence, strongly criticize Israel's policies on settlements, land seizures, and its wall construction. These groups also challenge America's unconditional support for Israel. Additionally, the fact is that the vast majority of U.S. Congress members do not require Jewish votes or money to win elections in their constituencies.

In light of this, it is clear that while Israel has influence, it does not control the U.S., and the relationship between the two countries is far more complex than simply one nation dictating the actions of the other. The U.S. often acts in its own national interest, which may or may not align with Israel's objectives.

Congress Members Who Fully Support Israeli Policies

All members of Congress who fully support Israeli policies typically come from areas that are considered their safest constituencies, and they have been winning from these constituencies for decades. For example, former Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, who was openly supportive of Israel, used to win with more than 80% of the vote in every election. To claim that the Jewish lobby is extremely wealthy and exerts pressure on US Congress members through financial means is a completely incorrect assumption. In terms of money, the most powerful lobby in the US is that of defence contractors, oil companies, and pharmaceutical companies. Only "AIPAC" (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) and "Lockheed Martin" spend seven and five times more, respectively, on lobbying compared to "Northrop Grumman" and "General Electric Boeing." Other similar companies in the defence industry also spend significantly less on lobbying. The Jewish population in the US is less than 5%, and even among this group, a significant number oppose unconditional support for Israel. Jewish votes hold no significance in more than 99% of the electoral constituencies in the US, and stronger lobbies than the Jewish lobby exist based on wealth. Given these facts, it becomes clear how little influence 2-3% of the Jewish population can exert on the US administration.

Despite all these facts, if we still believe that the US never acts against Israel's will, let me present some examples to dispel this notion once and for all.

Whenever a US president has seen that a policy pushed by the Israeli lobby was not in American interests, they have forced Israel to follow American policy. In 1956, when Israel, along with Britain and France, initiated a war to seize the Suez Canal, then-US President Dwight Eisenhower expressed strong displeasure over the war and threatened Israel that if it did not withdraw from Egyptian territories, the US would revoke tax exemptions on Israeli bonds and private donations sent to Israel.

Eisenhower issued this threat just weeks before the US presidential election. As a result of this pressure, Israel withdrew from all Egyptian territories within months.

Similarly, in 1978, when Israel invaded Lebanon and reached the Litany River, President Jimmy Carter threatened to cut off aid to Israel, forcing it to limit its operations to a few kilometres within Lebanon's border. Later, President Ronald Reagan, in 1981, rejected AIPAC's heavy pressure and sold F-15 fighter jets to Saudi Arabia. A decade later, President George H. W. Bush successfully resisted AIPAC's pressure and denied a \$10 billion loan to Israel until Yitzhak Shamir, who was a roadblock to the American Middle East peace plan, was ousted. This was a major blow to Israel.

In 2004, President George W. Bush not only forced Israel to break a deal with China under which Israel had modernised aircraft for China, but also led to the resignation of Amos Yaron, Director General of Israel's Ministry of Defence. For several years, Israel has been trying to convince the US to attack Iran, but not only has the US refused to fulfil this demand, it has also strongly warned Israel against taking any military action against Iran.

Despite all these facts, one may ask why the US still supports Israel so strongly. First, it is important to understand that the US is an ideological state and the world's only superpower. Whatever decisions the US makes are based on its needs and interests. The Middle East is of immense importance for several reasons. All major global shipping routes pass through its waters, and more than 66% of the world's oil and gas reserves are located in this region. Beyond these factors, the region has a predominantly Muslim population. The significance of the Middle East can be illustrated by a statement from former British Prime Minister Henry Campbell-Bannerman:



"Here live a people (Muslims) who control this vast region and the resources it holds. Their land is the cradle of human civilisation and religions. They share a common faith, language, history, and emotions. No natural barrier can divide these people, and if they are ever separated, they will once again reunite into one state. Then, they will hold the fate of the world in their hands and cut off Europe from the rest of the world. To prevent this, it is essential to embed an external entity into the heart of this region, so that the potential of this nation is wasted in endless conflicts. This external entity will also serve as a platform for the West to carry out its hidden plans."

These are the fundamental reasons why, after the First World War, the then-superpower Britain sought to establish a Jewish state in the Middle East. After the Second World War, when the US became the dominant global power, its interests also dictated that the state of Israel should be established and strengthened. Through the Israeli state, the region is kept in a constant state of war, which not only fuels American arms factories but also ensures that the US can maintain and expand its influence over these countries due to their weaknesses.

The US, the world's only superpower, champions the ideology of capitalism. The true enemy of Muslims and Islam is not the Jewish or Israeli state, but the US and the capitalist system. Israel is

merely a player that serves American interests. This player has neither the audacity nor the power to steer the world's only superpower according to its own interests. An Israeli professor and peace activist explained Israel's reality this way: "Israel is able to maintain its occupation because it is always ready to fulfil the colonial interests of the West, particularly the US. In reality, Israel has become a tested soldier of the US." Former US Secretary of State Alexander Haig made a significant statement about Israel: "Israel is the largest American aircraft carrier that cannot be sunk."

Historically, Jews have never been able to achieve their political goals without the assistance of an external power, despite their conspiracies, wealth, and political influence. Over the past fourteen hundred years, Jews have remained economically prosperous during the Abbasid Caliphate, the Ottoman Caliphate, the Umayyad rule in Spain, and in Europe and America. However, they have never been able to secure any significant political position in any region. In the state of Medina, the Jews of Banu Quraiza, Banu Nadir, Banu Qaynuqa, and Khaybar, despite their economic, political, and military strength, were never able to directly challenge the Medina state. Instead, they always awaited support from the Quraysh of Mecca and ultimately faced expulsion due to their conspiracies and broken promises.

In Europe, Jews have always been second-class citizens, and when any ruler attempted to oppress them, their economic power was of no avail. When the Ottoman Caliphate was going through its weakest phase, the Jews offered Caliph Abdul Hamid II that if they were granted the land of Palestine, they would pay off all the debts of the Ottoman Caliphate. However, despite their economic strength and the caliphate's weakness, Jews were unsuccessful in their objective. A nation that has been wandering for the past two and a half thousand years, despite all its conspiratorial mentality and wealth, eventually succeeded in establishing the state of Israel in Palestine by stabbing Arabs in the back, following the advice of British Prime Minister Henry Campbell-Bannerman, forty years after his death. The establishment of Israel in the region was necessary to ensure the permanent division of Muslims and to maintain the continuous acquisition of Jewish interests in the region. Allah mentions regarding the Jews in Surah Al-Imran:

لَنْ يَضُرُّوكُمْ إِلَّا أَذًى - وَإِنْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ يُؤْلُوكُمُ الْأَدْبَارَ. ثُمَّ لَا يُنصَرُونَ، ضَرَبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الدَّلَّةُ آيَةً مَا تُقِفُوا إِلَّا بِحَبْلٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَحَبْلٍ مِّنَ النَّاسِ وَبَاءَ وَبَغَضَ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَضَرَبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَسْكَنَةَ - ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا يَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَيَقْتُلُونَ الْأَنْبِيَاءَ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ - ذَلِكَ بِمَا عَصَوْا وَكَانُوا يَعْتَدُونَ ﴿112-111﴾

They will not harm you except for [some] annoyance. And if they fight you, they will show you, their backs; then they will not be aided. They have been put under humiliation [by Allah] wherever they are overtaken, except for a covenant from Allah and a rope from the Muslims. And they have drawn upon themselves anger from Allah and have been put under destitution. That is because they disbelieved in the verses of Allah and killed the prophets without right. That is because they disobeyed and [habitually] transgressed.

Allah has imposed eternal humiliation on the Jewish people. The Jews have never been on par with Muslims politically, economically, or militarily. Today, if the Jews seem to have dominance over Muslims, it is solely due to the power of their colonial master, America. We Muslims should understand that America deliberately promotes the idea that the Jewish lobby is so powerful that even a force like America feels compelled to yield to it. By fostering this belief, America gains two advantages:

1. It diverts the hatred of Muslims towards the Jews.

2. Muslims come to view Israel as their primary enemy and focus their efforts solely on eliminating Israeli power. In this way, neither America nor Israel is diminished. Through treacherous Muslim rulers, America ensures that the military power of Muslims remains fragmented in comparison to Israel, leading to infighting based on nationalist and patriotic foundations among Muslim forces. Muslims must realize that until they liberate themselves from the treacherous American agents imposed upon them, they cannot free themselves from America and its capitalist system.

It is also crucial to clarify that the reference here is to the governments of America and Israel. Just as Islamic governments do not represent the aspirations of the Muslim masses, so too the governments of the West and America do not fully reflect the desires of their people. An example of this can be seen when America, Britain, and their other allies announced their intention to invade Iraq. The largest demonstration in European history, involving millions of individuals, occurred in Britain, where people from all walks of life vehemently opposed this invasion. Even today, thousands protest daily in Britain, Europe, and America against the massacre of innocent Palestinians. However, the greatest obstacle remains the democratic system produced by capitalism, which requires that the growing awareness of the ongoing oppression in the world be translated into effective democratic action. All political parties must actively participate in this process, aiming to legislate for truth and justice within the legislative bodies. Certainly, the day will come when the oppressed will receive justice. Those who today are protesting against Israeli and American aggression will, in future elections, demand that every candidate promises to enact laws in Parliament to rein in every oppressor.

Without a doubt, the prophecy of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) will also come true, whereby Muslims will eliminate the Jews who have occupied Jerusalem, marking the end of their tyranny.

قال رسول الله ﷺ لا تقوم الساعة حتى يقاتل المسلمون اليهود فيقتلهم المسلمون حتى يختبئ اليهودي من وراء الحجر والشجر فيقول الحجر والشجر يا مسلم يا عبد الله هذا يهودي خلفي فتعال فاقتله إلا الغرقد فإنه من شجر اليهود (مشكوة المصابيح حديث: (5318)

The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: "Muslims will fight the Jews and kill them until a Jew takes refuge behind a stone or tree, and that stone or tree will call out: 'O Muslim, O servant of Allah, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him.'"

Nothing will remain, nothing at all, only the name of Allah will endure.

Friday 11 October 2024

Centuries Spent Spilling Rivers of Blood

The Arms Industry: Social Impacts and Global Threats

If we study history carefully, we find that the dominant culture or civilization tends to set global trends. At present, the West dominates the world in every respect—intellectually, artistically, economically, financially, and militarily. One thing that especially preoccupies the Western mind is war, and this is why a state of conflict exists around the world that seems never to end. Everyone knows that war is a kind of hell that destroys everything in its path, yet the appetite for war remains insatiable. We see a culture of fascination with war permeating films, dramas, video games, books, and even music. It seems as though war has become an inseparable part of Western culture.

There is a strong focus on fostering and nurturing a mindset that is inclined toward war. From a young age, Western individuals are introduced to the idea of war as something normal. Toy guns, model tanks, and board games ensure that war becomes a fundamental part of their mental framework. Consequently, those who grow up in the West come to see war as an essential aspect of both life and governance.

Today, war-themed video games are incredibly popular around the world. Even outside of Western societies, millions of children are playing these games, internalizing war as part of their personality. Only those who have lived through war can truly understand the mental toll that repeated exposure to violence can have on a person. The West is grooming its new generation to adopt a mindset that favours war. This generation is becoming desensitized to violence, both witnessing and enduring it. These war-themed video games plant the seeds of war lust and a fascination with bloodshed in children's minds like nails driven deep into wood.

Western culture, especially that of the United States, is founded on warlike tendencies. Their consciousness is so absorbed by war that life without it seems unimaginable. This attraction to war has severely impacted their moral structure as well. For the U.S., war is a reality that always happens somewhere else. If America is involved in a war, it is always fought far from its own shores. The U.S. strategy is that others should fight the wars, while the weapons that fuel these wars should come from America. American politicians and voters may express a strong dislike for weapons, but the state structure and policy-making processes are such that this sentiment never translates into actual change.

America frequently blames others for instigating wars, but in reality, it has played a key role in normalizing a warlike mentality. Through its policies, the U.S. has sparked conflict around the globe, dragging many regions into the quagmire of war. Europe has assisted America in these efforts, playing a supporting role. Most of the civil wars currently raging across the world can be traced back to U.S. policies and actions. Europe also contributes significantly, but many of the West's decisions align with American interests. The U.S. benefits from these situations and, as such, must also take responsibility for the major chaos that ensues.

The Western media has played a significant and disturbing role in preparing minds to accept war as a desirable activity. Many media outlets in the U.S. and Europe portray war as an unavoidable reality

that people must accept. Coverage of conflicts is presented in such a way that viewers become desensitized to the scenes of death and destruction, accepting them without protest. Instead of depicting war as an undesirable and catastrophic reality, Western media frames it as something useful and, to a certain extent, acceptable. Their goal is to ensure that viewers do not feel discomfort while watching war coverage.

Those who fight in wars and suffer its consequences often experience lifelong psychological and emotional imbalance. They understand better than anyone how war can devastate entire societies, yet they lack the power or voice to influence public opinion. Even if they wish to speak out against war, they are unable to shape minds. Moreover, society is often unwilling to listen to those who know and have lived through the devastating outcomes of war. The public views war through the lens presented to them by the media. Take, for example, Michael Bay's film *13 Hours*, which depicted the Benghazi incident in Libya. In the film, explosions—the most dangerous reality of any war—are presented in a way that makes them appear "cool" and acceptable.

This fascination with war is deeply embedded in Western culture, and as long as it persists, the world will continue to witness the horrific consequences of conflict.

For the past year, daily bombings in Gaza and other regions have resulted in the horrific destruction of human lives, with even hospitals not being spared. This relentless cycle not only continues but is expected to intensify, with the United States fully backing these actions. During their election campaigns, both candidates have openly supported Israel. Trump's statement that "Israel should immediately attack Iran's nuclear program and destroy it" is clear evidence that their mission is to achieve power at the cost of devastating the entire region. Let's not forget that in the past year, Israel has dropped 80,000 tons of explosives on civilian areas — far more than the ammunition used in world wars — and this onslaught shows no signs of stopping.

The U.S. military still aims to maintain war as a prevalent mindset. To ensure this, media outlets such as newspapers, magazines, TV channels, and even Hollywood films are being used. The development of new weapons is being highly encouraged, and many films promote these advanced weapons and their technologies, instilling in the rest of the world the notion that if they want to survive in today's world, they must not only acquire the most modern weapons but also embrace a warlike mentality.

The U.S. and Europe have been obsessively focused on developing extremely dangerous weapons under the guise of defense technology, and they have sold many of these weapons across the globe. The U.S. military has been driven by the obsession of maintaining its superiority in deadly arms, ensuring no one else can surpass them. All of this has been financed by taxpayers, while sectors like education and healthcare remain neglected. Few elected officials raise this issue, as everything is sacrificed on the altar of national security. Citizens are constantly reminded of security risks, implying that resolving their basic issues is secondary to the country's survival. If the country is secure, their problems will eventually be addressed.

Significant amounts of money are allocated to research and development for upgrading weapons and producing new ones. If a real threat exists, fine; otherwise, new threats are created and inflated. As soon as an external threat seems imminent, budgets for weapon development and upgrades

increase.

While all of Europe gained enough enemies post 9/11, the U.S. remains particularly self-sufficient in this regard, with most of these enemies being products of its own policies. Arms manufacturers always need a significant adversary or mechanism to keep production going. American politicians excel in fabricating enemies if none exist, often supporting terrorist groups covertly to maintain justification for U.S. military interventions globally. Over the past few decades, the U.S. has created several terrorist groups, exploiting them for its own purposes. Notice how, during election campaigns, the candidate who emphasizes national defense the most gains the most popularity and is often seen as the true patriot.



In the U.S. and Europe, the arms industry frequently faces challenges, as no adversary is capable of attacking American or European soil directly. Without a viable enemy, what justifies keeping the arms industry running? This is the question Western nations are unwilling to confront. To illustrate, the U.S. has committed aggression against 36 countries worldwide, failing miserably in each one and often retreating in disgrace. In Vietnam and Afghanistan, the U.S. waged decades-long wars of bloodshed and destruction, but ultimately fled Vietnam, with troops clinging to helicopters for evacuation. In Afghanistan, despite a 20-year campaign of devastation, the U.S. made a hasty exit by August 30, 2021. But as soon as that chapter closed, the American war machine plunged into the Ukraine conflict on February 24, 2022, and the war is ongoing. According to Princeton researchers, the risk of nuclear war has dramatically increased in the past two years, as both the U.S. and Russia have abandoned long-standing nuclear control agreements and begun developing new types of nuclear weapons, creating more scenarios in which these could be used.

According to aggressive U.S. policies, America still wants certain extremist groups to remain active and not retreat. There is considerable attention given to keeping these groups alive and strong in some form. These groups provide opportunities for the U.S. to maintain its global dominance. Both the U.S. and Europe have reaped the benefits of fueling terrorism. U.S. policies have sown the seeds of destruction, and in reaction, groups have risen against America, which are then secretly supported by the U.S. to project the illusion of facing an unseen enemy — terrorists. A clear example of this is how, immediately after 9/11, the U.S. threatened to "bomb Pakistan back to the Stone Age" to secure all forms of ground support and then, within a month, launched 57,000 airstrikes on Afghanistan, reducing it to rubble. Yet, despite Pakistan's loyalty, the U.S. allowed India, Pakistan's long-standing enemy, to use Afghanistan as a base for terrorist activities against Pakistan. Today, with full Western backing, India continues to support these terrorist proxies with the aim of dismantling the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

On August 12, 2016, Republican Donald Trump labelled Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton as "co-founders" of the Islamic State, denying their claims of being responsible for the rise of the militant group. The immense wealth gathered from the fluid resources of Arab nations was primarily secured in American banks. Initially, this substantial amount was used by American arms manufacturing plants to stabilize the American economy. This was achieved by portraying the threat of Israel in the

Middle East to compel these countries to purchase weapons at exorbitant prices. Subsequently, they ignited discord among these very nations, resulting in their arms manufacturing industry operating at full throttle around the clock.

Iraq was embroiled in a war with Iran for eight years due to a conspiracy, the costs of which were borne not only by the two countries but also by other oil-rich neighbouring nations. Just when this calamity had not yet subsided, Iraq was ensnared in a heinous trap that led to its invasion of Kuwait. Then, under the pretext of assisting Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, the "World Order" was initiated. The United States launched a full-scale attack on Iraq with its own and allied forces to liberate Kuwait. According to American records, the U.S. collected \$178 billion from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia for its services and imposed proposed sanctions on Iraq, extracting another \$120 billion from it. The most capable and resource-rich Iraqi military was completely annihilated, thus safeguarding its foster child, Israel, from threats posed by Iraq. Israel had already destroyed the Iraqi nuclear program in a specific airstrike, utilising the airspace of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait with their official permission.

This was not enough; subsequently, under a conspiracy, Iraq was accused of secretly preparing chemical weapons, and it was destroyed merely because Iraq, after American aggression, had made several agreements with Russia and China to reorganise its military in exchange for Iraqi oil. It stipulated that the price of Iraqi petrol would not be in dollars but in euros and other currencies. The U.S. seized Iraq and awarded the lucrative contract for all Iraqi oil reserves to American companies, particularly to former Vice President Dick Cheney. The centuries-old Iraqi civilisation was ruthlessly obliterated, and even today, civil war continues in Iraq, plunging the Iraqi nation into extreme poverty.

Conflicts and violence are part of societies. Many cultures have always had an inclination towards war and strife. Even today, numerous wars are being fought that have no direct connection to the U.S. and the West, yet the hand of America and the West remains prominent. American and Western societies are promoting militarism to sell their arms. Many regions have been plunged into severe internal threats regarding security. Numerous countries have been unnecessarily embroiled in warfare. Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Yemen are clear examples of this. In today's West, media, economy, politics, and entertainment are all engulfed in militarism; until this trend is abandoned, the path to genuine peace in the world cannot be paved.

Sunday 13 October 2024

The Sound of Judgment Day: The Possibility of War with Israel

Netanyahu's War Policy and the Future of Israel

We will later address the mistake made by Trump during his tenure, when he recognised the first Qibla (Al-Aqsa Mosque) as the capital of Israel. But first, let's take a glance into the pages of history.

According to Jewish belief, this phase of the world lasts 6,000 years. The Jewish historical calendar attempts to calculate the number of years since the creation of the world, based on the biblical narrative of creation and the stories that follow. The current Hebrew year began on 2nd October 2024 and will end at sunset on 22nd September 2025. According to the Jewish calendar (Torah), their sacred text, the Talmud, has marked the completion of 5,785 years. Based on this belief, only 215 years remain until the end of the world. The Jews believe the world will be completely annihilated in 215 years. Before the Day of Judgment, they have two main tasks: finding the Ark of the Covenant and reconstructing the Temple of Solomon.

This story begins with the Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham). He lived with Prophet Ismail (Ishmael) in Makkah for forty years, where they built the Kaaba. Prophet Ibrahim then returned to Palestine and constructed the second house of God, Bait-ul-Maqdis (Al-Aqsa Mosque). There was a 40-year gap between the construction of the Kaaba and Al-Aqsa. Prophet Ibrahim passed away in Palestine, and his tomb is located in the suburbs of Jerusalem, in an area named Hebron or Al-Khalil after him. The tombs of Prophet Isaac and Prophet Jacob are also found beside Prophet Ibrahim's. The children of Israel, or Bani Israel, are the descendants of Prophet Jacob. They were struck by famine and migrated to Egypt, where they were enslaved by Pharaoh. After enduring centuries of humiliation, they returned to Palestine 3,300 years ago under the leadership of Prophet Moses.

Prophet Dawood (David) conquered Jerusalem around 1,000 BCE and declared it the capital of his kingdom, known as the Kingdom of David. He began the construction of a great Jewish temple on the foundations of Al-Aqsa, a project that was completed by his son, Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon). Prophet Sulaiman possessed the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the two stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments that God had revealed to Prophet Moses on Mount Sinai. The Ark also held Prophet Aaron's staff and the container from which manna and quail were miraculously provided. Prophet Sulaiman hid this Ark within the foundations of the temple. He also dealt with powerful sorcerers of his time, executing them on God's command and burying their magic scrolls beneath the temple in caves.

The Jews refer to this temple as Solomon's Temple, or the Temple of Solomon. It was destroyed in 586 BCE by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, although he left its outer wall intact. Jews call this wall "Kotel" while Muslims refer to it as the "Wailing Wall." Jews believe that Prophet Sulaiman hid the Ark of the Covenant and the magic scrolls in the caves beneath the temple, and they have been excavating beneath Al-Aqsa for 3,000 years in search of them. They also plan to demolish Al-Aqsa to expand the Temple of Solomon over the entire area. Why? We will address this later. First, let's discuss the significance of Al-Aqsa for Muslims.

Until 11th February 624, Al-Aqsa was the first Qibla for Muslims. On the 27th night of the month of Rajab in the 10th year of prophethood, the event of Isra and Miraj took place. Allah took the Holy Prophet ﷺ from Makkah to Jerusalem, where he led the prophets in prayer at the first Qibla. He then ascended to the heavens from the courtyard of Al-Aqsa, riding the Buraq. A rock, seven feet long, forty feet wide, and six feet high, still exists at the spot where the Prophet ﷺ ascended. This rock began to rise with him, but the Angel Jibreel (Gabriel) placed his hand on it, attaching it back to the earth. The mark of Angel Jibreel's hand remains on the rock to this day. In 691 CE, Umayyad Caliph Abdul Malik built a golden dome around this rock, known in Arabic as "Qubbat al-Sakhrah" and in English as the "Dome of the Rock." This was the first structure built by Muslims outside of Arabia and today is one of Jerusalem's most iconic landmarks.

However, the golden dome is not the first Qibla. The actual Al-Aqsa mosque is located in a basement not far from the golden structure, accessible via stairs. Eight hundred years ago, Sultan Salahuddin Ayyubi expanded the mosque, an extension known today as "New Aqsa." The Jews also aim to demolish both the golden structure and the New Aqsa, as they believe the Temple of Solomon should encompass the entire area of Al-Aqsa.

According to the beliefs of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the Antichrist (Dajjal) will appear before the Day of Judgment. Jews refer to him as the Messiah, while Christians call him the Antichrist. He will appear after the reconstruction of Solomon's Temple. All Jews from around the world will gather in Israel, and the Antichrist will declare Israel the "Kingdom of David" and begin to conquer the world. He will destroy the entire Christian and Muslim world, waging a war that will last forty to fifty years, reducing the world to rubble. Eventually, in the ancient city of Damascus, Imam Mahdi will appear. Before Fajr (dawn) prayer, Prophet Isa (Jesus) will descend from the white minaret of the Umayyad Mosque and pray behind Imam Mahdi.

Together, they will fight against the Antichrist. This battle, known as "Armageddon", by the Jews, will see the Muslims victorious. After the conquests, an Islamic state will be established. Prophet Isa will live for 45 years and then pass away, and he will be buried beside the Holy Prophet ﷺ. After his time, the rule of a figure named Muq'add will come, and thirty years after his death, the Quran will be lifted from people's hearts. This will mark the beginning of the signs of the Day of Judgment. According to Jewish beliefs, the Antichrist will win this war, after which the Mount of Olives in the outskirts of Jerusalem will split in two. This will be the first sign of the apocalypse. Jews consider it an honour to be buried on this mountain.

Jews pray three times a day in their synagogues for the arrival of the Antichrist, a prayer known as "Shmoneh Esreh." Jerusalem holds great significance for Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike, as it is the city of the prophets. For 13 years, Muslims prayed facing Jerusalem. This city was conquered during the caliphate of Umar ibn al-Khattab and remained under Muslim control for centuries. The golden dome of the Dome of the Rock still stands today as a symbol of Muslim presence. Jerusalem is also one of the most important signs of the Day of Judgement. The rock that ascended with the Prophet's steed, Buraq, during the Night of Ascension is sacred to both Muslims and Jews. Jews refer to it as "Mount Moriah," and believe it is the point of creation. According to Jewish tradition, Prophet Abraham laid his son Isaac (whereas Muslims believe it was Ishmael) for sacrifice on this very rock.

In the next thirty years, Jews plan to demolish Al-Aqsa Mosque, the New Al-Aqsa, and the golden Dome of the Rock. This will lead to a confrontation with Muslims, the emergence of the Antichrist, and the start of a global war. The Antichrist will reach as far as Mount Uhud, and Mount of Olives will split into two, signalling the arrival of the Day of Judgement. Muslims agree with Jews up to the appearance of the Antichrist, but we believe in the eventual dominance of Islam and Muslims.



Now, let's turn to Donald Trump's folly.

The world currently teeters between two terrifying threats. The stockpiles of destructive weapons continue to grow, and extremist governments rule in many corners of the globe. Putin, an extremist, is in power in Russia, constantly seeking an opportunity to avenge his country's defeat at the hands of America and Europe, beginning with the Soviet Union's withdrawal from Afghanistan and its eventual breakup into six parts—something Putin has never forgotten. The U.S. and the West view North Korea's Kim Jong-un as a mad, fanatic ruler who has, for the first time, frightened America and Europe and reminded them of their vulnerability. Meanwhile, in India, Narendra Modi, a dangerous extremist, serves as prime minister, posing a significant threat to world peace, though he is engaged more in conspiracies due to his cowardice.

In the U.S., Donald Trump, once again, is hopeful of regaining power, competing against Kamala Harris. In his election campaign, he openly positions himself as a staunch supporter of Israel, advising Israel to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities. Recent events following Iran's ballistic missile attacks suggest that, with American backing, Israel might strike Iran at any moment. Israel's Defence Minister has already warned the world media of giving Iran a "surprise" after the recent missile attack.

In response to Iran's missile strikes, Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, while addressing his troops, threatened Iran with a "deadly" and "shocking" retaliation, stating that Iran wouldn't even understand what happened and how it happened. He declared that Iran would have to pay the price, and the world would witness the consequences of this attack. Gallant also warned of increasing the intensity of attacks against Hamas and Hezbollah. On Thursday, 3rd October 2024, Iran sent a message to the U.S. through Qatar, stating that the phase of "unilateral restraint" is over, and further tolerance could endanger their national security. They warned that any future attacks on Iran would elicit an "unconventional" response, which could include targeting Israeli infrastructure directly.

According to the Zionist Channel 12, the wicked Netanyahu summoned several cabinet ministers, Jewish rabbis, senior military leadership, intelligence officials, and global media coordinators to a long meeting in his office. After this session, he announced that the current war's name would be changed from "Iron Sword" to "Armageddon," or "The War of the End Times." According to ancient, modern, and Islamic traditions, the war before the appearance of Imam Mahdi is named "Armageddon," during which millions will die. This is also explicitly mentioned in the Book of Revelation, in the chapter "John's Apocalypse," which details the final battle.

There are reports that ISIS is regrouping in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan, while in Pakistan, it has

already claimed responsibility for several suicide attacks. Pakistan, the world's first nuclear Islamic state, possesses a distinguished position in missile technology. The second danger is Israel and the Jews, who believe they hear the footsteps of the Day of Judgement approaching. They pray "Shmoneh Esreh" three times daily, calling out loudly for the Antichrist. Jews believe that once their call is answered, the world will be ground between two millstones and reduced to nothing, after which the entire world will be under Jewish rule.

During Donald Trump's presidency, his Jewish son-in-law, Jared Kushner, was assigned the role of a new "Lawrence of Arabia," as he was also a close friend of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The task that Jews had been unable to accomplish for the past seven decades, Trump, with the help of Kushner, acted as a mediator to normalize Israel's relations with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco. Meanwhile, cooperation began in several sectors with Saudi Arabia, notably air services.

On December 6, 2017, Trump shocked the world by suddenly announcing the relocation of the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. This move shook the entire globe, and many could foresee the destruction that might follow. At that time, I warned in my columns that the countries recognizing Israel should not assume they would escape the consequences of the Greater Israel agenda. The actions taken by Israel would eventually lead to global devastation and possibly plunge us into a third world war.

Even after 12 months of ongoing human crisis and destruction, the Israeli public remains in shock, with large-scale protests occurring frequently. Politicians openly criticize Netanyahu's aggressive policies. Israel's economy is facing difficulties, its tourism industry has come to a complete halt, and its diplomatic relations with the world are steadily declining. The financial institution Moody's has forecast that Israel's economic growth rate will shrink to 1.5% in 2024, and according to the *Times of Israel*, 18% of Israel's workforce has been absent from work during the war. The same source reports that Israel is losing \$269 million per day during the conflict. For these reasons, Israel now stands at a critical juncture that may determine its future. Netanyahu's policies have led Israel to the brink of bankruptcy, though international financial institutions have yet to officially declare it. The same can be said for Israel's main ally, the United States.

Global defense analysts are increasingly concerned that Israel may try to involve the U.S. in the region more directly, similar to the mistakes the U.S. made in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, this time, such an error could potentially open the door to a global conflict, which seems highly likely.

The Quran says:

يَسْأَلُ أَيَّانَ يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ ﴿٦﴾ فَإِذَا بَرِقَ الْبَصِيرُ ﴿٧﴾ وَخَسَفَ الْقَمَرُ ﴿٨﴾ وَجُمِعَ الشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ ﴿٩﴾ يَقُولُ الْإِنْسَانُ يَوْمَئِذٍ أَيَّانَ الْمَقَرُ ﴿١٠﴾ كَلَّا لَا وَرَرَ ﴿١١﴾ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ يَوْمَئِذٍ الْمُسْتَقَرُّ ﴿١٢﴾ يُنَبِّئُ الْإِنْسَانَ يَوْمَئِذٍ مَّا قَدَّمَ وَأَخَّرَ ﴿١٣﴾ بَلِ الْإِنْسَانُ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِ بَصِيرَةٌ ﴿١٤﴾ وَلَوْ أَلْفَىٰ مَعَاذِيرَهُ ﴿١٥﴾

He asks, "When is the Day of Resurrection?" So, when vision is dazzled, And the moon darkens, And He asks, "When is the Day of Resurrection?" So, when vision is dazzled, And the moon darkens, And the sun and the moon are joined, Man will say on that Day, "Where is the [place of] escape?" No! There is no refuge. To your Lord, that Day, is the [place of] permanence. To your Lord, that Day, is

the [place of] permanence. Man will be informed that Day of what he sent ahead and kept back. Rather, man, against himself, will be a witness, Even if he presents his excuses. (*Al-Qayyimah 6-15*)

Tuesday 15 October 2024

If This Happens...

Is the World on the Brink of Nuclear War

On 11 May 1995, the countries that were signatories to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) once again came together to decide that the treaty should remain effective indefinitely. The NPT had originally been initiated in 1970 with a 25-year term. Therefore, the review conference held in 1995 had two choices: either to extend the treaty for a limited time or to make it indefinite. Wisely, the NPT signatories opted for an indefinite extension, ensuring a strong foundation for efforts to curb the spread of nuclear weapons. Twenty-five years later, the wisdom of this decision was celebrated, reaffirming that even fifty years on, the treaty remains a credible guarantee for nuclear non-proliferation, which promotes global cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy, arms control, and disarmament efforts.

As of August 2016, 191 states had become parties to the treaty. North Korea joined in 1985 but never fully complied with its terms and, after conducting nuclear tests in 2003, announced its withdrawal from the treaty. During the 2015 UN NPT Review Conference, the UK's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Baroness Joyce Aynlay, expressed concern over the slow pace of global disarmament, despite the significant reduction in warheads since the Cold War. She acknowledged the awareness of nuclear weapons' humanitarian impacts in recent years but affirmed that the UK, along with Norway and the US, would continue its verification work.

On 23 July 2024, as preparations were underway for the 11th NPT Review Conference in Geneva, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated that the treaty remains the cornerstone of international nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, and an essential pillar of the global governance system for peace and development. As a signatory, China has consistently upheld the treaty's objectives, fulfilling its obligations and advocating for balanced progress across the three pillars: nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation, and the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Despite these positive efforts, why has this treaty ultimately failed, and how might it, heaven forbid, one day ignite the dry and dangerous fuel of global conflict, potentially plunging the world into the Stone Age? The fears expressed at the start of the Ukraine war have proved accurate: the US is now poised to unilaterally withdraw from a key Cold War-era nuclear arms control agreement. The treaty in question, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, was signed in 1987 by US President Reagan and Soviet leader Gorbachev to halt the arms race of medium-range nuclear weapons. It was hailed by global experts as a milestone in arms control. However, as the situation in Ukraine has evolved, the US accused Russia of violating the treaty by deploying a cruise missile, signaling a shift in American policy. While Russia denied these allegations, former US President Trump confirmed during a press briefing in Nevada that "we are going to terminate the treaty and withdraw from it." On 13 June 2022, the US announced its withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, and the very next day, Russia responded by declaring it would no longer adhere to the START II arms control agreement.

Russia justified its decision to abandon the INF Treaty, saying that Washington had suspended the

agreement over alleged Russian violations regarding its new cruise missile tests. In response, President Putin declared his intent to withdraw Russia from Cold War-era nuclear arms control treaties, which were aimed at preventing nuclear war. He argued that China's advancements in missile technology, despite not being a signatory to the treaty, had reduced its importance due to emerging military threats. Previously, Russia had denied US claims of new missile tests, instead accusing the US of violating the treaty by installing missile defense systems in Eastern European member states.



Putin stated that Moscow will now begin working on the development of new missiles and upgrading existing systems. However, he emphasised that until the United States makes a definitive decision, Russia will not deploy any weapons. In response to the U.S. actions, Putin declared that Russia is also suspending the treaty, just as the U.S. has done. It should be noted that the INF Treaty focused on land-based missiles with a range of 500 to 5,500 kilometers. Analysts have warned that the end of missile control treaties and the installation of missile defence systems in Europe could pose a serious threat to EU countries. The co-chair of the European Council on Foreign Relations has suggested that, in the event of the INF Treaty's demise, Europe could face threats from Russian ground-launched cruise missiles with a range of 1,500 kilometers.

Before Russia's withdrawal from the treaty, China had attempted to avoid further confrontation. Meanwhile, in the U.S., Congress allocated funds to the Pentagon for research and development of new missiles. However, U.S. officials stressed that the country was not in a position to immediately deploy medium-range missiles in Europe.

The U.S. believes that despite several rounds of negotiations, the failure to reach an agreement led it to suspend the treaty, prompting Russia to also withdraw from the INF Treaty, which had been signed during the Cold War. According to the British newspaper *The Guardian*, Trump's National Security Advisor, John Bolton, had been pushing for the U.S. to abandon the treaty, while the U.S. Department of Defense had opposed such a move.

Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister, Sergey Ryabkov, stated that the U.S. withdrawal from the treaty has dealt a significant blow to global efforts aimed at preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons. As a result, Russia now finds it necessary to develop ground-based launch systems and hypersonic ground-based intermediate-range missiles for its active missile programme, in which it has now become self-sufficient.

The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), a global disarmament agreement, was signed between Russia and the U.S. in 1991 and came into force in 1994. The aim of this treaty was to reduce the number of nuclear weapons and long-range missiles, as well as weapons of mass destruction, between the two then-global superpowers. Representatives from the U.S. and Russia had held talks in Beijing to salvage the INF Treaty, but these efforts were unsuccessful. The U.S. has warned that if Russia does not dismantle the missiles it has deployed in Europe in violation of the treaty, it will

withdraw from the INF immediately. Moscow, however, rejected the U.S. demand, stating that its 'Novator 9M729' missiles were deployed in compliance with the treaty's terms and conditions. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has issued a stern warning, stating that an Israeli attack on Iran's civilian nuclear facilities would be a "serious provocation." In response to a potential Israeli attack, the Iranian parliament has begun deliberations on withdrawing from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Meanwhile, Iran has already conveyed a message to the U.S. through Qatar, indicating that any Israeli strike will be met with an unconventional response. If this happens...!

Thursday 17 October 2024

Possible Consequences of Israeli Attacks on Iran's Nuclear Targets

Is the World Moving Towards a New War

The quiet storm brewing after Iran's ballistic missile strikes on Israel has caused a surprising upheaval, and dangerous speculations are emerging about the possible nature of the reactions in the region. Both sides are now issuing severe and shocking threats of retaliation. Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant warned that Israel's response will be "deliberate, targeted, and so lethal that Iran will not be able to predict its scope." It seems that the countdown for these dangerous retaliatory attacks has begun in the region. The question is, will the world powers allow the situation to plunge into darkness?

According to the Iranian government, its ballistic missile attacks were a response to the assassination of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh, implying that Iran also sent a message of ceasefire. However, due to continued Israeli attacks in Lebanon and Gaza, Hezbollah retaliated by launching a drone strike on a military base in Binyamin, about 33 kilometers south of Haifa in northern Israel, resulting in the death of four Israeli soldiers and injuring over 60 others. This was confirmed by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Hezbollah's media office claimed responsibility for the attack, stating that it targeted the Golani Brigade training camp in the area between Tel Aviv and Haifa. The attack was carried out on Thursday in response to Israeli assaults on southern Lebanon and Beirut.

Meanwhile, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin contacted Israel's Defense Minister via phone, urging the protection of "United Nations peacekeeping troops" in Lebanon. A spokesperson for 10 Downing Street also expressed shock at reports suggesting that Israel deliberately fired on a UN peacekeeping post in southern Lebanon. Both the European Union and Sri Lanka condemned the targeting of peacekeeping forces. Israel had previously admitted that two peacekeepers were injured by its forces' gunfire in southern Lebanon. The UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) had earlier stated that any deliberate attack would be a serious violation of international humanitarian law.

In light of these deteriorating conditions, Iran has warned the Gulf states that maintain diplomatic relations with Israel not to allow the use of their airspace for any potential Israeli response, as any assistance to Israel will also be targeted by Iran.

These are just a few factors being considered in discussions between the U.S. and Israel regarding Israel's possible response. Washington has already stated that it opposes any Israeli action against Iran's nuclear facilities. With the U.S. presidential election on November 5, 2024, the White House is unlikely to welcome any attack on Iranian oil facilities, which could impact global oil prices, nor does it wish to be drawn into another conflict in the Middle East. On the other hand, Israel's allies, who had urged restraint following the Iranian attack on Israel in April of this year, are now notably silent. Israel, after threatening to confront all its enemies in Lebanon, Gaza, Yemen, and Syria simultaneously, seems unlikely to back down under Prime Minister Netanyahu's leadership.

With the help of U.S. satellite intelligence and Mossad operatives in Iran, the Israeli military has a range of targets in Iran to choose from, categorized into four levels:

1. Israel's primary targets would be the bases from which Iran launched the recent ballistic missiles. These include Iranian launch pads, command and control centers, fuel tanks, and bunker-stored warehouses.
2. In addition, Israel may target the bases of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), air defense systems, and other missile batteries. It could also attempt to assassinate key figures involved in Iran's ballistic missile program through its agents.
3. Israel might target Iran's economic infrastructure, including petrochemical plants, power generation facilities, and possibly its maritime industry. However, this would be highly unpopular among the Iranian public, as it would harm civilians far more than military targets, potentially pushing Iran towards unconventional retaliation.
4. Will Israel dare to attack Iran's nuclear programme and risk pushing the world into a new global conflict? This would be the most significant and consequential step of all. The UN's nuclear watchdog has confirmed the well-known fact that Iran is enriching uranium far beyond the 20% required for civilian nuclear power. Israel and others suspect that Iran is attempting to reach the "breakout point" where it could produce a nuclear bomb in a very short time. Israel's potential list of Iranian nuclear targets includes key facilities at Parchin, the centre of Iran's military nuclear programme, as well as research reactors in Bonab and Ramsar, and major nuclear sites in Bushehr, Natanz, Isfahan, and Fordow.



However, the question is: after these actions, Iran's response would certainly be even more severe. Israel and its allies will undoubtedly be strategising to counter this reaction, as the consequences of such dangerous actions could plunge the world into darkness. In the West and America, there is growing concern over these precarious developments. The prevailing view is that Iran's stance should be acknowledged, especially since its recent ballistic missile strikes on Israeli military targets have balanced the score. But if Israel escalates further, Iran will retaliate once again.

Iran's President, Masoud Pezeshkian, has stated that what the world has seen so far is just a "small glimpse" of Iran's capabilities. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) reinforced this message by declaring, "If the Zionist regime responds to Iran's actions, it will face crushing attacks." According to global defence analysts, Iran cannot defeat Israel militarily. Its air force is outdated and dilapidated, its air defence is vulnerable, and it has been dealing with harsh Western sanctions for many years. However, Iran still possesses ballistic and other missiles, along with explosive-laden drones and multiple allied militias across the Middle East. These missiles could easily target Israeli civilian areas instead of military bases in the next round. The 2019 attack on Saudi Arabia's oil facilities by an Iran-backed militia proved how easily Iran can strike its neighbours.

The IRGC's navy, which operates in the Persian Gulf, has a large fleet of small but fast missile boats that could potentially overwhelm the US Navy's Fifth Fleet in a coordinated attack. If ordered, it could also attempt to lay mines in the Strait of Hormuz, severely disrupting the flow of 20% of the world's daily oil exports. This would have a catastrophic impact on the global economy. Additionally, American military bases are scattered all along the Arab shores of the Persian Gulf, from Kuwait to

Oman. Iran has warned that if it is attacked, it will not only retaliate against Israel but also target any country that supports such an attack.

These are just some of the frightening scenarios that defence planners in Tel Aviv and Washington are likely considering.

Friday 18 October 2024

The Foundation of the Pakistan Movement and the Conspiracies of Foreigners

Studying the centuries-long history of the Indian subcontinent opens new avenues of thought and it feels as if the foundation for the creation of Pakistan was laid centuries ago. Subsequently, historical events continued to shape themselves towards this purpose. This is why some historians conclude that the creation of Pakistan was inevitable and destined by divine will. Reflecting on the significant milestones of this extensive historical journey provides clear evidence of this assertion.

Among the historical records of ancient India, the Tarikh-e-Ferishta holds a credible status. Reading a letter written by Shahabuddin Ghori, dated 1192, in response to a letter from the famous Hindu ruler Raja Prithviraj, left me in deep thought. The Muslim and Hindu armies stood face-to-face in the field of Tarain. Two years earlier, Shahabuddin Ghori had faced defeat at the hands of Prithviraj and was now preparing for a decisive battle. Prithviraj was considered the symbol of Hindu power and had the full support of Hindu rulers. Before the battle, Ghori sent a letter to Prithviraj proposing mutual peace, demanding the provinces of Punjab, Sindh, and the Frontier, as these areas had relatively higher Muslim populations who were suffering under oppressive rule.

Baluchistan was not included in this demand as it already had a Muslim government. However, Prithviraj, intoxicated with power, rejected Ghori's peace offer and refused to cede these areas. The resulting battle led to a crushing defeat for Prithviraj and his hundreds of companions, who were participating in this holy war according to their faith. Prithviraj was killed, breaking the back of Hindu power, and Ghori appointed Qutbuddin Aibak as the ruler of the conquered territory. In 1193, Aibak captured Delhi, establishing the first regular Muslim government in India. The Battle of Tarain is considered a crucial milestone in Indian history as it decided the destiny of India and paved the way for a Muslim government.

Ghori's letter holds extraordinary significance for us, revealing many aspects that require deep contemplation. Before delving into this topic, it's essential to remember that the first Islamic state in India was established by Muhammad bin Qasim. His rule covered a much smaller area compared to later conquests. Muhammad bin Qasim invaded India in 712, reaching Multan before being recalled in 715. Shortly after his departure, the Muslim state weakened and fragmented into smaller states due to rebellions by local chieftains and rulers. Therefore, the credit for establishing a significant Muslim rule rightly goes to Qutbuddin Aibak.

However, the question arises: how did the Muslim population in the areas comprising present-day Pakistan become relatively higher by 1192, despite the absence of a stable Islamic government until then? Undoubtedly, Muslim invaders frequently attacked during this period, often returning with spoils of war.

From 997 to 1030, Mahmud of Ghazni launched 17 invasions into India, weakening local Hindu states and indirectly strengthening Muslims, but he never established an Islamic state in India, often returning home with looted wealth. This refutes the claim by Hindu and Western historians that Islam

spread by the sword, as by the Battle of Tarain, there was neither an Islamic government in India nor sufficient Muslim power to spread Islam by force. Instead, many saints, Sufis, and pious individuals, particularly Hazrat Ali Hujwiri, known as Data Ganj Bakhsh, settled in India during this period. They accompanied Mahmud Ghazni's army and stayed, winning the hearts of the local populations through their spiritual influence, gradually bringing them into the fold of Islam over centuries. By 1192, the Muslim population had significantly increased in the regions of present-day Sindh, Frontier, and Punjab, paving the way for the eventual creation of Pakistan.

When reflecting on the selected aspects of this issue, profound wisdom and clear signs of divine will are revealed. The noteworthy point is that while Sufi saints were spread throughout India, including notable places like Delhi, Sirhind, and Ajmer Sharif, Muslims did not achieve majority status in these regions. Another significant observation is that over time, Muslims became a majority in those provinces or areas that were geographically contiguous and connected to each other. If Muslims had been in the majority in the Frontier province alone, and also in distant regions of India such as UP, would the demand for Pakistan have been possible or acceptable? The answer is no. The demand for Pakistan was based on the premise that Punjab, Frontier, Sindh, Baluchistan, and later East Bengal—where Muslims were in the majority and geographically linked—should form an independent Muslim state where Muslims could live according to their religion, culture, and traditions. It seems to be divine will that Muslims became a majority in these regions, forming a geographic unit.

In this context, Pakistan's foundation was essentially laid when Shahabuddin Ghori demanded these areas for peace from Prithviraj. In this backdrop, during his 1944 speech at Aligarh, Quaid-e-Azam said that Pakistan was established the day the first Muslim set foot on Indian soil. This was because Muslims represented a distinct way of life, a unique culture, and mindset, entirely different from other Indian communities. This historical statement by Quaid-e-Azam was made considering that in Hinduism, a child's identity is derived from the father's religion, creating a deep divide of hatred and humiliation among Hindus. However, the day the first person in India embraced Islam, he completely severed ties with his previous identity and adopted a religion that differentiated his entire way of life from Hindus.

In the history of India, I see a profound connection between Muslims and Islam. Whenever Islam faced a challenge or Muslims encountered a genuine threat, forces emerged to successfully counter these challenges and protect Muslims. Historically, Muslims ruled India for 680 years, with a total of 76 rulers. The most powerful government was considered to be that of the Mughal dynasty, during which Islam in India first faced a serious challenge in the form of Akbar's Din-i-Ilahi. Hazrat Mujaddid Alf Sani stood as a barrier against Din-i-Ilahi and fulfilled the religious leadership role for Muslims. The Mughal dynasty, except for Aurangzeb Alamgir, is considered a liberal government, with at least two or three kings born to Hindu mothers. Hence, the Mughal dynasty's role in serving Islam in India was limited. Islam spread internally through the blessings of saints, Sufis, and pious individuals.

Aurangzeb Alamgir passed away in 1707, and subsequently, the Mughal Empire weakened. The 18th and 19th centuries were extremely challenging for Muslims in India as Muslim governments began to fall, anti-Muslim forces took control of various regions, and Muslims felt increasingly insecure. The British, who had arrived in India during Akbar's reign for trade purposes, gradually expanded their influence, increased their military strength, and defeated Siraj-ud-Daulah in the Battle of Plassey in

1757, capturing Bengal. They defeated Tipu Sultan in 1799, taking control of his kingdom, and after the Battle of Buxar in 1764, Mughal Emperor Shah Alam submitted to the British, marking the fall of Delhi. In 1808, Ranjit Singh established a Sikh government in Punjab, severely oppressing Muslims, even converting the royal mosque into a stable.

During this period of decline and tribulation for Muslims, Shah Waliullah initiated a social reform movement, organized programs to awaken jihad among Muslims, invited Ahmad Shah Abdali to weaken anti-Muslim forces, and wrote letters to Muslim leaders, which help us understand the psyche and thoughts of Muslims of that time. The essence of these letters was that for the survival of Muslims and Islam in India, it was essential to establish Muslim governments in certain areas. Reflecting on this, it becomes apparent that this thinking laid the foundation for the Pakistan Movement. This is precisely what Allama Iqbal repeatedly emphasized in his Allahabad address and letters to Quaid-e-Azam, and Quaid-e-Azam often echoed this sentiment. This dream of a Muslim state grew in the collective unconscious of Muslims after the end of their rule in India, eventually manifesting in the demand for Pakistan.

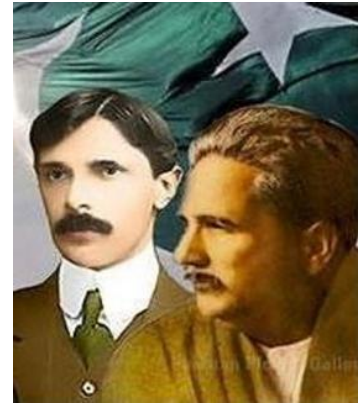
Shah Waliullah's successor, Shah Abdul Aziz, declared India a Dar-ul-Harb, and Syed Ahmad Shaheed launched a jihad to liberate the Muslims of Punjab from Ranjit Singh's oppression. In 1826, the jihadist caravans moved towards the Frontier province. The Mujahideen won the first and second encounters, capturing the Frontier, and in 1827, Syed Ahmad Shaheed was appointed the Amir-ul-Momineen of the Frontier province, declaring the enforcement of Shariah. Ranjit Singh personally came to Peshawar and succeeded in winning over some tribal leaders, notably Yar Muhammad and Sultan Muhammad. In the decisive battle of Balakot, Yar Muhammad deserted the Mujahideen during the battle and poisoned Syed Ahmad through his cooks. In 1831, at Balakot, Syed Ahmad Barelvi and Shah Ismail were martyred, thus ending the movement that Shah Waliullah had initiated in 1731, exactly a century later in 1831.

Syed Ahmad Shaheed and Shah Ismail's Endeavour

Syed Ahmad Shaheed and Shah Ismail intended to liberate the Muslims of this region from Sikh rule and then wage jihad against the British, but their dream remained unfulfilled. It had to be realized in a different form and manner, as fate would have it. On the other hand, the British were slowly expanding their influence and employing cunning strategies to establish control over India. After defeating the armies of Siraj-ud-Daulah, Tipu Sultan, and Shah Alam, they emerged as a formidable military force. Following this strategy, the British annexed Sindh in 1843 and Punjab on March 29, 1849, thus taking control of these provinces. In 1856, the British, with the assistance of Awadh's Prime Minister Mir Ali Naqi, compelled Awadh's ruler Wajid Ali Shah to sign over his kingdom and then imprisoned him in Metiabruz, Calcutta.

A historian notes that three 'Mirs' determined the fate of Muslim rule in India. Mir Jafar betrayed Siraj-ud-Daulah at the Battle of Plassey, leading to the loss of Muslim governance in Bengal. Mir Sadiq's betrayal resulted in Tipu Sultan's defeat, turning Muslims in Mysore from rulers into subjects. Lastly, Mir Ali Naqi facilitated the British annexation of Awadh by securing Wajid Ali's signature. In Punjab, the historians mention a key figure from the Fakir family in Lahore, who helped strengthen Ranjit Singh's rule and facilitated negotiations with the Mujahideen. This influential figure, highly

regarded in Ranjit Singh's court, supposedly received the title of 'Syed' from the British, as per a command seen in the Punjab Secretariat's archives by Moizuddin Ahmed, son of Maulana Salahuddin Ahmed.



After the failed War of Independence in 1857, the British firmly established their rule in India. They introduced science, technology, communication, railways, modern education, and a political culture, which fostered a sense of nationalism. This led to the emergence of political parties, discussions about voting rights, and elections, consequently nurturing a sense of limited democracy and the notion of majority and minority.

As a result, Muslims increasingly felt that, as a minority, they would perpetually remain subjugated by the majority. They began to realize that, given their distinct religion, culture, historical background, and national identity, they should strive for a separate homeland. From Sir Syed Ahmad Khan to Quaid-e-Azam, almost all Muslim leaders initially advocated for Hindu-Muslim unity. However, experiencing Hindu narrow-mindedness and attitude firsthand, they chose different paths. The significant milestone of Hindu-Muslim unity was the Lucknow Pact of 1916, which was shattered by the Nehru Report in 1928. This disillusioned even steadfast individuals like Quaid-e-Azam, leading him to declare that the paths of Hindus and Muslims were now separate. Allama Iqbal's Allahabad Address in 1930 provided Muslims with a new perspective and awakened a sense of destiny. The Congress rule in six provinces following the 1935 elections further opened Muslim eyes, setting the stage for the Pakistan Resolution in 1940, where Muslims under the banner of the Muslim League demanded an independent and separate homeland.

Subsequently, the British government made numerous efforts to solve the "Indian problem," as documented in various books, but all efforts and schemes eventually failed. Alongside political developments, some spiritual signs also indicated divine will. Hakim-ul-Ummah Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi, an interpreter of the Quran, lover of the Prophet ﷺ, and a spiritual personality, had millions of followers and devotees. Such a saintly person could only be expected to speak the truth. His nephew, Maulana Zafar Ahmad Usmani, recounts that one day Maulana Thanvi called him and said:

"I seldom dream, but today I had a strange dream. I saw a large gathering, as if it were the Day of Judgement. In it, saints, scholars, and righteous people were seated on chairs. Mr. Muhammad Ali Jinnah was also present, dressed in Arabic attire, seated on a chair. I wondered how he was included in this gathering, and I was informed that Muhammad Ali Jinnah is currently rendering great service to Islam, hence he has been accorded this status." (Reference: "Tameer-e-Pakistan aur Ulama-e-Rabbani" by Munshi Abdul Rahman, Idara Islamiyat, Lahore, 1992, p. 92)

On 4th July 1943, Maulana Thanvi summoned Maulana Shabbir Ahmad Usmani and Maulana Zafar Ahmad Usmani and said, "The Pakistan Resolution of 1940 will be successful. My time is near. If I were to live, I would surely work for the success of this great cause. It is divine will that Muslims should have a separate homeland. Do whatever you can for the creation of Pakistan and encourage your followers to do the same. One of you two Usmanis will lead my funeral prayer, and the other

will lead Jinnah's funeral prayer." (Reference: "Quaid-e-Azam ka Mazhab aur Aqeedah" by Munshi Abdul Rahman, p. 249)

Maulana Shabbir Ahmad Usmani led the funeral prayer of Quaid-e-Azam in Karachi. Maulana Hasrat Mohani, a revered, selfless, and brave individual, spent a significant portion of his life in jail for his resistance against British rule and often endured hard labour as punishment. His famous couplet encapsulates his struggle:

شوق سے کٹتے ہیں رات دن زنداں میں موہانی
ہم خوش ہیں اپنی قسمت پہ کریں گے دعائیں کیا

(Translation: "Happily the days and nights pass in prison, Mohani. We are content with our fate, what prayers shall we offer?")

اک طرفہ تماشہ ہے حسرت کی طبیعت بھی
یہ مشق سخن جاری چکی کی مشقت بھی

The nature of longing is also a one-sided spectacle

The practice is also the work of the ongoing mill

Maulana Hasrat Mohani presided over many meetings of the Muslim League and was such a domineering person that he stood up in a full meeting of the Muslim League Council and criticized the policies of the Quaid-e-Azam and the Quaid-e-Azam himself used to respect him immensely. The democratic mood is also revealed. Allah Ta'ala blessed Mu La Na with many years of life as a judge and a judge of poverty. Maulana spent the rest of his life in the Muslim League fighting day and night for Pakistan, but after the establishment of Pakistan, he preferred to stay in India because his struggle was not for his caste but for the nation. Respected Zaheerul Islam Farooqi Advocate in his book "Moqsad Pakistan" (Lahore 1981) states that "In 1946, the meeting of the Muslim League was in Bombay. Maulana Hasrat Mohani was traveling along with Pir Syed Ali Mohammad Rashidi in the train. Rashidi Sahib. asked Maulana Hasrat Mohani Sahib that "Will the demand of the Muslim League be accepted by Pakistan?" Maulana Husrat Mohan Ni Mur Hum said in reply that "Pakistan will be created by thinking about the future" and then said. He took fortune from Hafiz and recited these verses in his guarantee.

جبکہ حافظ بھی مصدق ہو بہ فال دیوان
جب کہے خواب میں خود آ کے وہ شاہِ خواباں
تجھ کو حسرت یہ مبارک ، سند و مہر و نشان
پردہ بردار کہ تا سجدہ کند جملہ جہاں

While Hafiz is also Masadq by Fal Diwan

When he comes to himself in a dream, he is the king of good things

You are blessed with regret, certificate and seal

Remove the veil so that he can prostrate everywhere

Maulana Hussain Ahmed was a prominent leader of the Congress and a strong opponent of the partition of India, about which I have heard from several elders that he visited Bengal for the purpose of collecting votes for the Congress in the context of the 1945 elections. had been . He was accompanied by many devotees and political activists. One day during this election campaign, he offered the Fajr prayer, after leading a speech in his limited circle, he said that tonight I was blessed with the visit of the Prophet ﷺ. When Maulana Madani had said this, a murid stood up and said that the Hazrat should go and support the Muslim League, now there is no justification for campaigning for the Congress after that. In response, Maulana Madani said that religious matters It is obligatory

to follow the Holy Prophet ﷺ, but not in political affairs. There is a need to take notice of those who stand on the land of India and say that we did not take part in the mistake of making Pakistan but now they are the contractors of Pakistan's politics and are also enjoying all kinds of benefits.

Many incidents are well-known in this regard, but I have given references only to those persons whose trust and honesty are beyond doubt. The progress of the political front is also worth considering and gives some such indications that the British, after all, India, wanted to keep them united and they were eager to find a solution to the problem of India in this framework. Many efforts were made in this regard, but it was the wish of Will that they should not be repeated, the mention of the Bena Mission Plan here seems necessary because it was accepted by the Muslim League and thus the acquisition of Pakistan was postponed for ten years. It could have happened because according to the cabinet plan, different groups could get out of this arrangement after ten years. The wish of Will was that the establishment of Pakistan should not be postponed for ten years, so the Congress rejected this plan and thus the British had no choice but to divide India.

Consider this aspect of the partition of India that the British government announced the partition of India in June 1948. Mountbatten was appointed Viceroy on February 11, 1947, and later Mountbatten became Viceroy on March 20, 1947. After reviewing the situation, he came to the conclusion that it would be very dangerous to keep the partition hanging for a long time, so he convinced the British government that India should be partitioned and given freedom as soon as possible. Thus, the midnight of August 14th and 15th was chosen for the declaration of independence and the establishment of Pakistan, which was a very good omen for the Muslims of Pakistan, blessed and a clear sign of Yazidi's blessing for those with vision and insight, because the night is "Shab Qadr". It was the month of Ramadan and August 15, our first Pakistan Day, was not to be celebrated on Friday. These symbols can only be understood by mystics, and these signs are only for those whose inner being is enlightened and whose heart is transparent. If you like, call me superstitious, regressive and weak-minded, but I find these hints to be thought-provoking. was doing that Pakistan is a unique kind of country and if you look into its mind and conscience, you get immense wealth of thought and thought, how the will of my Allah moulded it into the mould of history for centuries and Then it rose on the map of the world by making it the largest country in the world of Islam. In this context, his question was a natural response that why was Pakistan broken in 1971? In the words of Iqbal, the answer to this question is as follows.

فطرت افراد سے اغماض تو کر لیتی ہے
نہیں کرتی کبھی ملت کے گناہوں کو معاف

Nature ignores people

Never forgives the sins of the nation

If you get a great gift or reward from nature, it has some requirements and if you don't fulfill those requirements, then you get a warning and sometimes a punishment. I have given us a great reward which has been reduced to half due to our greed, short-sighted political lust and unworthiness, but this is a separate problem that East Pakistan is still East Pakistan today, only its name has changed. In terms of Islamic background and thinking, it is still East Pakistan, and it can only be called the charisma of nature that on the 5th of August 2024 of the same blessed month, it was nice to see such a revolution that the bloody Hasina witch ran back to lick the shoes of her Hindu masters. Gayi and the idols of his father made by him were smashed by the public and showered with shoes. Today, the United States and Great Britain have refused to give shelter to the same witch, and the United

Nations has demanded a global investigation, holding her responsible for all the massacres. The parrots of the hands of the Modi government have flown and the ISI is finally being blamed for blocking the emergency meeting. But even in this tragedy there is a point which, if you consider it, you get surprising clues and new doors of understanding are opened.

Just consider that apparently the responsibility of breaking Pakistan is assigned to three political characters while the fourth character was military. Just consider the revenge of nature that those three political characters namely Indra Ghandi, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto have left stories of lessons after being subjected to unnatural death. He died and left behind stories of lessons. World history is a witness that countries are formed and broken, shrinking and expanding and the geographies of nations are also changing. It is only yesterday that a superpower named "USSR" Russia has collapsed and many independent Muslim countries have broken up before our eyes. The history of Poland, Bosnia and Serbia etc. is fresh in our minds, but I have not found any example in world history where a country breaks up.

Gorbachev has been hanged or some responsible person has received a lesson punishment while this revenge of nature in Pakistan has not been limited to only one generation and now the latest example is the escape of his daughter Hasina Wajid and the escape of Mujibur Rehman. The fate of the idol.

I submitted that there is a lot of lesson in it for those who think, have you ever considered that the unnatural and lesson of the three characters who broke Pakistan (Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Mrs. Indar Gandhi and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto) After his death, none of his next generation had a natural death, is it all just a coincidence?

The question is, why did this coincidence happen only with the three characters of East Pakistan? Then why did it happen to all the characters? I sincerely believe that there are clear signs of Allah's will in the history of the establishment of Pakistan and it was announced by our Prophet ﷺ many times, so whoever will serve this country in the true sense will be in this world. He will be honoured in this world and in the next world, and whoever harms him in any way will be humiliated here and there.

Nothing will remain, nothing will remain but the name of Allah!

انہی غم کی گھٹاؤں سے خوشی کا چاند نکلے گا
اندھیری رات کے پردوں میں دن کی روشنی بھی ہے

The moon of happiness will come out of these sorrows
There is also daylight in the curtains of dark night

Saturday 20 October 2024

A Tale of Global Powers' Intervention and Atrocities

The Cost of Destruction and

the Apologies of the Powerful

One might ask the United States why it crosses seven seas and travels thousands of miles to the Middle East, the Gulf states, South Asia, and Central Asia, armed with forces and conspiracies. The answer is simple: it comes to sell death and buy life. This venture involves not just expansionist ambitions and criminal enterprises but also the misuse of power and elements of religious fanaticism. If the U.S. had a genuine love for humanity, peace, and harmony, if it despised poverty, ignorance, and disease, the world would be a paradise today. The world would not have to cross seas of fire and blood or rely on weapons and explosives to achieve these goals. All that would be required is the principle of "live and let live," respect for human dignity, equality between the powerful and the weak, without discrimination of race, religion, or colour. Essential conditions include mutual respect, recognising a nation's freedom, respecting borders, and, most importantly, refraining from interfering in another country's internal affairs.

Yet, the seller of death and buyer of life, who pretends to be a champion of peace and harmony, has built high and mighty protective walls around itself. The people living within these walls are both human and acquainted with humanity, free and safe from the poison of arms and ammunition. Can the poor, weak, and destitute countries ravaged by hunger, poverty, and disease even dream of penetrating these borders? Only the hawks, perpetually in search of prey, possess such power, attacking at will and tearing apart the very fabric of humanity.

The bloodthirsty hawks, who feast on the bodies of naked and hungry humans, are relentless in their search for terrorists among the very people who suffer at their hands. These terrorist hawks have no principles of their own and, in their hunt for prey, have at times fought amongst themselves. In 1950, Britain, France, and the United States signed a tripartite agreement, under which the security of all Middle Eastern borders was guaranteed on the condition that no party would engage in aggression. But the West, driven by greed, could not remain at peace. Only six years after this agreement, Britain and France attacked the Suez Canal—a story in its own right.

At present, three fundamental interests of the United States and its allies are under scrutiny.

The first is to dominate the resources of the Gulf countries, which supply 60% of the world's oil, and establish their hegemony in the region. (The Soviet Union was also part of this race.) As part of its policy, the U.S. not only guarantees Israel's security but aims to strengthen it to such an extent that Arab countries live in constant fear, allowing the U.S. to impose its policies on them. At the same time, under the guise of friendship, the U.S. has secured control over the economy and defence sectors of certain Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and the monarchies of the Gulf, ensuring their survival against the Israeli threat. As a result, American forces are stationed in these countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, burdening these states with the cost of maintaining them. Meanwhile, the presence of U.S. forces provides a sense of security for Israel.

After the revolution in Iran, the U.S. lost a trusted ally. As a result, it developed rapid-deployment forces aimed at protecting its global interests, particularly in the Gulf. Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon were free from U.S. control but fell under Soviet influence. After losing Iran, the U.S. turned its attention to Iraq, exploiting the longstanding border and other disputes between Iraq and Iran. The U.S. successfully incited war between the two nations in an attempt to crush the Iranian revolution. The eight-year Iran-Iraq war inflicted heavy human and financial losses on both sides, while arms manufacturers in the U.S. and other nations profited by selling \$83 billion worth of weapons to both countries.

Iran saw an opportunity to achieve its goals, including the end of Saddam's regime, in these border disputes. The stage was set for war, with Gulf states given signals of non-cooperation, while other Islamic countries outside the Gulf were either invited to join or urged to remain neutral. Western allies began preparing for war, and Gulf states were ordered to purchase weapons in the name of self-defence. The Gulf War alone earned U.S. defence industries approximately \$210 billion from Gulf nations, with Saudi Arabia purchasing around \$60 billion worth of arms. During Trump's tenure, defence contracts worth \$300 billion were signed, reviving arms manufacturing companies.

At U.S. instigation, Israel increased its provocations against Iraq and accelerated its oppression of Palestinians. Apart from a few countries, nearly all Gulf states sided with the U.S. against Iraq. U.S.-backed Kurdish movements intensified, while American intelligence agencies successfully reignited dormant sectarian, ethnic, and provincial tensions. The conspiracy to divide Iraq's armed forces succeeded. Saddam Hussein, who prided himself on promoting secularism and socialism, believed he had united the diverse sects, ethnic groups, and provinces under an Iraqi nationalist identity, only to find that internal divisions were tearing his nation apart.



In January 2002, during his State of the Union address, President Bush presented a justification for attacking Iraq, labelling Iraq as part of the "Axis of Evil" and accusing it of possessing the world's most destructive weapons. However, U.S. Speaker Nancy Pelosi had opposed the Iraq resolution, which authorised Bush to use military force against Iraq. Bush's closest ally, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, had ordered British troops into combat five times in the first six years of his premiership, more than any other British prime minister in history. These instances included Iraq in both 1998 and 2003, Kosovo (1999), Sierra Leone (2000), and Afghanistan (2001). During this period, the then-UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan declared the invasion of Iraq illegal. The International Commission of Jurists in Geneva confirmed that the attack on Iraq was neither an act of self-defence against an armed attack nor authorised by a UN Security Council resolution, thereby making it an act of aggression, a war crime.

The Iraq War resulted in 4.7 million deaths, and \$450 billion worth of Iraqi oil was looted. In 2020, Neta Crawford, head of the political science department at Boston University, estimated the long-

term cost of the Iraq war at \$1.922 trillion. The U.S. had accused Iraq of possessing nuclear and chemical weapons (which were never found) and attacked Iraq with its full military might, reducing the country to rubble. The entire nation was engulfed in fire and bloodshed. Thousands of Iraqis, including the elderly, children, and women, were mercilessly killed, with holy sites targeted. The world watched in horror as the atrocities in Abu Ghraib prison unfolded, exposing the degradation of Iraqi dignity, while Iraq's military turned against Saddam Hussein. All the missiles, aircraft, and military equipment became useless. Saddam Hussein was eventually hanged, following his defiance of the U.S., but the world also witnessed U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell and Tony Blair later apologizing for the war in Iraq. The question remains: why have those responsible for this devastation not been brought to justice at the International Criminal Court?

The issue did not end there. As soon as, after three decades, Egypt's elected government began asserting its sovereignty, it was swiftly overthrown, and a representative acceptable to the West was installed. Simultaneously, the monarchs and rulers of the Gulf states were assured that their reign would remain secure as long as they remained subservient to the U.S. and the West. The ongoing Israeli aggression and brutality, carried out with the support of the U.S. and the West, and the criminal silence of the regional countries, stand as clear evidence of this. Peace-loving people across the world are asking: when will these merchants of death be held accountable?

Wednesday 23 October 2024

The Future of Hamas: Who Will Succeed Yahya Sinwar *Hamas's New Leader: Khalil al-Hayya or Someone Else*

In Israel, Yahya Sinwar was considered the "mastermind" behind the October 7, 2023, attacks on the country. Experts believed that his appointment following Ismail Haniyeh's martyrdom sent a bold message of rebellion against Israel. The Israeli colonial military had listed him, along with other Hamas figures, as one of their most wanted individuals. Recently, an unverified image circulated on social media, showing a severely injured person lying on the ground, with Israeli authorities uncertain about their identity. Later, the Israeli army shared a video, reportedly taken by a drone, which they claimed depicted Sinwar's final moments. In the footage, a masked individual is seen trying to fend off the drone. As Israeli army spokesperson Daniel Hagari confirmed Sinwar's death in Rafah, celebrations erupted in Israel, while Muslims in Gaza and worldwide mourned the loss of another martyred fighter for the cause of justice.

Within hours, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant and Prime Minister Netanyahu officially announced Sinwar's death. Khalil al-Hayya, a member of Hamas' political bureau, confirmed the martyrdom, stating, "Yahya Sinwar's movement will continue until the establishment of a Palestinian state on Palestinian soil, with Jerusalem as its capital. The blood of Sinwar and other Hamas leaders will continue to light our path." Referring to the Israeli hostages, he added, "The occupiers' hostages will not be released until the aggression on Gaza ends, Israel withdraws completely, and our prisoners are freed."

Sinwar's death has cast a pall of grief over Gaza. Umm Muhammad, who had to leave her home in northern Gaza and now resides in al-Aqsa Hospital, spoke to international media, saying, "A few days ago, I witnessed the fire in the camps and felt its pain in my heart. Today, we are enduring the same pain with the news of Yahya Sinwar's death." Another Gaza resident said, "Sinwar was martyred a year after the conflict in Gaza began. While opinions on his character may differ, it is undeniable that he was armed and fought Israeli forces when he was killed. He did not die in an intelligence operation as the Israeli army claims." He added, "Netanyahu didn't want Sinwar to die in a sudden skirmish. He wanted Sinwar to be killed in a way where Netanyahu could personally be seen giving the order to kill him."

He further remarked, "Israel and its allies need to understand that Palestinians do not fear death. We have seen death at every moment of our lives and watched our loved ones embrace it with bravery and smiles. However, we long to return to a normal life, where we can find some peace. We are tired of this war."

Omar, another Gaza resident, shared, "Like every Palestinian who has sacrificed their life in Gaza or the West Bank, we pray to God that this war ends now."

Anas al-Jamal, a social and political activist, wrote on Sinwar's death, "This is not the ending Netanyahu wanted. He didn't want Yahya Sinwar to be seen as a hero, wearing his military uniform and fighting alongside the front-line forces in Rafah. Netanyahu didn't want him to die in a clash; he wanted Sinwar's death to be a personal victory, a moment where he could take full credit." He also

noted, "Netanyahu will hold accountable those soldiers who leaked the image of Sinwar, and now that image will become a symbol of pride for the Palestinian people."

Bidaa al-Oula wrote on social media, "He was martyred during the battle in Rafah, not in some operation. He fought and did not flee. A kaffiyeh wrapped around his neck, and explosives in his hands, he took bullets to the forehead and head, not to his back or hands. He died advancing." Meanwhile, videos shared from Israel on social media and broadcast on local media showed celebrations following Sinwar's death. In Kiryat Bialik, people were seen rejoicing on the streets. Some celebrants played Israel's national anthem from loudspeakers on their balconies, while others honked car horns in joy. In another video, Israeli soldiers were seen handing out sweets to drivers on the streets. In Ashdod, people clapped and whistled to celebrate Hamas' political leader's death. In northern Israel, near the shores of Galilee, roads were blocked as hundreds of people danced and waved Israeli flags in celebration of Sinwar's death.

Speaking to the media, a Jewish individual expressed his hatred by saying, "Yahya Yahya Sinwar was a bad man, and his time had come. His death is a gift to all of us Jews." The families of hostages held by Hamas welcomed the death of Yahya Sinwar, but they also stressed that efforts to bring their loved ones home must be intensified. A man named Einav Zingwalker told local Israeli media, "We have settled the score with the killer, Yahya Sinwar, but we will not have complete victory until we save our loved ones and bring them home."

In the city of Ramallah in the occupied West Bank, a man named Murad Omar told Reuters, "Yahya Sinwar's death will complicate the situation further. After this, people in Gaza will have fewer options, and as a result, the war will drag on. The Americans and Israelis who think that today marks a new beginning in Gaza without Yahya Sinwar and Hamas are mistaken. These are just political slogans. The war will continue, and it doesn't seem like it will ever end." A few miles away in Hebron, Ali al-Hashlamon commented, "In my opinion, whenever someone dies, another person takes their place who is even more stubborn. Yahya Sinwar was a stubborn man, and we hope his successor will be just as determined, if not more so."

On the other side, Jordan shares a border with Israel, and in its capital, Amman, thousands of people took to the streets to condemn Yahya Sinwar's death and express solidarity with Hamas. One protestor told international media, "Yahya Sinwar and the resistance are ideas, and ideas never die. Bodies may fall, but ideologies remain intact. So, Yahya Sinwar's death will only make the situation worse."

On Friday morning, according to local Israeli media, the Israeli military issued a statement saying that there had been an attempt to infiltrate Israel from Jordan, during which two soldiers were injured. However, the Jordanian military released a statement denying these reports, saying, "There is no truth to the media claims that the Jordanian army crossed the western border of Jordan."

In Iraq, protests had already occurred following the death of Ismail Haniyeh, but the demonstrations after Yahya Sinwar's death were much larger compared to the past. Iraqi Member of Parliament Rais al-Maliki said, "The sight of Yahya Sinwar's death was as painful as the deaths of millions of Palestinians and the displacement of thousands of hungry people."

Iraqi journalist and blogger Ahmed al-Sheikh Majid posted on the social media platform X, writing, "Yahya Sinwar lived a life that only exists in poetry. Here in Iraq, we all know the reason behind this, and we also know the difference between blackmailers and lions. Yahya Sinwar is the lion of the Arabs, and his roar will continue to frighten the enemies even after his martyrdom."



In Egypt, the prestigious Al-Azhar University referred to Sinwar's death as the "martyrdom of a hero in the Palestinian resistance" without directly naming him. In a statement on X, Al-Azhar emphasized the need to preserve the reputation of figures seen as symbols of Palestinian resistance and to prevent their portrayal as terrorists. The statement further noted that "resistance, defending one's land, and dying for it are ranks beyond comparison."

Egyptian politician and former presidential candidate Hamdeen Sabahi attended a gathering after Sinwar's death, saying, "You lived like a hero and attained the status of martyrdom. Like the other people of Gaza, you were martyred as a hero. You didn't hide in a tunnel or take refuge with prisoners, but when confronted by the enemy, you stood alongside your comrades and fought."

Abdel Azim Hamad, former editor-in-chief of the Egyptian newspaper Al-Ahram Al-Shorouk, expressed sorrow over the death of the head of Hamas' political bureau, writing, "We must understand that Israel aims to eliminate all centres of resistance in order to pave the way for Israeli dominance in the region." Another Egyptian media figure, Mahmoud Saad, shared a Palestinian poet's verse on X following Sinwar's death. The verse, when translated into Urdu, means: "If I die, my mother, do not cry. I will die so that my country can live." An Egyptian individual named Ahmed Musa also condemned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on social media, calling him a "war criminal."

Some bloggers and political activists compared the image of Yahya Sinwar's body, shared by Israel, to the iconic photos of Che Guevara after his death. Guevara, a revolutionary born in Argentina, became a symbol of revolutionary movements worldwide in the second half of the 20th century. When he was killed in Bolivia in 1967, images of his body circulated globally. On the other hand, some have compared the death of Hamas' political bureau chief to that of Saddam Hussein, noting that while Saddam Hussein was captured by U.S. forces hiding in a tunnel, Yahya Sinwar died bravely, with a weapon in hand, facing the enemy.

After the martyrdom of Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar at the hands of the Israeli military, speculation is growing about who will succeed him as the head of the organisation. A Hamas official has stated that, due to security reasons, the group will keep the identity of its 'new leader' confidential. In 2003, Israel assassinated the then-head of Hamas, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, and his successor, Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi. During that time as well, Hamas chose not to disclose its new leader's identity. It is expected that the election for Hamas's new leader will take place in March 2025, and until then, a five-member committee will manage the organisation. This committee includes Khalil al-Hayya, Khaled Meshaal, Zaher Jabarin, and Shura Council leader Mohammed Darwish, with the fifth member's identity kept secret.

In some circles, Khalil al-Hayya, the deputy to Yahya Sinwar and a senior Hamas official, is considered a strong candidate for the leadership. According to a Hamas official, al-Hayya has assumed responsibility for political and foreign affairs, and he is directly overseeing matters in Gaza. As a result, he is functioning like the acting head of the organisation. Regarding hostages, he stated that Hamas has the capability and manpower to ensure their safety, though he provided no further details, adding that since June, there has been very limited communication on the issue.

Khalil al-Hayya, based outside Gaza, is a highly senior Hamas figure. Currently residing in Qatar, he is leading Hamas's delegation in negotiations with Israel regarding a ceasefire. It is said that he has deep knowledge, connections, and understanding of the situation in Gaza. Following Yahya Sinwar's martyrdom, Hamas leaders are expected to meet again in the coming days to choose his successor. It's worth remembering that Yahya Sinwar only became the head of Hamas this year after the death of former leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran.

Since July 2024, ceasefire negotiations concerning Gaza have stalled. Israeli and Western media have succeeded in creating the impression that Sinwar's leadership was a major obstacle to a ceasefire agreement. In recent days, international media have reported that Yahya Sinwar placed more emphasis on a military solution to the Gaza issue rather than a diplomatic one. A senior Hamas official has warned that despite Sinwar's martyrdom, there has been no change in Hamas's conditions for accepting a ceasefire or releasing Israeli hostages. Hamas continues to demand a complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, unrestricted access for humanitarian aid, and the reconstruction of war-torn areas. Israel has outright rejected these conditions, insisting that Hamas must disarm.

When asked about Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's demand for Hamas to disarm, a Hamas official responded, "For us, surrender is impossible. We are fighting for the freedom of our people, and we will never accept laying down arms. We will fight to the last bullet and the last soldier, just as Sinwar did and said." Sinwar's death is one of the greatest losses the organisation has suffered in decades. While replacing him is a challenge, Hamas has a history of withstanding leadership losses dating back to the 1990s.

Although Israel has succeeded in assassinating most of Hamas's leaders and founders, the movement has proven resilient in finding new leaders. Amidst this crisis, questions remain about the fate of the Israeli hostages held in Gaza, and who will now be responsible for their safety and security. In this context, Yahya Sinwar's brother, Mohammed Sinwar, has emerged as a key figure. It is believed that he is leading the remaining armed factions of Hamas and may play a significant role in shaping the future of the movement in Gaza.

As Hamas faces this critical moment, fighting in Gaza continues. Last week, dozens of people were killed in Israeli military attacks on the Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza. Israel claims that Hamas is attempting to regroup there. Some analysts believe that Yahya Sinwar's death is a significant blow to Hamas. In August, after Ismail Haniyeh's death, Hamas elected Sinwar as a signal that the group would not bow down to Israel. Over the past year, Hamas has not only shocked and surprised Israel and all its allies but has also demonstrated that, in the future, these oppressors will meet their end on the battlegrounds of Gaza, God willing.

Thursday 24 October 2024

The Fiery Future of the Mediterranean: The Path of Conflicts

Flames in the Depths of the Mediterranean: The Dawn of a New War

The Mediterranean Sea's location is remarkable, acting as a crossroads between Asia, Europe, and Africa. Each of these continents is so closely linked to it that without the sea, their importance seems diminished. Since ancient times, this sea has been a focal point for the world's great powers, as they have competed to exert their influence over it. Major states have historically used this region to bolster their power. The Mediterranean's strategic location has made it of exceptional political and geographical importance to many countries in Asia and Europe. Despite civil wars and foreign-instigated destruction, Libya remains a key state in this context.

When the Cold War began, the U.S., under the Truman Doctrine, started providing significant aid to Greece and Turkey. The main goal was to strengthen American interests in the Mediterranean, while also ensuring that Greece and Turkey emerged as strong American allies against the Communist bloc. During the Cold War, the Mediterranean was of immense political and diplomatic significance—not just for the U.S. and Russia but also for Greece and Turkey. As vital members of NATO, Greece and Turkey could not be overlooked. Meanwhile, Syria and Egypt emerged as Soviet allies, with military bases established in Tartus (Syria) and Sidi Barrani (Egypt).

Until 1972, the Soviet Union used the Sidi Barrani base to monitor NATO activities. However, after the Cold War ended and the Soviet Union disintegrated, the region lost its importance to the U.S. and Europe, who were no longer willing to invest in their allies here. Cold War politics had forced the U.S. to focus on the Middle East and Afghanistan. Meanwhile, China was also rising rapidly, posing another challenge for the U.S. Neglecting the Mediterranean reshaped global dynamics, encouraging China's rise. But then, new oil and gas reserves were discovered, and the region regained significance. Now, the U.S., Europe, Russia, and regional powers are all competing to control these natural resources.

It is now evident that the discovery of gas reserves has driven regional countries to increase their investments, aiming to strengthen their political positions. This investment was necessary not only to meet domestic needs but also to compete globally. The growing demand for gas in any country determines which state will emerge as the leading supplier. Today, many nations depend solely on gas for their energy needs. As a result, gas has become more crucial than oil in terms of power dynamics. Consequently, the political landscape has shifted. Relying on a single energy source has also changed the strategic realities for the involved countries. Libya is a prime example of this, where governance has slipped out of control, for which the U.S. and the West bear full responsibility.

Experts have confirmed the existence of significant gas reserves in the Mediterranean region. The desire to control these reserves has once again turned the Mediterranean into a battleground. All the major powers are committed to focusing more on this region, intensifying the competition. According to a survey by the U.S. Geological Service, the discovery of 340 trillion cubic feet of gas in areas stretching from Lebanon to Cyprus and Egypt has sparked disputes and conflicts. Many countries are now laying claim to the gas-rich areas, escalating tensions to the point where preventing large-scale military conflict may not always be possible.

Greece has not only explored for oil and gas on a large scale but has also begun extraction. Turkey and the Turkish-administered area of Cyprus also have vast maritime boundaries in the Mediterranean. However, whenever they attempt to extract oil and gas, Greece and the Greek-controlled part of Cyprus object, intensifying the conflict. Cyprus is a shared territory between Turkey and Greece, and both claim equal ownership over its resources. Turkey wants to explore and extract oil and gas in the Greek-controlled part of Cyprus, but Greece opposes this, citing ownership disputes over a small island. This has once again led to heightened tensions between the two countries. The atmosphere in the Eastern Mediterranean is becoming increasingly tense, and the growing friction between Turkey and Greece poses a warning to other countries in the region. Should this conflict escalate further, its negative effects will ripple across the entire region.

Three years ago, Turkey's National Oil Company announced that by 2023, the centenary of modern Turkey's founding, it aimed to meet its oil and gas demand entirely through domestic sources. Turkey's Ministry of Energy has also declared its ambition to become the leading country in the region in terms of fulfilling its oil and gas needs domestically. The fundamental question now is how this will unfold and what impact it will have on the region's security. The growing tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean call for diplomatic efforts to resolve these disputes amicably. However, no such attempts have yet been made.

The exploration of oil and gas in the region needs to be re-evaluated. Libya is a crucial country because its oil and gas reserves are among the largest. Its political and economic conditions have caused concern for many nations in the region. Libya still holds the position of the biggest gateway for Africa. It is located in a part of the Mediterranean Sea where there are extensive reserves of oil and gas, both offshore and on Libyan soil. Whoever has control over Libya can monitor the entire region, and, most importantly, has access to vast oil and gas reserves. All regional and external powers understand that they cannot completely dominate the Mediterranean, but they remain involved in the region to ensure that no single nation can monopolies' all the resources.

Libya's significance can be gauged by the fact that its internal situation involves the interests of the US, Russia, Europe, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, Qatar, Greece, and Cyprus (under Greek administration). Russia, Saudi Arabia, Greece, the UAE, and Western nations have backed General Khalifa Haftar in the Libyan conflict.

On the other hand, Turkey and Qatar have given full support to the UN-appointed Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj. The situation in Libya clearly shows that the presence of vast oil and gas reserves in the region has united former enemies, while those who were allies yesterday now stand face-to-face in opposition. This is all about dividing the resources. Each side wants to control the largest share of the natural resource-rich areas. Several militias under General Haftar are preparing to overthrow the legitimate government, with the support of various powers. While this is entirely wrong, it is happening, nonetheless. Some regional and European nations are providing financial and military support to Haftar, while Turkey has made two significant agreements with Libya's official government.

On one hand, there is a power vacuum in Libya, and on the other, the balance of power in the region has shifted. The presence of extensive oil and gas reserves has further exacerbated the situation.

With the table set, everyone is vying for a share. For more than a decade, the Eastern Mediterranean has been the focal point of attention and competition for external forces, and this situation has intensified over time. The presence of major powers may prevent any one nation from taking complete control of the region, but there is also the concern that this area will remain a battleground for great powers.



The importance of this region, from Libya to Syria, is evident when we consider that the wars here are nothing more than a conspiracy, a drama enacted for vested interests. In the 1930s, the famous American Marine Major General Smedley Butler investigated the various groups that used American military power to protect their own interests. From National City Bank's interests in Haiti to United Fruit's plantations in Honduras, from Standard Oil's access in China to Brown Brothers in Nicaragua, Major General Butler tried to prove that the US military was working to protect the interests of a few large corporations, with the damage being covered by the American public's money. The wealth accumulated by their hard work was plundered by big businesses working in tandem with the political system. While times and circumstances have changed, the old saying still holds true: "The more things change, the more they stay the same."

It is worth noting that in Gaddafi's final years, relations between China and Libya had flourished. In 2010, trade between the two countries exceeded \$6.6 billion. In 2007, when the US began focusing on Africa, Gaddafi, addressing students at Oxford University, stated that maintaining good relations with China had proven to be very beneficial. He praised China's investment in Africa, stating that by staying out of regional politics, the Chinese had won the hearts of millions across Africa. However, the situation has since changed. During the early days of the transitional setup, relations with China cooled, with officials from Libya's National Transitional Council explaining that China was being punished for its delayed recognition of the revolutionary forces. Although this statement was later retracted, it became evident that many Chinese companies were waiting to recover and restore over \$18.8 billion worth of frozen assets in Libya. Eventually, the transitional council completed several successful rounds of talks with Chinese companies, steering matters in the right direction.

In truth, Libya has been overlooked in the power dynamics between large and medium-sized powers because China opposed the use of mercenaries and air strikes led by the UAE, Turkey, and Russia. However, after these events, China began using investment and influence in ways that align with its global ambitions, aiming to ensure Libya's eventual inclusion. Notably, in 2011, China abstained from voting at the UN Security Council on military intervention against Gaddafi and immediately rejected NATO's airstrikes on government forces and the no-fly zone. China's staunch opposition, driven by fears of a "humanitarian disaster" and the potential to counter US influence, has since strengthened its neutrality policy in Libya and the broader region.

Since the fall of Gaddafi's regime, China's involvement in Libya, and its behind-the-scenes diplomacy, has focused primarily on economic engagement as the strongest line of influence. Avoiding military entanglements, China has wisely advanced its commercial ambitions. Despite adhering firmly to its principles, Beijing has demonstrated a keen awareness of local realities, reshaping its approach to

adapt to shifting circumstances and maximising its benefits amid the uncertain outcomes of the conflict.

When faced with the 2011 uprising, China rejected NATO-led military intervention and maintained its economic relations with Libya, demonstrating its continued commitment to a long-standing non-intervention policy. However, this stance caused friction with the Arab League and the African Union, both of which supported military action in Libya. At the same time, Beijing was keen to maintain its recently strengthened diplomatic and economic ties with countries in the Middle East and Africa. More importantly, China sought to protect its national security by avoiding endorsement of the "Responsibility to Protect" doctrine, which sets a global standard for intervening in sovereign states on the basis of human rights protection. This perspective was also shared by Russia, resulting in a convergence of China-Russia policies not only regarding Libya but also in relation to Syria and Iran, with China often following Moscow's lead.

It is noteworthy that before the 2011 conflict in Libya, China had been involved in various infrastructure projects, and in return, Libya was sending substantial investment to China. By 2011, 75 Chinese companies were operating in Libya with approximately \$18.8 billion in contracts. These projects involved 36,000 Chinese workers across 50 ventures, ranging from residential and railway construction to telecommunications and hydropower projects. In particular, prior to the Libyan revolution, Libya supplied 3% of China's crude oil imports—about 150,000 barrels per day—which accounted for a tenth of Libya's crude exports. Beyond oil imports, Chinese companies were deeply involved in Libya's oil industry, with all of China's major state-owned oil firms—CNPC, Sinopec Group, and CNOOC—holding substantial infrastructure projects there. These factors led the U.S. and Western powers to fear that China's existing commercial influence in Libya could result in the entire region slipping out of their control, a concern that likely contributed to Gaddafi's eventual downfall. However, the irony of fate is that China has since managed to restore its commercial trust on a war footing, confirming that China will not remain silent if the Mediterranean becomes a potential battlefield.

The question now is whether the U.S. and the West are willing to ignite the Mediterranean seas in an effort to curb China's growing influence, especially as the situation has become more perilous and alarming than ever before.

Saturday 26 October 2024

Iranian Missile Programme: History, Development, and Current Challenges

Iran and the USA: Conflict, Incidents, and Strategic Impacts

In the pitch-black night, the golden dome of Al-Aqsa Mosque will likely never forget the scene of April 13, 2024, when for the first time, Iranian ballistic missiles and drones bypassed Israel and its allies' famed defense system, the "Iron Dome." They left their mark on Israeli airbases and various locations, demonstrating their reach. Six months later, on October 1, 2024, the attack was repeated with the declaration that it was in fulfillment of a promise made in response to the martyrdoms of Ismail Haniyeh and Hassan Nasrallah. This time, Iran's Revolutionary Guards targeted a larger number of Israeli sites, warning that the next response could be non-conventional.

According to a researcher at the Stimson Institute and a former director of NATO's Arms Control Program, "Iran's recent attack has permanently altered the dynamics of the Middle East." It's worth noting that the Iranian missile program, which laid the groundwork for this attack, has developed over several decades at an astonishing pace, becoming so reliable and effective that it is now referred to as a "pointer." This has caused the West to take it seriously and label it as a severe threat not only to Israel but to its other allies in the region.

Now, the entire focus has shifted to the threats posed by Iranian ballistic missiles in an effort to erase the aggression of Israel and its allies from the global landscape. How did Iran manage to develop such an advanced missile program despite severe international sanctions, and what types of missiles, with what ranges, does it currently possess?

According to the U.S. Institute of Peace, Iran possesses the largest and most diverse arsenal of ballistic missiles in the Middle East. Though it lacks nuclear weapons, its ballistic missiles can reach up to 2,000 kilometers. Ballistic technology was developed during World War II, but only a few countries in the world today have the capability to independently produce ballistic missiles. In 2006, the UN Security Council passed a resolution banning the sale of any nuclear technology or material to Iran, including items that could have military uses.

Just three months later, another UN resolution imposed a complete ban on the exchange of conventional arms or military technology with Iran. This also affected Iran's ballistic missile program, making it impossible for Iran to buy weapons from countries like Russia and China, with whom it had been trading since the Iraq war.

However, Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei made it clear in a speech that "the missile program that worries the West was developed under these sanctions." Over the past two decades, despite severe international sanctions, Iran has acquired this technology and produced ballistic missiles.

Ballistic missiles can carry nuclear warheads, and Western countries argue that since Iran has developed ballistic technology, it is unlikely to abandon efforts to enrich uranium to the level necessary to produce nuclear weapons. After the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) agreement in July 2015, and the subsequent approval of UN Security Council Resolution 2231, all sanctions against Iran were lifted. However, the "snapback mechanism" retained restrictions on

arms, particularly for five years, to monitor Iran's missile program. This was intended to exert pressure on Iran and control its missile activities.

Iran expanded its missile program so much that in March 2016, the United States, the UK, France, and Germany sent a joint letter to the UN Secretary-General, accusing Iran of violating Resolution 2231 by conducting missile tests after the JCPOA agreement. Ultimately, in 2020, former U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew from the agreement, citing concerns about the lack of inspection and verification procedures needed to address the threat posed by Iran's missile program.

Although Iran tried to show that it remained a part of the JCPOA, after the expiration of the deadline in Resolution 2231, the Rouhani government advertised for arms purchases from Russia and China in October 2021. However, due to global sanctions, Iran has not yet succeeded in these efforts. Currently, Iran produces over 50 types of rockets, ballistic and cruise missiles, as well as military drones, some of which have been used in international conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine war.

During the Iran-Iraq war, Iran's artillery had a range of just 35 kilometers, while Iraq had the "Scud-B" ballistic missiles, with a range of up to 300 kilometers, which targeted various cities within Iran. As Iraq gained the upper hand through missile strikes, Iran considered deploying missiles, and Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini authorized a missile response to Iraq's attacks. In November 1984, under the leadership of Hassan Tehrani Moghaddam, Commander Amir Ali Hajizadeh of the Revolutionary Guard's Aerospace Force was responsible for establishing a missile unit, setting up the first base in the western city of Kerman, and launching the "missile command." In 1985, Iran purchased Russian-made "Scud-B" missiles from Libya, along with technical advisors, marking the start of Iran's missile operations.

The first missile attack by Iran on Iraq occurred on 21st March 1985, targeting the city of Kirkuk. Two days later, Iran launched another attack, this time on the Iraqi Army Officers' Club in Baghdad, killing around 200 Iraqi commanders. Following these missile strikes, several Arab nations lodged strong protests with Libya, which led to the departure of Libyan advisors from Iran. Before leaving, the Libyans also disabled the missile systems and launch equipment. In the aftermath, a group of Iranian Air Force members began testing the missiles themselves. This small team from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) started dismantling the missiles and launchers, reverse engineering them in the process.

Hassan Tehrani Moghaddam, often referred to as the "Father of the Islamic Republic of Iran's missile programme," was featured in a documentary titled "Zero to One Hundred Missile Programme." The film showed that, after the departure of the Libyan advisors, 13 members of the IRGC were sent to Syria for training on Scud ballistic missiles. Within a short period, they had successfully understood the operation of these missiles. In 1986, Moghaddam was appointed as the missile commander of the Iranian Air Force, and by 1988, the IRGC had seriously embarked on its own missile development efforts.

According to William Alberque, a researcher on global security and technology at the Stimson Institute and former director of NATO's Arms Control Program, "During these years, China and North Korea also engaged in extensive cooperation with Iran on missile development. Later, Russia

provided support for the expansion of Iran's missile programme. It cannot be ignored that Iran, being technologically advanced, conducted effective research in reverse engineering, learning how to disassemble and reconfigure these missile components."

In the 1980s, North Korea and later China assisted Iran with its missile programme. As a result, some global powers attempted to make China a member of the "Missile Technology Control Regime" (MTCR), an informal political agreement between 35 member states aimed at limiting missile production, development, and technology. While China did not agree to join the regime, it pledged to abide by its terms.

The "Nazaat" and "Mojtama" rockets were the first generation of missiles produced in Iran. Shortly after, Iran introduced the "Thunder-69" missile, essentially a redesigned Chinese short-range ballistic missile (B610), which the Iranian armed forces re-engineered with the help of an allied nation. The development of Iran's missile programme began in the early 2000s under Hassan Tehrani Moghaddam's supervision in the IRGC Aerospace Missile Unit, supported by then-IRGC Air Force commander Ahmad Kazemi. Their goal was to succeed in constructing more advanced technologies, such as ballistic missiles and satellite engines.

However, the second and more serious phase of Iran's missile programme began with the production of the "Fateh-110" missile. Hassan Moghaddam was the most crucial figure in this programme's development. In 2009, during a project, he successfully tested the "Extra Heavy Satellite Engine" series for the first time. According to key Iranian sources, Moghaddam, along with 16 others, was killed on 12th November 2011, in an explosion resulting from sabotage at a military base while preparing for a new missile test. Although the exact cause of the explosion was never determined, Moghaddam's grave bears the inscription, "Here lies the man who wanted to destroy Israel."

Today, under the leadership of Amir Ali Hajizadeh, the IRGC Aerospace Force is the largest entity responsible for missile and drone production for the Iranian armed forces. In recent years, it has taken over the responsibility for many of the Islamic Republic's operations abroad, supplanting the traditional role of the Iranian military.

While Iran frequently showcases its missiles as a significant achievement in military production, the true extent of its missile development, as well as progress at its missile bases, remains largely unknown. According to the IRGC, they have numerous missile bases hidden deep within rugged mountains, engineered with sophisticated tunnelling systems. In 2004, Amir Ali Hajizadeh, commander of the IRGC Air Force, first discussed these missile bases, some of which are located as deep as 500 metres underground across various provinces of Iran.

Reliable information about the construction timeline of these underground missile bases is scarce. However, in an interview with Al Jazeera, Mehdi Bakhtiari stated that the first underground missile base was established in western Iran in 1984, at the inception of the missile programme. Iranian media and the IRGC have released several images of these underground missile bases, which they refer to as "missile cities." The exact locations of these bases are unknown, and no official data is provided about them. Released footage shows some of these bases, including one which appears to be larger than the others, storing the IRGC's most important missiles and drone weapons, alongside

manufacturing and launching facilities. One video depicts hallways filled with missiles and launchers, with areas designated for launch preparations.

In March 2019, the IRGC unveiled a "Marine Missile City" on the coast of the Persian Gulf. As with previous disclosures, the exact location was not revealed, but local media in the Hormozgan province reported on the base. IRGC Commander-in-Chief Hussein Salami described this complex on the Persian Gulf coast as one of several strategic missile storage facilities for the IRGC Navy, where missile and launcher systems are housed.



The precise number of Iran's underground missile bases remains unknown, but in January 2014, Iranian Ground Forces Commander Ahmad Reza Pour dastan announced that these underground missile cities are not exclusive to the IRGC, and the Iranian Army owns several as well. Amir Ali Hajizadeh has also confirmed the existence of three underground missile factories in Iran. The Iranian armed forces, particularly the IRGC Aerospace Force, manufacture a wide range of rockets, cruise, and ballistic missiles.

The ballistic missile is the most important type of missile developed in Iran. A ballistic missile flies at high altitudes in an arc. It has three firing stages, and in the second stage, its speed reaches approximately 24,000 kilometers per hour. Long-range ballistic missiles exit the Earth's atmosphere after being launched and re-enter at speeds faster than the speed of sound. Cruise missiles are fully guided and have the ability to fly at low altitudes, making them capable of evading radar. The speed of a cruise missile starts at 800 kilometers per hour.

Iran possesses four types of missiles: rockets, cruise missiles, ballistic missiles, and hypersonic missiles. These four groups of Iranian-made missiles primarily consist of surface-to-surface and surface-to-sea missiles. However, defensive system missiles are also included in Iran's arsenal, with some being produced by Russia and China and others developed by Iran's own armed forces. In April 2024, during its missile attack on Israel, Iran used the "Emad-3" ballistic missile, the "Paveh" cruise missile, and the "Shahed 136" drone. However, Iran's state media also claimed that a "Khaybar Shikan" ballistic missile was launched.

The Emad missile is an improved version of the Qadr ballistic missile. In 2015, the Emad, a medium-range ballistic missile with a range of 1,700 kilometers, was unveiled. It is 15 meters long and carries a 750-kilogram warhead. The "Paveh" missile was unveiled in February 2023. It is part of a family of medium-range cruise missiles with a range of 1,650 kilometers and is said to be capable of reaching its target through various routes. The Paveh missile group can communicate during the attack, and Iran claimed that this missile can reach Israel, which may be why it was chosen for the 13th of April attack, proving effective in that instance.

Currently, Iran's missiles have a maximum effective range of 2,000 to 2,500 kilometers, meaning they cannot yet target European countries. Iran's armed forces have claimed that this range limit follows Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's directive that, for the time being, Iranian missiles should not exceed

2,000 kilometers. After this directive, the development of long-range missiles was halted. According to Ayatollah Khamenei, there is a "reason" behind this decision, though he has not disclosed it.

The "Zulfiqar" is another short-range (700 kilometers) ballistic missile used in 2017 and 2018 to attack ISIS positions. This missile is 10 meters long, has a mobile launch platform, and is claimed to possess radar-evading capabilities. Another improved version, the "Zulfiqar 10," carries a warhead weighing 450 kilograms.

According to global security expert William Albarque, Iran has a solid missile manufacturing capability, and the development of its missile programme has evolved by borrowing missiles from other countries and reverse-engineering them. They have transitioned from liquid-fuel to solid-fuel rockets and missiles. The accuracy of their missiles has dramatically improved, making Iran's missile programme one of the most advanced for short- and medium-range ballistic and cruise missiles. In recent years, close military cooperation between Iran and Russia has allowed Iran to learn from Russian expertise, gaining access to more advanced missile designs, technologies, and capabilities in exchange for this collaboration.

Iran has also claimed that its new generation of missiles belongs to the hypersonic category. Hypersonic refers to weapons that typically travel at speeds five to twenty-five times the speed of sound. Iran first introduced the "Fattah" missile as both a ballistic and cruise hypersonic missile. The "Al-Fattah" hypersonic missile has a range of 1,400 kilometers, and the IRGC claimed that it can evade and destroy all missile defence systems. The "Al-Fattah" belongs to a generation of solid-fuel missiles with speeds reaching up to 13 to 15 Mach before hitting the target. Mach 15 equates to a speed of five kilometres per second.

At the unveiling ceremony for the Al-Fattah missile, Amir Ali Hajizadeh, the commander of the IRGC Aerospace Organisation, stated that "this missile can travel both at high speed and inside and outside the atmosphere." He also claimed that "the Fattah cannot be destroyed by any missile." After the unveiling of the Al-Fattah ballistic missile, a billboard was erected in Tehran's Palestine Square, threatening Israel, with the message "Tel Aviv in 400 seconds." In response to this hypersonic missile threat, Israel's Defence Minister Yoav Gallant remarked, "Our enemies are boasting about their weaponry, but we have superior responses to any technology, whether on land, in the air, or at sea."

Four months after the unveiling of the Al-Fattah 1, the IRGC introduced the Al-Fattah 2, capable of reaching targets 1,500 kilometers away, with the ability to fly at very low altitudes and change its route multiple times during flight. This missile was unveiled during Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's visit to the Ashura University of Aerospace Sciences and Technologies, which is affiliated with the IRGC. However, no details regarding its range were published. Although Iran introduced the Fattah missile as a threat against Israel, it did not use these missiles in the 13th April or 1st October attacks.

In the past decade, Iran has become involved in regional conflicts for various reasons and has carried out cross-border operations against opposing groups, parties, and countries from its territory. All of Iran's overseas operations have been conducted by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Air Force, which has taken on the responsibilities of engaging in and responding to conflicts, effectively replacing the regular military in these roles. Although the IRGC's foreign branch, the Quds Force, has

been present in locations ranging from Afghanistan to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, etc., since the end of the Iran-Iraq War, its presence or actions have not been officially acknowledged as Iranian responses.

Following the end of the Iran-Iraq War, the first attack launched from Iranian territory against another country occurred in Deir ez-Zor, Syria, targeting ISIS. This operation, dubbed "Laylat al-Qadr," was a response to ISIS's attack on the Islamic Council. During it, six Zulfiqar and Qiam medium-range ballistic missiles were fired at ISIS headquarters from Kermanshah and Kurdistan. Subsequently, seven Fateh-110 missiles were used to target the headquarters of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran in Qeshnaj, located in the Iraqi Kurdistan region. The IRGC announced that this was a retaliation for the July 2017 attack on the Sayyid al-Shuhada Hamza base in Marwan.

On October 9, 2017, the IRGC launched the "Ashura Attack" operation in response to the armed forces parade attack in Ahvaz, destroying ISIS positions along the Euphrates River with six Qiam and Zulfiqar missiles, along with the aid of seven combat drones. On January 18, 2018, in retaliation for the death of Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani at the hands of the United States in Iraq, the IRGC Air Force fired 13 Fateh-313 and Qiam-2 ballistic missiles at Ain al-Asad, the largest U.S. military base in Iraq. An attack was also launched on a base in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan region of Iraq. Following Soleimani's death, the intensity of Iran's missile attacks on neighboring countries increased. In March 2022, the IRGC fired 12 Fateh-110 ballistic missiles at the home of Buzkarim Buzhinji, which Iran claimed was one of Israel's "strategic centers" in the Kurdistan region.

The following year, the IRGC Air Force targeted the headquarters of Iranian Kurdish parties in Iraqi Kurdistan with Fateh-360 missiles during operations named "Rabee 1" and "Rabee 2." In January 2004, the IRGC attacked the home of an Iraqi businessman, which it identified as the headquarters of Mossad, while also targeting ISIS and Turkistani Party bases in Idlib. On January 16, 2024, the IRGC Air Force targeted a residential area in the border village of "Sabz Koh" in Pakistan's Baluchistan province, hitting a base of the Jaish al-Adel group with missiles. The following day, Pakistan retaliated by firing missiles at several locations in Iran's Sistan and Baluchistan province. This was the first time a country responded directly to Iran's missile attacks. In response to this tension, Iranian Foreign Minister visited Pakistan, and later an official visit by the Iranian President helped normalize the situation.

After an Israeli missile attack on the Iranian consulate building in Damascus, which resulted in the deaths of Iranian general Mohammad Reza Zahidi and six other IRGC officers, Iran launched an operation called "Wahdat al-Sadiq," targeting various locations in Israel with hundreds of drones, cruise, and ballistic missiles. Iran claimed that this attack targeted the Novatim Air Base in the Golan Heights and the Syrian Hermon Base.

According to global security researcher William Albrecht, while there was some observable decrease in the ability of Iranian missiles to hit their targets during the attack on Israel, Iran gained significant insights regarding Israel's defensive capabilities and those of other countries aligned with Israel that are involved in countering Iranian missiles.

Before the Iranian Revolution, Iran's largest ally was the United States, from which most military

equipment, primarily fighter jets, were purchased. Iran acquired 160 F-5 fighter jets, designed as economical options for countries unable to afford expensive fighters. During the Pahlavi regime, Iran also procured a substantial number of McDonnell Douglas F-4 fighter jets, which are still part of its air fleet. The Shah of Iran then decided to replace them with a new fighter aircraft, purchasing 60 F-16 Tomcat jets. At that time, Iran was among the countries with the largest number of fighter jets in the Middle East.

Following the Islamic Revolution and the attack and takeover of the U.S. embassy in Tehran, relations between Iran and the United States were severed permanently. Various American sanctions, including arms embargoes, targeted Iran, making it impossible to acquire modern weapons and combat aircraft. During the war, Iraqi ballistic missiles targeted Iran extensively, leading Iran to decide to initiate a rocket program. Thus, the missile program emerged as an optimal choice for Iran, serving as a defensive weapon that could reach other countries in times of conflict.

Consequently, Iran's missile program is currently regarded as one of the most advanced and significant weapon programs in the country. According to researchers in global security and related technologies, these missiles serve as an excellent alternative to fighter jets, requiring less training and fewer pilots and being easier to launch. Now, Iran can independently produce missiles, which are also much cheaper than combat aircraft. There are many reasons why Iran is pursuing missiles.

As Iran's knowledge of missiles and its arsenal continue to grow day by day, the scope of regional conflicts and tensions is also expanding. Although many experts believe that Iran has thus far managed to evade missile strikes against countries in the region, it remains to be seen how far the strategic patience of Western and Middle Eastern countries will go. On the other hand, will Iran be compelled to reconsider its missile program and extend their range? This raises a moment of concern for Israel and its allies regarding how seriously they take this issue.

Monday 28 October 2024

Echoes of the Past: Today's American Muslims

Islamophobia: From Past to Present

In the United States, public opinion is generally forecasted through surveys to predict who the next occupant of the White House will be, and at what level of popularity each presidential candidate stands. Whether these surveys prove accurate will become clear in the coming days. However, amidst the ongoing tensions and conflicts in the Middle East, what role can American Muslims play? In 2009, the renowned author Suheila Sune published the English book "American Islam: The Struggle for the Soul of a Religion," which provides a detailed discussion of the challenges, rights, and cultural issues faced by American Muslims. The book also explores the historical resonance of Islam in the past, the history of Muslims in America, and the intriguing narrative of Islamophobia from the past to the present. Let us examine the role of Muslims in the current American elections in the context of this book.

Thomas Jefferson, the third President of the United States and author of the Declaration of Independence, not only owned a copy of the Qur'an but also envisioned Islam as a possible part of American society. He advocated for the protection of Muslims' rights and saw them as potential citizens of the new American state. Jefferson purchased a copy of the Qur'an eleven years before drafting the Declaration of Independence, and his Qur'an is still preserved in the Library of Congress, symbolising the early connections between Islam and America. These connections continue to hold significant importance for candid American scholars even today.

Jefferson's possession of a Qur'an suggests an interest in Islamic teachings, though it does not necessarily imply he aimed to address Muslims' specific issues. Jefferson's initial understanding of Islamic principles of basic rights was influenced by the writings of the seventeenth-century English philosopher John Locke, who encouraged European societies to incorporate Muslims and Jews. Locke was following the insights of thinkers from a century earlier who had already considered this. Jefferson's concept of Muslims' rights can be better understood within the context of intellectual developments across the Atlantic from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century.

When sectarian conflict arose among Christians in Europe, some Christians viewed Muslims as a means to test the limits of tolerance toward followers of different beliefs. These European precedents made Muslims a subject of discourse in America as well, particularly concerning "the boundaries of citizenship and tolerance." During the formation of the new government, America's founders—all Protestant—considered examples from the Islamic world while deliberating on religious freedoms for people of various faiths. Founding American thinkers debated whether the United States should be predominantly Protestant or openly accept followers of all religions. They even thoroughly discussed whether non-Protestants should be allowed to attain high offices, like the presidency. These considerations inspired reflections on religious freedom and the idea of separating religion from the state, as well as discussions around religious tests in the Constitution, which persisted in some states into the nineteenth century.

The notion of resistance to Muslim citizenship was not surprising in the eighteenth century. Americans inherited nearly a thousand years of negative European perceptions regarding religious

leadership and politics. Yet, despite the negative sentiments surrounding Muslims, it is remarkable that some of America's most prominent early figures rejected the idea of excluding Muslims as potential citizens. The Founding Fathers envisioned Muslims as citizens with full rights, a stance that mirrored a thousand years of European political thought and extended it further. This raises the question: how did the idea of fully recognising Muslims' rights survive in America despite resistance? And perhaps more importantly, what future does this idea hold in the twenty-first century?

This book provides insights into the views of prominent early American figures regarding Islam, showing that they refused to accept negative opinions about Islam as definitive. While Europe subtly encouraged intolerance toward Islam and Muslims, these figures declined to adopt that view.

Most American Protestants believed that Muslim beliefs were unacceptable. This mindset fostered a status quo among Protestants while also encouraging some Americans to consider the value of listening to diverse perspectives. As one part of society resisted the inclusion of Muslims, a growing segment began to see the benefits of welcoming people of various faiths, promoting a more inclusive society. This evolving mindset gradually fostered an awareness that Muslims, too, could be embraced.

Such considerations emerged even before Muslims had arrived in America, with acceptance of them being cultivated in advance. Jefferson and his close associates understood that thinking and debating about Muslims' rights would pave the way for universal rights in America. Consequently, the acceptance of minorities, including Catholics and Jews, advanced within the mainstream of society. The discussions about Muslims' rights helped establish the notion that all people should be welcomed with an open heart.

America gained true independence from Britain in 1783, and in that year, George Washington wrote to Irish Catholics residing in New York, emphasizing that America should welcome individuals of every religion and sect, especially those who had suffered persecution. At the time, America had only around 25,000 Catholics, who faced significant restrictions, including political exclusion in New York. Washington also wrote to the Jewish community, then comprising only 2,000 individuals in America. He envisioned America as a haven for the oppressed worldwide, especially those persecuted for their beliefs.

In 1784, George Washington openly expressed his views on Muslims at his home in Mount Vernon. A friend from Virginia had written to him about needing a carpenter and a mason for house construction. Washington replied, explaining that the religion, sect, colour, or race of a craftsman was irrelevant in building a house or making furniture. A good craftsman could be from Asia, Africa, or Europe and could be Muslim, Christian, or Jewish, or even have no religious beliefs at all. This letter highlights that Washington included Muslims in his vision of "America for All." He may have sensed that Muslims were unlikely to play significant roles in various fields for a long time to come.

Different sources suggest that Muslims were living in America during the 18th century, though Thomas Jefferson and his associates seemed unaware of their presence. Jefferson and his colleagues had referenced Muslims as potential future citizens of the United States. Mentions of Muslims in the writings and speeches of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson were certainly intentional. Both

of these influential figures inherited two contrasting European perspectives on Muslims.

One perspective argued that the teachings of Islam were entirely opposed, even hostile, to those of Protestant Christianity and that Islamic ideas contributed to oppressive regimes. Accepting Muslims into America's Protestant society meant including a community whose religion and related views Europe deemed alien and dangerous. This was not limited to Muslims; American Protestants similarly regarded Catholic beliefs as foreign and hazardous, as Catholicism was also perceived to oppose American ideals of freedom and inclusivity.

Jefferson and other advocates for non-Protestant citizenship fostered a school of thought that opened the door not only for Muslims but also for Catholics and Jews. In the 16th century, Catholics and Protestants who advocated for their beliefs faced severe persecution, and those who promoted the acceptance of all religions in the 17th century were often sentenced to death, forced labour, or exile. This rejection applied to people from various backgrounds, including aristocrats who embraced all religions and endured harsh punishments for doing so. Non-conformists in religion were typically unorganised, yet they supported the acceptance of organised Muslims within Christian states as a means to avoid persecution.

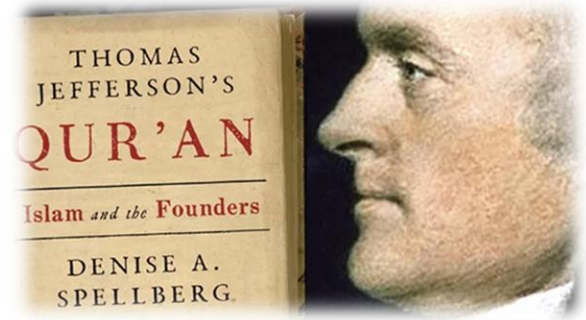
As a prominent Anglican establishment member and leading Virginia politician, Thomas Jefferson advocated ideas that had previously subjected their proponents to ridicule or even the death penalty in Europe. Because Jefferson himself was part of the establishment, his views on Muslim rights were taken seriously in Virginia. Alongside a few colleagues, Jefferson presented concepts to the fledgling United States that had been largely dismissed or lost in European mainstream thought. It's not that Jefferson was instantly celebrated for his ideas on religious freedom for all, including Muslims; opponents challenged him at every turn. However, he also garnered significant support, especially from groups like the Presbyterians and Baptists, who had experienced Protestant repression.

While few in American society were genuinely committed to extending full American citizenship to non-Protestants, there was still a degree of tolerance for Muslims. What these early proponents of Muslim rights were suggesting was novel and largely unaccepted in the 18th-century social landscape, where American citizenship was typically reserved for white, male Protestants. Distinguishing citizenship from religion was essential, and Virginia's initial legislative steps marked only the beginning of a long journey.

Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and James Madison began the work of separating citizenship from religion, a formidable task. Despite substantial effort throughout their careers, they couldn't fully achieve this ideal and left it as an unfinished mission for future generations. This book is the first to explore how Jefferson and his peers, despite their incomplete and sometimes ambiguous understanding of Islam, were active in advocating civil rights for all non-Protestant citizens, including Muslims.

In 1784, George Washington advocated for allowing Muslims to work in America. Nearly a decade earlier, he mentioned two African women, a mother and daughter, named Fatima and Fatima Sughra, who were part of his taxable estate. Although Washington supported granting Muslims American

citizenship, the reality is that he himself bought Muslim slaves, thereby obstructing their fundamental rights. Notably, at that time, enslaved Muslims were not allowed to practice their religion. This may have been the case on the estates and farmlands of Jefferson and Madison as well, though we have little information about the religious background of their slaves.



There's no doubt that the number of Muslim slaves brought from West Africa was in the thousands, possibly even surpassing the number of Catholic Christians and Jews in America at the time. Some former Muslim slaves may have even served in the Continental Army, though there is no evidence that they practiced their faith, nor that the Founding Fathers were aware of their presence. It's also noteworthy that these former Muslim slaves did not influence the debate over Muslims' civil rights or citizenship rights.

Although Muslims had been present in America since the 17th century, racial and slavery-based factors were so strong that their religious identity remained largely hidden. When the Founding Fathers thought of the rights of future American Muslims, they likely envisioned only white Muslims. By the 1790s, any white person, regardless of their background, could apply for American citizenship. Jefferson met only two Muslims, both ambassadors from North Africa of Turkish descent. He neither commented on nor wrote about their appearance; both were relatively fair-skinned. Jefferson's attention to these ambassadors was due to their political and diplomatic status rather than their race or religion.

As ambassador, Secretary of State, and Vice President, Jefferson avoided viewing America's conflicts with North African states through a religious lens. American shipping was constantly threatened by piracy in the Mediterranean and eastern Atlantic. Jefferson clarified to the rulers of Tripoli and Tunis that his nation harboured no anti-Islamic prejudice. At one point, he even remarked that Americans worshipped the same God as Muslims.

Jefferson wished to separate religion from politics and governance, a principle he advocated both domestically and internationally. His perspective on Islam and Muslims was largely shaped by relations with the North African states, forming the basis of his foreign policy in that region. It's also possible that Jefferson, being a monotheist, felt some affinity with the Islamic world.

While Jefferson certainly would have been aware of the prevailing negative perceptions of Islam, it's likely that he used certain inherited European notions and examples in the Virginian debate on separating religion from state affairs. The ideological victory Jefferson achieved between the 18th and 19th centuries remains a challenge for Americans in the 21st century. Since the late 19th century, America's Muslim population has grown significantly, exhibiting rich ethnic diversity. However, American society has never fully embraced Muslims. In Jefferson's era, an imagined Muslim population faced prejudice; in today's America, Muslims are subject to political hostility.

The 9/11 attacks and the War on Terror have cultivated an environment in which many Americans

support restricting Muslims' fundamental civil rights. Today, there is growing debate about whether a Muslim can qualify to be the President of the United States. This question first arose in connection with Barack Obama but actually dates back to the early history of the American presidency. Jefferson was the first prominent figure accused of being a Muslim.

The question of whether an American Muslim can be President helps illustrate the degree to which Muslims have permeated the American public consciousness and how Muslim rights became an early component of American ideals. Thus, understanding the debate on Muslim rights that began in the late 18th century is crucial to understanding the contemporary issue of Muslim citizenship in America.

While the rights of American Muslims were theoretically recognised long ago, they still face significant trials in practice. In fact, American Muslims experience challenges regarding their rights on a daily basis. In today's America, even prominent scholars such as historian of Islam John Esposito have been compelled to question the supposed Western tolerance and inclusivity. *Thomas Jefferson's Qur'an* helps us understand when, where, and how Muslim rights were incorporated into American ideals.

Historians have spent considerable energy trying to prove that Islam and American ideals are fundamentally incompatible. Many argue that Protestant Americans have consistently dismissed Islam as inherently un-American. Some historians even suggest that America itself was born in the 18th century as a reaction against the oppressive governance structures attributed to Islam. Certainly, America's early policies and documents contain traces of this viewpoint. However, there are also positive views of Islam and Muslims, such as the discourse on the "rights of future American Muslim citizens." This implies that not all Protestants viewed Islam as an entirely foreign faith.

This book sheds light on the fact that Muslims were not only non-American but that discussions regarding their potential citizenship and expected rights had already taken place at the time of the country's founding. However, it is true that many of these ideals were not openly accepted by the majority of Americans at the time. Alongside exploring Jefferson's views on Islam and the Islamic world, this book also eloquently presents the thoughts of John Adams and James Madison. The discussion about the rights of Muslims was not limited to the Founding Fathers. The struggle of Baptists and Presbyterians in Virginia, as well as their confrontations against the religious establishment, are also detailed in this book, along with the advocacy for Muslim rights by the well-known Anglican lawyer James Iredell and Samuel Johnston. The evangelical Baptist John Leland, who was among Jefferson and Madison's associates, raised his voice for the rights of Muslims in Connecticut and Massachusetts. He also protested against the flaws found in the Constitution, the shortcomings of the First Amendment, and the role of religion at the state level.

This book mentions two Muslim slaves from West Africa, Ibrahim Abdul-Rahman and Omar Ibn Said. Omar Ibn Said knew Arabic and had even written his autobiography in Arabic. The mention of these two Muslims suggests that there were thousands of Muslims in America at that time, but they were denied many rights, including the freedom to practice their religion. They were also deprived of the right to citizenship. Catholic Christians and Jews continued their struggle for rights even in the twentieth century. The rights they obtained were not fully in accordance with the Constitution.

However, it is a bitter truth that today, Muslims remain the only community in America that has not been fully accepted, and efforts are still being made to keep their influence limited. Following the decision of the Pharaoh Trump in the White House to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, there remains no doubt that he has openly declared war not only against America but also against the Islamic world. Now, it remains to be seen whether the Islamic world, amidst the ongoing Israeli atrocities, will remain silent and commit suicide by allowing the candidates of both parties in the American elections to openly support the Israeli aggression aimed at forming a Greater Israel in the region, or whether it will seize the opportunity to reshape its destiny.

Thursday 31 October 2024

Threats in the Middle East: The Impact of Leaked American Documents

Document Leak: Security Challenges in the Middle East

On October 1st, Iran launched approximately 200 ballistic missiles at Israel. According to the Israeli military, most of these missiles were intercepted and destroyed in mid-air, but some inevitably reached their targets. For now, Israel is keeping the extent of the damage caused by this attack hidden from global media. It is worth remembering that earlier this year, in April, following an Israeli strike on the Iranian consulate in Damascus, Syria, Iran had responded by launching drones and missiles towards Israel. Since then, the U.S. has been working urgently to strengthen Israel's security. The threat of further major conflict continues to loom over the region.

A few days ago, a Telegram channel called "Middle East Spectator" highlighted these threats by publishing some alleged secret U.S. documents. These documents revealed ongoing risks in the region, shedding light on how the U.S. has been assessing an Israeli plan to attack Iran. The channel claims that these documents were provided by an official linked to U.S. intelligence. Speaking to the global media, U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson said that he had been briefed on the situation but could not share details at the moment. However, he confirmed that an investigation is underway to determine how these secret documents were leaked, calling the leak "deeply concerning."

Previously, news agency Associated Press (AP) cited three unnamed U.S. officials who stated that the U.S. was investigating how two classified documents related to a potential Israeli attack on Iran had been leaked. Another U.S. official told AP that the documents appeared to be authentic. The documents, labelled "Top Secret," are dated October 15th and 16th. The aforementioned Telegram channel is reportedly run from Tehran and covers news related to the "Axis of Resistance." In the past, it has also published memes referring to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The satellite images in these documents detail Israel's preparations for an attack on Iran, showing that Israel is still moving military equipment to nearby bases in anticipation of such an operation. Israel also recently conducted a major military drill. These documents, prepared by U.S. Space Intelligence Agency and the U.S. National Security Agency, were intended to be shared with the "Five Eyes" intelligence alliance, comprising the U.S., the U.K., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

Following the Telegram leaks, U.S. media outlets also reported that an investigation is underway to find out how these documents were leaked, whether it was intentional or through hacking. Investigations of such matters typically fall under the purview of the FBI, the Department of Defense, and other U.S. security agencies. However, the FBI has not yet commented on the matter. According to the Associated Press, one of the leaked documents closely resembles another that was leaked about seven months ago through the U.S. Space Intelligence Agency, with an Air National Guard officer taking responsibility for that leak. The Pentagon has taken note of the reports on these documents but has refused to comment further. Additionally, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) also declined AP's request for comment.

Following Iran's recent missile strikes, Israel has said that it will respond at an appropriate time based on its "national interests." Last week, The Washington Post reported that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu plans to target only military sites, rather than Iran's nuclear and military

facilities. Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant also recently stated that when Israel does respond, it will be a "precise and lethal" operation, adding that Iran would not be able to predict it. In response, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi warned that any attack on Iran would cross a "red line," and Tehran would respond appropriately.

Iran's Foreign Minister told Turkey's NTV channel that Iran's missile strikes on Israel specifically targeted military installations, and that these attacks were a response to Israel's assassination of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh. He also stated, "We have now identified all of our targets in Israel, and similar attacks will be carried out on them." Iran has also warned the Gulf Arab states, some of which have diplomatic relations with Israel, not to allow their airspace to be used for any potential Israeli counter-attack. Any country aiding Israel in an attack on Iran would be considered a legitimate target for Iranian retaliation.

It is important to note that after the death of Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar, the U.S. has been urging Israel to move towards a ceasefire in Gaza. The U.S. has also warned Israel not to expand military operations further into northern Lebanon, avoiding the risk of a wider regional war. However, Israeli leadership has repeatedly stressed that it will respond to Iran's missile strikes. When asked by journalists in Berlin about when and how Israel would respond to Iran's missile attacks, U.S. President Biden simply replied, "Yes," without offering further details.

The critical point is that with the U.S. presidential election approaching, the White House would not welcome any attack on Iranian oil installations that could affect oil prices. Moreover, it has no desire to be dragged into another Middle Eastern war. However, regarding the leaked documents on the Telegram channel, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby stated that President Joe Biden is "deeply concerned" about the leak. U.S. officials have yet to determine whether the documents were deliberately leaked or obtained through hacking.

Military analysts have pointed out that the headings used in the documents seem authentic, with similar wording seen in other previously leaked classified documents. The documents are marked "Top Secret" and "FGI," meaning "Foreign Government Intelligence." Apparently, these documents were meant to be shared with the "Five Eyes" intelligence alliance, consisting of the U.S., the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The documents also contain code words like "TK," or "Talent Keyhole," referring to satellite-based signals and imagery intelligence.

The documents indicate that Israel is preparing to target specific locations in Iran. The report is based on intelligence gathered and analyzed by the U.S. Special Intelligence Agency on the 14th and 15th of October. The review frequently mentions two air-launched ballistic missiles, "Golden Horizon" and "Rocks." The "Rocks" system is a long-range missile system developed by Israeli company Rafael, capable of targeting both above-ground and underground installations.

"Golden Horizon" refers to Israel's Blue Sparrow missile system, which has a range of around 2,000 kilometres. This suggests that the Israeli Air Force is planning another attack on Iran similar to the one carried out on April 1st this year, but on a larger scale. This time, however, Israel is unlikely to use Jordanian airspace due to Iran's earlier warning that any country allowing its airspace or bases to be used for an Israeli attack would be considered a target by Iran.

The leaked documents also suggest that Israel is not preparing any nuclear option to deter further Iranian attacks. At Israel's request, U.S. administrations have never officially acknowledged that Israel possesses nuclear weapons. The mention of nuclear weapons in these documents could be an embarrassment for the U.S. The documents do not specify when or which Iranian targets Israel might strike. However, it is noteworthy that the U.S. has opposed Israel targeting Iran's nuclear or oil installations. This leaves the Revolutionary Guard military bases, associated personnel, and the Basij forces, which are active both inside and outside Iran in quelling resistance.

As for an Israeli attack on Iran, many believed that Israel would have acted by now, but in April this year, Iran waited 12 days before responding to Israeli strikes. Previously, Israel had targeted an Iranian diplomatic building in Damascus, killing seven members of the Revolutionary Guard.

The delay in Israel's attack on Iran could also be due to U.S. concerns. The U.S. does not want tensions to escalate in the region ahead of its presidential election. However, given how both presidential candidates have openly supported Israel during their campaigns and celebrated the killing of Yahya Sinwar, leader of Hamas, it seems unlikely that Israel will act before the U.S. election. Nevertheless, Netanyahu's past behaviour suggests otherwise.

It is possible that the documents were leaked by someone attempting to thwart Israel's plans to attack Iran. Iran possesses significant cyber warfare capabilities, raising questions about whether this leak was the result of hacking. If the documents are genuine, it also suggests that despite being close defence allies, the U.S. continues to spy on Israel.



The documents also reveal that the Israeli Air Force is preparing for a long-range strike against Iran, with readiness to counter any potential Iranian retaliation. In short, when Israel acts on its plans, the Middle East could once again experience significant tension, the repercussions of which the world may have to endure.

Since 2002, military and technical cooperation between Tehran and Moscow, which began during the Ukraine war, is now visibly linked to the potential Iran-Israel conflict. Iran has previously supplied Russia with small shipments of drones and other weapons, which the Russian military has used in its offensive against Ukraine. With rising tensions in the region, this military and technical cooperation could reach new heights. For instance, Russia could sell Iran some Sukhoi-35 (Flanker) fighter jets. These jets were originally manufactured for Egypt, but the deal between the two countries never materialised. Iran has expressed interest in purchasing these combat aircraft.

If Iran acquires these fighter jets, it will become significantly more challenging for any country to carry out air operations against it. Currently, the Iranian Air Force has only a few dozen combat aircraft, most of which are outdated Russian and American models from before the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The Sukhoi Su-35 is one of the most advanced aircraft in the Russian Air Force. It is a large supersonic fighter, over 70 feet in length, and can weigh up to 35 tons when airborne. The jet is powered by two engines, each providing 31,000 pounds of thrust. Despite its heavy weight, the Su-35 can swiftly change direction in the blink of an eye.

In the spring of 2023, Iranian radio reported, citing an unnamed member of Iran's delegation to the United Nations, that a deal for these combat jets had been finalised. However, since then, no official report from Iran has been released regarding the delivery of the planes.

At present, more than 20 such fighter jets are stationed at the airbase of the Komsomolsk-on-Amur aircraft factory in Russia. These jets can even be seen on Google Maps. Additionally, Russia could provide Iran with short-range missile systems like the Pantsir-S1 air defence system. This system would help protect long-range defence systems and other critical targets from Israeli missile strikes. According to classified American documents, in 2023, Russia's Wagner Group, a private military contractor, planned to transfer this system to Hezbollah or Iran. At the time, John Kirby, the spokesperson for the US National Security Council, announced that the US was "prepared to impose anti-terrorism sanctions on Russian individuals and entities" if such an operation took place. However, no reports have since surfaced about the plan being carried out.

On the other hand, Iran might supply Russia with operational tactical or short-range ballistic missiles. Adding such missiles to Russia's arsenal could significantly impact the current state of the war in Ukraine. In the event of a war with Israel, a country about 1,000 kilometres away from Iran, the latter would require medium-range missiles. Meanwhile, Russia needs tactical or short-range missiles with a range of less than 500 kilometres. Therefore, transferring such equipment to Russia would not compromise Iran's ability to strike Israel.

This issue has become so severe that it has further strained diplomatic relations between Moscow and Washington. In early September, US President Joe Biden considered allowing Ukraine to use American missiles against targets inside Russia. At the time, the US, France, Germany, and the UK officially accused Iran of supplying ballistic missiles to Russia. According to media reports, these missiles had already reached Russia, though the world is not unaware of the hypocrisy in these accusations, given that these countries provide far more dangerous weapons to Israel.

While Kyiv has not yet been granted permission to use Western weapons against targets inside Russia, Moscow has also denied using Iranian missiles in Ukraine. Iran has officially denied sending such missiles to Russia. The potential sale of fighter jets and ballistic missiles represents some of the largest arms deals leaked to the media, but nothing definitive can be said yet. However, the possibility of such transactions reflects the high level of military and technical cooperation between Iran and Russia, which is already influencing the region.

This cooperation also affects Israel's interests. Although relations between Russia and Israel are not as strained as those between Russia and other Western countries, they are not particularly close either. Meanwhile, despite repeated requests, Israel has not yet provided Ukraine with lethal weapons—at least not publicly. Ukraine is particularly interested in Israel's effective air defence

systems, such as the Iron Dome. As tensions continue to rise in the Middle East, the Ukraine issue is becoming an increasingly nightmarish scenario for the US and its allies.

It appears that while Israel may eventually send such systems to Ukraine, they would come from its active military units. These systems are also ready for export, with two units currently stationed in the US, which could be sent to Ukraine if Israel agrees. So far, Israel has not provided significant military aid to Ukraine, limiting itself to humanitarian assistance. In February 2023, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that he was considering providing military aid to Ukraine but did not specify the type of aid. However, it seems that no decision has been made in this regard yet.

Relations between Israel and Russia have become more complex due to the simultaneous operations of their air forces in Syria. Their aircraft frequently fly close to one another, and they need to maintain constant coordination to avoid incidents like the downing of a Russian reconnaissance plane in 2018. Although the plane was mistakenly shot down by Syrian air defence, Russia claimed that Israeli jets were nearby and were the intended targets.

International relations in the Middle East are so intricate and interconnected that any major intervention could trigger a new chain of problems with other countries. However, it seems that Moscow and Tehran have tried to discuss all details to avoid escalating any conflict in the region.

On September 30, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin visited Tehran. According to the Russian newspaper *Vedomosti*, the purpose of this visit was to review the full scope of cooperation between Russia and Iran, with a particular focus on large joint projects in the fields of transport, energy, industry, and agriculture. It remains unclear whether military technology was also discussed during this visit.

Sunday 3 November 2024

America's Moral Standing: Changes During the Trump Era

American Values and the Trump Era: A Critical Review

This was the first time that an American president, sitting in the White House with full control over the nuclear briefcase, had his mental health questioned openly on American electronic media. A prominent psychologist, with evidence, publicly expressed concerns regarding Trump's mental stability, sending a wave of alarm through defence and political analysts alike. The psychologist argued that since Trump assumed office, he had repeatedly acted in ways that seemed contrary to what had made America a great power. Time and again, his words and actions were at odds with the dignity and requirements of the office. Trump appeared intent on bringing his capricious nature into the presidential role, disregarding the principles and characteristics that had historically strengthened America. More and more Americans, they argued, were sensing the damage this approach was causing.

Predicting global politics is notoriously challenging due to the rapid shifts in circumstances that threaten any prediction's accuracy, and Trump's tenure was especially complex in this regard. During his first year in office, the unpredictability of his actions left analysts cautious about making predictions, knowing he might confound them by taking contrary actions. Historians examining Trump's presidency may well note how his impulsive behaviour disrupted the discipline expected of the office. Throughout his term, Trump appeared to lack a clear vision or the ability to formulate a "grand strategy" that could offer America a structured path through crises or a refreshed model for its society and governance. His seriousness on these matters, it seemed, fell notably short.

No nation can progress, let alone survive, without a coherent and overarching strategy. For the U.S., as a global superpower, it is crucial to maintain a stable leadership structure and a well-defined strategy on international affairs. Historically, America has followed such a comprehensive approach, not out of choice but necessity. The United States, being a superpower, must cultivate strategic alliances worldwide and maintain oversight across regions. A president cannot simply ignore or act contrary to the grand strategy of the country. Even if a leader lacks insight, they must nevertheless take an active interest in strategic matters. While Trump may not seem to possess the required vision, he too cannot disregard the grand strategy. As Leon Trotsky aptly noted, if a leader shows no interest in grand strategy, it will inevitably affect them, leaving only the option to advance.

Trump assumed office at a critical juncture. For the preceding seventy years since World War II, America had positioned itself as a global leader capable of reshaping the world. The U.S. has influenced various regions according to its interests, fostering development in some areas while bringing destruction to others. After the Cold War ended in 1990, America emerged as the sole superpower with increased responsibilities. Over the subsequent thirty years, the U.S. has achieved some positive outcomes but more frequently has been entangled in turmoil. Often, American actions seemed either poorly planned or driven by fear.

According to American defence analysts, it is significant that Trump was elected president at a time when China had fully emerged as a formidable global power. China now presents a substantial challenge to U.S. military and economic dominance, necessitating a shift in the American grand

strategy. Furthermore, in the region, Pakistan—once a vital ally that played a crucial role in establishing America’s superpower status—now faces strained relations with the U.S. due to the ongoing human rights abuses in Kashmir and terrorism issues linked to India.

The U.S.'s failed policy of pressuring Pakistan while strengthening ties with India, compounded by the disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan, has backfired. In response, a robust regional alliance comprising China, Pakistan, Russia, and Iran has emerged, creating a new power bloc that could challenge U.S. influence in the area.

On one hand, China has emerged as a significant challenge to the military and economic dominance of the United States, and on the other, the rapidly changing situation in the Middle East is also causing issues for the US. It should be noted that there is a growing trend worldwide of rejecting democracy as an ideal form of governance. Many people are beginning to question whether democracy is even necessary if authoritarianism can effectively solve their problems.

For decades, the United States has maintained an uncontested dominance over global politics and economics, making decisions in alignment with Europe and reaping the benefits. However, much has now changed. Several nations have rapidly emerged as powerful forces. Europe, to a great extent, has charted its own course, while China, Russia, Brazil, South Africa, and many other countries have grown stronger. Their stability has surfaced as an evident threat to American supremacy.

Even within the United States, there are now questions regarding America's role in global politics and economics. The most critical question in the current presidential election is how to enable America to retain its dominant status on the world stage. Clearly, challenges have increased, and exceptional changes in strategy are inevitable. During his tenure, Trump did little to indicate that he possesses the ability to elevate America to new heights. He appears to lack the political insight deemed essential for an American president. However, this does not mean that he has failed entirely to leave an impression. In some areas, he has demonstrated a degree of moderation beyond his usual rhetoric, and to some extent, has influenced American thought through his words and actions.

Many Americans now feel that Trump’s efforts have affected the principles and methods that have maintained the country’s dominance in global politics and economics. Trump claims that his ideas and actions will bring unprecedented strength and wealth to America, sustaining its supremacy on the global stage. However, his policies have actually caused harm to the nation. Policymakers are increasingly aware that since Trump’s arrival, America’s position as the leading global power has weakened. The impact of Trump’s words has not matched their expected outcome, and Americans are beginning to see that his policies may have limited America’s influence on the world stage.

Some American policymakers claim, debatably, that for four generations, the US has provided a system to the world that has paved the way for peace, prosperity, stability, and democracy. This is stated in comparison to other political systems. America’s dominance in global politics and economics has been largely a result of its "hard power." The country wielded unmatched strength and focused intensely on utilising this power effectively.

Following World War II, America formally assumed the role of a global power. While it did not enjoy uncontested dominance during the Cold War due to the presence of the Soviet Union, the world was

divided between two clear global powers. America exerted substantial military influence globally, especially after the end of the Cold War, which further bolstered its military power. Its share in the global economy expanded to the point where at one stage, its gross domestic product comprised 25% of the global GDP. The world had never seen a single nation as powerful as America.

This dominant position, however, would not have been possible if the Soviet Union had not made the error of invading Afghanistan and without the extensive support of allies like Pakistan, who significantly assisted America in becoming the world's sole superpower. However, after achieving its objectives, America repeated its historical pattern by abandoning Pakistan and Afghanistan mid-crisis. It immediately gravitated toward an alliance with Pakistan's adversary, India, who, after five decades of loyalty to Russia, turned towards America, a shift that was openly criticised by Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Yet, in a twist of fate, the principle of "actions have consequences" has, within recent years, created numerous threats to American supremacy. Now, China, Russia, and other nations have emerged as formidable rivals. Nevertheless, America believes that its military and economic power still provides substantial influence over global politics and economics, and that its leadership remains capable of significantly impacting worldwide affairs.

At the close of World War II, America could have devised a strategy solely beneficial to itself, strengthening its military and economic power to its fullest extent. However, policymakers focused on creating an international system that not only ensured America's own stability but also fostered the development, prosperity, and progress of like-minded countries. Institutions were established, and programs were organised to maintain this international order, positioning America as a global leader.



America established military alliances and worked to secure international trade routes as a means to maintain global peace. But the underlying intent was to create a world order in which America could thrive and maintain its own stability and progress with greater ease.

After World War II, the United States could have devised a strategy that benefited both itself and its close allies, allowing it to further consolidate its military and economic power. Instead, policymakers focused on establishing an international system through which the U.S. could achieve stability and ensure the economic prosperity of its allies, especially those inclined to support its agenda. In particular, this meant winning the allegiance of countries willing to back its initiatives, much like its allies have done in supporting U.S. actions in the Middle East and Afghanistan. To sustain this international order, various institutions and programs were developed, positioning the U.S. as a global leader. The U.S. also formed military alliances and sought to secure international trade routes, ostensibly in the name of global peace, though ultimately to create a world where it could thrive with ease.

The post-WWII American efforts to reshape the world according to its design had one primary goal: establishing dominance in global politics and economics without facing significant challenges. The "New World Order" programme, introduced by George H.W. Bush and inspired by Henry Kissinger, sought to establish a framework that would solidify U.S. power in economics, military strength, and diplomacy. The purpose was to create a world order where the U.S. could wield its influence on a scale that could bolster its global leadership by controlling the economy to serve American interests.

It's important to note that, while the U.S. has made far-reaching decisions in global politics and economics, it has not always resorted to heavy-handed tactics against its allies. Rather than enforcing its will through direct power, the U.S. often employed a subtler approach, sharing portions of the benefits with countries willing to accept its global vision. Unlike other superpowers, the U.S. has been less inclined to impose its will forcefully, and many of its partners have openly admitted that they are more afraid of the U.S. stepping back from global affairs, potentially exposing them to competition from other powers.

The "America First" slogan has consistently underscored American politics and economics. The U.S. has always prioritised its interests, aiming to bend situations to its benefit rather than adapt to them. A European diplomat once remarked that for seventy years, Europe danced to America's tune. From Vietnam to Nicaragua, people have witnessed the lengths to which U.S. officials have gone to secure their national interests, often embracing harsh policies without hesitation. Beyond economics and politics, America's leadership approach has also been significant in areas such as global peace and stability. Since World War II, the U.S. has played an extraordinary role in promoting peace and stability, especially when the world was divided between capitalism and communism. America's allies believed that it had the commitment and capability to deliver on its promises and that it alone could achieve stability in a dangerous world.

American presidents have persistently strived to ensure that democracy and human rights flourish globally, particularly in alignment with U.S. interests—a sentiment reflected in the ousting of Algeria's and later Egypt's Morsi government. The U.S. leadership believes that its global standing is bolstered by upholding certain moral standards worldwide, advocating open societies and the spread of liberalism. Former U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz once said that the most stable relations were with countries whose democratic roots were aligned with U.S. policies. This isn't coincidental; the U.S. gravitates towards countries with democratic and secular values similar to its own, fostering closer political and economic ties with nations whose political traditions are aligned with those of the U.S. and its allies.

The U.S. has not solely relied on "hard power" (economic and military might) to assert itself. To sustain its global influence, it has employed "soft power" to shape perceptions worldwide. American leaders have always wanted their country to be seen not just as a force to be feared but as one to be admired. While anti-U.S. sentiment is widespread, people globally still dream of opportunities in the U.S. Even in countries where citizens harbour deep resentment toward the U.S., there remains an eagerness to secure a U.S. visa. The "soft power" of the U.S. has played a vital role in enhancing its "hard power," creating an allure that continues to draw people despite any reservations they may hold. Unfortunately, the immigration policies under Trump have tarnished this image, to the point

where even the U.S. Supreme Court intervened, rejecting parts of Trump's policy and reflecting the broader impact it has had on America's longstanding appeal.

Thus far, Donald Trump's statements indicate that he is more focused on destruction than on creation. (For Dean Acheson, it was significant that he was present at the time of America's creation.) According to American and Western political analysts, one can assert without fear of contradiction that, looking at Trump's bombastic statements, he might one day take pride in having been present during America's downfall. During his election campaign, Trump said much that suggests he has little regard for upholding fundamental American values. He prioritised his interests over free trade, insisting that the latter be set aside.

Trump has not demonstrated the kind of appreciation for democracy that his predecessors have shown. Most notably, he expressed admiration for Vladimir Putin, who views authoritarianism as a fundamental political value and seeks to centralise all power in himself. Trump seems intent on dismantling what the US has achieved over five to six decades. He believes that the post-war foreign policy adopted by America has granted opponents such considerable concessions that they are now contemplating retribution. The United States has indeed attempted to shape the global economy according to its own interests in the world following the Second World War, but in doing so, it has also shared its products and technologies with the world. This is something individuals like Trump disapprove of; they believe that America should refrain from spreading its technologies and advanced products globally.

By allowing the US military to employ torture on prisoners, Trump has stated that if it becomes necessary to commit war crimes in the fight against terrorism, there is nothing wrong with that. This indicates that America has managed to maintain its dominance in some manner, but Trump has been eager to dismantle it. It is not the case that Trump's presidential remarks are merely emotional. He has long been highly critical of several American partners. In the 1980s, he targeted Japan and Kuwait, asserting that the US received little from both countries while giving much. Similarly, he harshly critiqued Germany and Mexico in 2015 and 2016, stating that both had played a parasitic role in relation to the US. The views he expressed about some of America's partners during his campaign reflect his perspectives from the past two or three decades. This means that what Trump has said about certain allies as president is not merely bluster or emotional rhetoric; he genuinely wishes to take action. In fact, he seems eager to push some of America's allies aside and establish new relationships, regardless of the heavy price the US may have to pay.

Will the well-wishers of the US and its allies once again support Trump's policies, which are leading America rapidly towards isolation?

Tuesday 5 November 2024

The Weakness of Muslim Thought in the Storm of the West

The Balance of Freedom of Expression and Its Limits

The meaning and definition of "freedom of expression" is that everyone has the right to openly present their viewpoints, raise questions, disagree, and offer criticism. However, no one is allowed to defame, slander, or harm others by making baseless accusations. While criticism is indeed a rightful aspect of freedom of expression, it is crucial to remember that where legitimate criticism ends, disrespect often begins—a boundary every society deems unacceptable. Some individuals, however, cross all limits, believing that hate speech, incitement, personal defamation, disrespect toward religious beliefs, or insult to respected figures fall within the remit of free expression. Such actions are a blatant violation of ethical freedom of expression and reveal the perpetrators' moral decline. In any society, freedom of speech does not extend to the point of harming others' sentiments. Each society has defined the boundaries of free expression according to its own values.

According to the United Nations General Assembly's 1966 "ICCPR" resolution, any speech or writing that opposes or offends any religious, national, or ethnic group within a country or promotes hatred or contempt against them must be legally restricted by that country. Additionally, various European nations have implemented numerous restrictions on freedom of expression. I would like to highlight a notable ruling issued on **October 26, 2016**, by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), which stated that insults against the Prophet Muhammad exceed acceptable limits of free expression, potentially inciting prejudice and endangering religious harmony. This decision was rendered in response to an Austrian woman's appeal against her sentence for making derogatory comments about the Prophet Muhammad. This verdict does not infringe upon fundamental human rights.

It is worth noting that the ECHR, based in Strasbourg, France, carefully balanced the woman's right to free expression against the right to protect others' religious sentiments. Identified only as "ES," this woman delivered several speeches under the title "Basic Information on Islam" in 2008 and 2009, wherein she made statements about the Prophet Muhammad. She was subsequently tried in a Vienna court and fined 480 euros in February 2011 for her derogatory remarks about religious principles. This decision was upheld by the Austrian appellate court and later, in 2013, dismissed by the Supreme Court as well. This ruling was issued by a seven-judge panel. The woman then appealed to the ECHR, citing Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, claiming that Austrian courts had failed to protect her right to free expression, but her appeal was rejected.

What is Article 10? Article 10 grants the right to free expression but also sets restrictions, stating that with the right to freedom comes a responsibility to avoid infringing upon the rights and sentiments of others. This freedom must operate within the framework of democratic society, observing laws, customs, and conditions without offending others. Following this decision, some propagated the notion that European countries are moderate, free-spirited, and uphold equal rights for all, treating all religions and people without discrimination. However, a clear pattern of double standards can be observed in their policies.

For a long time, there has been a continual trend of disrespect toward Prophet Muhammad under the pretext of freedom of expression. Social media is filled with attempts to ridicule and mock the

Prophet as much as possible, which has deeply angered the entire Muslim world. Each instance of disrespectful caricatures or writings triggers a wave of protests, rallies, and expressions of outrage throughout the Muslim world. This protest is not limited to Muslims alone; a considerable number of non-Muslims, who understand the importance of respect and reality, stand with Muslims. This collective sentiment underlines that disrespecting sacred figures is something beyond human tolerance. Islam is a faith that not only respects all Prophets sent before but also acknowledges the honor and reverence due to the religious leaders of other religions, considering them worthy of the same respect as God's Prophets. The Quran has taught us:

آمَنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ - كُلٌّ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ، لَانْفَرَقُوا بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْ رُسُلِهِ
اسْمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا غُفْرَانَكَ رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ - وَقَالُوا

The Messenger has believed in what was revealed to him from his Lord, and [so have] the believers. All of them have believed in Allah and His angels and His books and His messengers, [saying], "We make no distinction between any of His messengers." And they say, "We hear, and we obey. [We seek] Your forgiveness, our Lord, and to You is the [final] destination."

In response to the disrespect shown towards the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), Muslims around the world cannot stoop to the same level as those who insult him. Every holy figure is respected and revered in Islam, so it's inconceivable that Muslims would respond by insulting other religions' prophets or sacred figures. Those who engage in such disrespect might be waiting for Muslims to retaliate in a similar manner, potentially using it as an excuse for further provocation. However, rather than descending to such depths, Muslims worldwide have instead chosen the path of peaceful protest, raising their voices against the injustice rather than resorting to violent responses. With the grace of Allah, these protests often yield positive outcomes, underscoring that blatant disrespect cannot be justified under the guise of free expression.

Another significant factor is the demographic change in France, where, according to the 2019 census, out of a total population of 66 million, six million are Muslims. Official reports show that the Muslim population is increasing annually by 4%, and according to reputable sources such as the Pew Research Centre, Muslims could make up the majority by 2050, possibly shifting the power dynamics in the country.

France also stands out as the European country with the highest number of practicing Muslims. Around 78% of Muslims in France actively practice their faith, with 84% observing Ramadan fasting. This growing visibility of Muslims and their faith has alarmed certain segments of society, especially as the rate of atheism and religious indifference rises in France, where over 60% of the population identifies as irreligious, and Christianity is on the decline. The increasing numbers of individuals converting to Islam across Europe, along with this decline in Christianity, is a cause of concern for religious authorities like the Vatican. A prominent international journal also reveals that around 60% of children in France are born out of wedlock, the highest percentage globally. This lack of social cohesion reflects why there is often a lack of respect for the most revered personalities, such as the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Though Muslim societies also face sectarianism, we do not encounter the kind of disrespect seen in Western societies. However, in the name of free expression, the widespread influence of social

media has led to damaging consequences. Unverified news is often disseminated without scrutiny, and the life of an innocent girl and her family can be irrevocably harmed. Even though she and her parents may publicly denounce any association with such incidents, the emotional distress and harm caused to her family and society cannot easily be repaired. This rush to circulate unverified information clearly defies the divine instruction found in the Quran, which advises:



يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا أَن تُصِيبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصِحُّوا عَلَيَّ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نَادِمِينَ (الحجرات:6)

O you who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful. (Al-Hujrat 49:6) Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also advised:

عَنْ حَفْصِ بْنِ عَاصِمٍ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ: كَفَى بِالْمَرْءِ كَذِبًا أَنْ يُحَدِّثَ بِكُلِّ مَا سَمِعَ

"It is enough for a person to be considered a liar that they narrate everything they hear."

Once again, our country faces issues concerning constitutional amendments that have plunged the nation into uncertainty and confusion. The government's haste, coupled with institutional incompetence, has further fuelled this chaos rather than resolving it. While the specific implications of these amendments are yet to be fully understood, Ibn Khaldun's observations from seven centuries ago seem to resonate with the current state:

"A conquered nation tends to mimic the conqueror. They adopt the victor's clothing, symbols of power, culture, and customs, and even start to identify their past with the history of the conqueror. Eventually, they even walk as the conqueror does, believing in the conqueror's authority and skill as if it were an absolute truth."

When societies succumb to this, they lose their moral compass and abandon their principles. As time passes, people become so disconnected from their heritage that they only live for base desires, reduced to mere survival instincts.

When states fail, and nations decline, they are overrun with charlatans, beggars, hypocrites, and false witnesses. Professionals lose value, governance becomes chaotic, and the difference between truth and lies blurs. The line between honest efforts and subversion vanishes, while real intellect and morality are compromised.

In the cacophony of preachers, the voices of intellectuals are often drowned out. Chaos reigns in the markets, and loyalty is traded as a commodity. Concepts of nationalism, patriotism, belief, and fundamental aspects of religion fade, while even close family members accuse each other of betrayal. Eventually, conditions deteriorate to the point where people have only one course of action left migration. Talk of fleeing these circumstances becomes commonplace, and the number of emigrants rises. The homeland becomes no more than an inn, with belongings reduced to travel bags. Pastures lie desolate, the homeland becomes a memory, and memories turn into tales.

Ibn Khaldun, may God have mercy on you! Were you prophesying our future? Seven centuries ago, you saw clearly what we still fail to comprehend today. If only these insights could reach our ruling

class and the people, who consider themselves all-knowing as they accelerate their fall into ruin. Muslim scholars had long ago grasped the bleak path awaiting the Muslim world, as they were visionaries, not shortsighted. If only we could regain our footing now, perhaps the Ummah could find a way to rebuild what has been lost. However, the sincere and conscientious leadership required for such a revival is sorely lacking.

Feel free to exercise your freedom of speech, but always remember to act with such responsibility that no one may one day complain about you before Allah.

Friday 8 November 2024

The Burden of Judicial Privileges on the National Treasury: Facts and Questions

judicial Privileges and Rule of Law in Pakistan: An Overview

The Federal Ministry of Law and Justice of Pakistan has issued a notification announcing an increase in house rent allowances for Supreme Court judges to PKR 350,000, while the judicial allowance has been raised by more than PKR 1 million. However, none of the judges responsible for dispensing justice has made a statement regarding these increases, despite Pakistan's dire economic situation. There ought to be at least one judge with the moral courage to decline these substantial increments. The amount allocated for house rent surpasses the monthly salary of 95% of Pakistan's population. Who pays PKR 350,000 per month for rent? This seems a peculiar joke in our country. The house rent allowance for judges has been raised from PKR 65,000 to PKR 350,000, and the judicial allowance has crossed PKR 1 million.

Meanwhile, the poor struggle for basic sustenance, middle-class salaries remain stagnant, unemployment is on the rise, and educated youth lack job opportunities. According to a Bloomberg report, from 2015 to the first five months of 2024, more than 6.2 million educated young people have left the country. The Bureau of Immigration reports that 823,000 young Pakistanis left in 2023 alone, and 895,000 have already departed in 2024. Yet, almost every year, judges' salaries and perks see increases in millions, with a judge's monthly salary now exceeding PKR 2 million under the new package of allowances.

In Parliament, by swiftly approving the 26th amendment, a bill to increase the number of Supreme Court judges to 34 was passed. Previously, the Senate Standing Committee approved an increase from 17 to 25 judges. Now, following the rapid implementation of these amendments, generous privileges have been announced to reward the appointees of choice. Presently, the Supreme Court has 19 judges, 17 permanent and 2 ad hoc. The government has ostensibly justified these measures by citing the thousands of pending cases in the apex court. As per the Supreme Court records, there are over 60,000 pending cases.

The public, however, views this government move as a calculated effort to pressure the judiciary and appoint favoured individuals to the Supreme Court, creating concern about whom they can turn to for justice and the protection of their rights. It would have been better if, while announcing these benefits, the government had also clarified the complete array of privileges Supreme Court judges receive beyond their monthly salaries.

Currently, the Chief Justice of Pakistan's salary stands at approximately PKR 1.25 million, while other Supreme Court judges earn around PKR 1.1 million monthly, according to the Ministry of Law and Justice's notification from July last year. Under the Supreme Court Judges Leave, Pension, and Privileges Order of 1997, in addition to their monthly salaries, Supreme Court judges receive a government-provided residence or, if unavailable, a monthly rent allowance. The government also covers utility bills for electricity, gas, and water at judges' residences.

Judges receive an official vehicle with 400 litres of fuel per month and are exempted from income tax. They are further entitled to daily expenses allowances and judicial allowances. Upon retirement,

judges not only receive a pension but also have the privilege of retaining a government-funded driver or assistant, a benefit that continues for the widow after a judge's death.

It is astounding to learn that judges receive interest-free loans while they already enjoy government housing and numerous perks. According to an official of the Lahore High Court Bar Council, the caretaker government in Punjab approved interest-free loans exceeding PKR 360 million for 11 judges of the Lahore High Court for house construction, a decision confirmed by the caretaker Minister of Information. In a time of economic crisis, who should be held accountable for draining the public treasury with such measures?

When I raised this question in my column, asking the caretaker government about this, they evasively responded, stating that interest-free loans had been provided to judges in the past as well, ostensibly to keep them away from corruption. Is it reasonable to accept this logic? Why would a person be appointed as a judge if there were even a hint of corruption associated with them? Does this mean that if these benefits are not provided, judges might potentially become involved in corruption? And is there any instance in the past where a corrupt judge was ever given a deterrent punishment? In fact, judges of the Supreme Court themselves have unanimously acknowledged that the execution of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was a judicial error. There are also several instances where the Supreme Court acquitted individuals after they had already been hanged years prior, leaving their families to suffer alone and in hardship.

Instead of acknowledging its own mistake, the caretaker government offered the rationale that at the Standing Committee on Finance meeting, agenda items 17, 18, and 19 approved "interest-free loans" for 11 judges to build homes, each averaging around 35 million rupees. These loans amount to the equivalent of 36 months of their basic salary, which will supposedly be deducted from their salaries over 12 years. However, what remains hidden is what privileges the government itself secures from these judges in return for such benefits. It was also not disclosed what guarantees exist to ensure that a judge will even survive the next 12 years.

The government, trying to deflect, informed the public that the loan applications had come from the Lahore High Court Registrar's office and were approved by Punjab's Standing Committee on Finance, as per usual procedures. Yet, why are employees in other government departments deprived of similar benefits, especially when they are regular taxpayers while judges are exempted from all taxes? The government further admitted that these 11 judges were the ones left out; all other judges of the Lahore High Court had previously received interest-free loans from various governments to build houses. These 11 judges argued for equal treatment.

To cover up its mistake or corruption, the government argued that offering interest-free loans to judges is a major means of keeping them away from corruption so they can build homes during their service. But one might wonder why this simple fact does not resonate with these "blind thinkers," that judges already receive handsome salaries and benefits, and providing them interest-free loans is a covert way to secure further favours from them.

However, a petition has been filed in the Lahore High Court, describing these loans as "discriminatory" and "inequitable" and requesting they be declared null and void. The Pakistan Bar

Council has also expressed grave concerns over these interest-free loans to Lahore High Court judges, demanding an immediate withdrawal of the alleged notification. Yet, the public has seen this drama multiple times before. When the people vote to elect members of Parliament with the hope of eradicating corruption, both the government and the opposition, seemingly hostile in front of the public, unite over bills increasing their own salaries and are often seen embracing each other.

In a statement, the Bar Council deemed this act "unethical" and "unlawful," adding that, in the current extreme economic conditions, such actions severely harm the public treasury. Granting public funds to approve loans for judges is neither legitimate nor acceptable, especially when inflation is already overwhelming the public. Even the poor are charged interest rates of 20-25% on loans, while a judge—who receives an attractive salary package and enjoys additional benefits—is provided an interest-free loan, which is against judicial ethics and represents discrimination and inequity.



The entire nation hopes that the judges of the Lahore High Court and Supreme Court will not only reject these unjustified benefits but also order an immediate end to all undue privileges for the elite class, including judges. These benefits are being given at a time when inflation is crushing the public, and electricity prices continue to rise, while, on the other hand, our elite class is being further financially strengthened.

The judiciary's responsibility is to deliver justice, but such governmental actions resemble "bribing" the judiciary or "pressuring" it. Undoubtedly, the backlog of pending cases has paralysed the judicial system, with priority given only to cases involving political circles or elite individuals, leaving cases for the poor and middle class unheard for a decade or more. It is a tragedy that while the world moves forward, we seem to be falling further behind.

Under the World Justice Project in America, data regarding the judiciary and judicial systems in various countries has been gathered for several years. This year's report, covering data from 128 countries, places significant emphasis on the rule of law as an important index. According to this research, the judicial performance in several South Asian countries is notably better than in Pakistan. According to the Rule of Law Index, Nepal ranks 61st, Sri Lanka 66th, and India 69th for judicial performance.

Currently, Pakistan ranks 120th out of 128 countries for the provision of justice. The announcement of interest-free loans and benefits for judges has not only surprised legal bodies but also sparked reactions on social media. While industries and businesses are collapsing due to high interest rates, the Punjab government is granting interest-free loans to judges, and the federal government is offering them extensive privileges, hoping to gain their goodwill—an ethically questionable move. The primary rule to correct such issues is to avoid making new mistakes. The real question is: could a sanitation worker or security guard ever hope to secure a 371-million-rupee, interest-free loan? Could a clerk, who spends his life receiving orders from these judges, benefit from such privileges?

This privilege of interest-free loans for judges, along with vast retirement benefits like 90 acres of land for powerful institutions and generous benefits for the Chairman and former Chairman of the Senate, raises concerns. Was Pakistan originally intended to serve only a specific privileged class, leaving the rest to serve them like servants? This is a disturbing thought, but no surprise. In March 2013, just two days before leaving office, Speaker of the National Assembly Dr. Fahmida Mirza presided over her last meeting of the Finance Committee. Quietly, she secured lifelong benefits for herself, which continue to cost Pakistani taxpayers millions even today. If she never becomes an MNA or Speaker again, she will still receive these lifelong privileges.

To deflect criticism, Mirza also extended these benefits to seven former Speakers of the National Assembly, ensuring that prominent figures like Farooq Ali Khan, Fakhar Imam, Hamid Nasir Chattha, and Chaudhry Amir Hussain received these benefits unrequested. Yousuf Raza Gilani, a former Speaker and now Senate Speaker, too, continues to enjoy such benefits. Additionally, Mirza granted a third service extension to her favoured staff members who had retired years before. Although the Supreme Court had ruled against post-retirement extensions, Mirza reappointed ten retired employees, including the Secretary of the National Assembly and Senate Secretary Iftikhar Babar.

The National Assembly's Finance Committee, consisting of both opposition and government members, quietly approved these benefits without question or any public knowledge. In a joint report published by the United Nations Development Programme and Pakistan's National Human Development in 2021, it was highlighted how privileges granted to Pakistan's elite—landowners, political leaders, and the military—place an extra burden of over \$17 billion on the national economy.

According to a report from the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), judges of the High Court are granted government housing, which includes rent covered by the state, as well as utility bills and a government vehicle. If they live in their own homes, an additional allowance of about 65,000 rupees is allocated monthly. Rent allowances are at least 350,000 rupees, while the judicial allowance exceeds one million rupees. After the recent announcement increasing the benefits for Supreme Court judges in Pakistan, will the financial struggles of judges truly be alleviated? Perhaps it's worth re-examining these privileges to ensure that the absence of such benefits does not open doors to corruption.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوْمِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَوِ الْوَالِدِينَ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ ۚ إِنْ يَكُنْ غَنِيًّا أَوْ فَقِيرًا فَاللَّهُ أَوْلَىٰ بِهِمَا ۚ فَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا الْهَوَىٰ أَنْ تَعْدِلُوا ۚ وَإِنْ تَلَوَّا أَوْ تَعْرَضُوا فَقَانَ اللَّهُ كَانَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا ﴿النساء: 135﴾

O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives. Whether one is rich or poor, Allah is more worthy of both. So, follow not [personal] inclination, lest you not be just. And if you distort [your testimony] or refuse [to give it], then indeed Allah is ever, with what you do, Acquainted.

Sunday 10 November 2024

Iqbal's Unwavering Conviction and the Blight of Nationalism

Demand for love from Kalam-i-Iqbal and Payam-i-Iqbal

After the Partition of the subcontinent, the historical realities of this division are undeniable. Attempts to distort historical events by falsifying them or casting aspersions on Iqbal, aiming to mislead younger generations, are as futile as spitting at the moon—it only falls back on the one who tries. Seven decades later, why is Pandit Nehru's baseless allegation resurfaced—that Iqbal abandoned the concept of Pakistan under the influence of socialism in his final years? Can such accusations alter ground realities to envision a unified India where events like Kashmir and Gujarat continuously torment Muslims? Why, then, accuse Iqbal, who envisioned a sovereign state like Pakistan? And why do we hear this discordant tune echoing simultaneously in both India and Pakistan? Let's examine history through the lens of truth.

In his book, *The Discovery of India*, penned in 1944 while he was imprisoned at Ahmednagar Fort, Pandit Nehru praised Iqbal's contributions as a poet and thinker. However, while acknowledging Iqbal's intellectual prowess, Nehru remarked that Iqbal was "a poet, scholar, and philosopher with links to the old feudal system." He further observed:

"Iqbal was among the earliest supporters of Pakistan, but it seems he realized the absurdity and risks inherent in the proposal."

Edward Thompson also noted that in a conversation, Iqbal expressed regret about supporting Pakistan at a Muslim League session, feeling the concept ultimately harmful for both India and Muslims. Perhaps he had revised his stance or hadn't initially given the issue much thought, as it was not yet significant. His general philosophy did not align with the later idea of Pakistan or the partition. Toward the end of his life, Iqbal inclined towards socialism. The success of the Soviet Union greatly influenced him, altering the course of his poetry.

However, Nehru's claim is entirely unfounded. His allegation stems not from ignorance but malice. Even a cursory examination of Iqbal's poetry, philosophy, and political thought demonstrates that Iqbal was one of the most vocal opponents of the feudal system. Nehru conveniently overlooks a major historical fact: three years before his book, letters written by Iqbal to Quaid-e-Azam, complete with a preface by Jinnah, had already been published. This English-language book likely crossed Nehru's path and includes a long letter dated May 28, 1937. In it, Iqbal openly critiques Nehru's "atheistic socialism," asserting that not only Muslims but even Hindu society would reject it. Iqbal advised Jinnah that if Islamic law were reinterpreted to address modern economic issues, it would better solve the livelihood challenges of the Muslim community. For alleviating Muslim poverty, a separate legislative assembly, ideally within an independent Muslim state, was essential.

The contents of this letter proclaim:

- 1- Iqbal favours Islam's economic system over Nehru's "atheistic socialism."
- 2- Establishing a separate Muslim state is essential for implementing Islam's economic ideals within a contemporary framework.
- 3- Just months before his death, Iqbal advised Jinnah to make Pakistan's creation the political agenda of the All-India Muslim League.

4- Iqbal urged Jinnah that the time had come to declare Pakistan as their destination. Nehru deliberately omitted his meeting with Iqbal, three months before Iqbal's death, when he visited Javed Manzil with Mian Iftikhar Uddin. However, Dr. Ashiq Hussain Batalvi recorded this memorable encounter in his book, *The Last Two Years of Iqbal*. Dr. Batalvi writes: "At that time, Nehru was vigorously promoting socialism, having presided over two Indian National Congress sessions. In both, he proclaimed socialism as the remedy for all of India's woes. Yet, few Congress leaders shared his views; indeed, prominent figures like Sardar Patel, Rajagopalachari, and Satyamurti openly opposed Nehru's belief. During their meeting, Iqbal asked Nehru, 'How many Congressmen share your view on socialism?' Nehru replied, 'About half a dozen.' Iqbal then remarked, 'Surprising. In your party, only half a dozen support you. Yet you ask me to advise Muslims to join Congress? Do you expect me to sacrifice ten crore Muslims for the sake of six people?' Nehru fell silent.

Another incident occurred during this meeting, which Nehru also chose not to disclose, though Batalvi recorded it...

"The conversation with these two eminent personalities was ongoing when, suddenly, Mian Iftikhar Uddin interrupted and said, 'Dr. Sahib! Why don't you become the leader of the Muslims? Muslims respect you more than Mr. Jinnah. If you were to negotiate with Congress on behalf of the Muslims, the outcome might be better.' Dr. Sahib, who had been lying down, immediately sat up in anger and said in English, 'Oh, so this is the tactic! You want to flatter me into opposing Mr. Jinnah? Let me make it clear to you: Mr. Jinnah is the true leader of the Muslims, and I am but a humble soldier of his.' After this, Dr. Sahib fell completely silent, and a tense stillness took over the room. Pandit Nehru quickly sensed that Mian Iftikhar Uddin's unwelcome intrusion had upset Dr. Sahib, and that it was pointless to continue the conversation further. Thus, they sought permission and departed.

What is surprising is that Nehru conveniently forgot these unforgettable memories yet gave Edward Thompson's gossip the status of undeniable historical truth. Edward Thompson, a professor of Bengali at Oxford University with an interest in Indian history, had twice visited British India as a correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian*. He had close ties with Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Rajagopalachari, Sardar Patel, and Jawaharlal Nehru, often actively opposing the Muslim League while leaving no opportunity to support Congress.

The basis of Nehru's accusations against Iqbal stemmed from an alleged conversation between Edward Thompson and Allama Iqbal. This statement by Thompson contradicts the documented evidence of Iqbal's letters to Quaid-e-Azam as well as the above-mentioned account of the Iqbal-Nehru meeting. Iqbal remained passionately devoted to the idea of Pakistan until his last breath, tirelessly advocating for its realisation, and advised Muslims that instead of praying for his long life, they should pray for Muhammad Ali Jinnah's long life, as Jinnah alone possessed the ability to steer the nation to its desired shore. It remains unclear why Nehru overlooked these points or deemed them unsuitable for his book, perhaps considering them politically inconvenient or contrary to his ideological beliefs.

نگاہ بلند، سخن دلنواز، جاں پُر سوز
یہی ہے رختِ سفر میرِ کارواں کیلئے

High-minded, kind-hearted, soul-stirring
This is the route for the caravan

Iqbal often said, 'My Prophet (PBUH) taught us that the best among you is the one with the best character.' This is why, despite ideological differences, mutual respect between Allama Iqbal and Pandit Nehru persisted. In 1933, during the Round Table Conference in London, Nehru criticised the behaviour and mindset of Muslim delegates, supporting Gandhi's perspective. This critique took Iqbal by surprise, as Nehru had not attended the conference, whereas Iqbal had. Gandhi represented Congress at the conference and, upon his return, claimed to have personally accepted all of the Muslims' demands but accused them of sabotaging the conference due to 'political backwardness.' Believing Gandhi, Nehru issued a highly critical statement against the Muslim delegates. To counter Gandhi's allegations, Allama Iqbal wrote to Nehru, in which his dignified response is worth noting:



'I have always valued Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's sincerity and straightforwardness. His latest statement in response to the Mahasabha critics reflects this sincerity—a rare quality among today's Indians. However, it appears that Pandit Ji's understanding of the delegates' conduct in the past three Round Table Conferences is somewhat biased.'

After expressing this goodwill, Iqbal candidly revealed the true facts, explaining that while Gandhi had indicated a personal willingness to accept the Muslims' demands, he had also clarified that he could not guarantee Congress's approval, nor could he ensure that Congress would ever grant him full authority in this regard. Essentially, Gandhi had dismissed all the Muslim demands. Additionally, Gandhi imposed an unfair condition that Muslims renounce their support for the specific demands of the Dalits, which they refused, thus angering Gandhi.

In his letter, Iqbal raised a pointed question:

'Given Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's publicly professed socialist ideals, how could he possibly support such a dehumanising condition? At the very least, it does not suit him to accuse Muslims of political regression. In such circumstances, those who understand the communal objectives of the Hindus are justified in concluding that Pandit Ji is an active participant in the communal campaign launched by the Hindu Mahasabha.'

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's second accusation against the Muslims was that they were opposed to Indian nationalism. In response, Allama Iqbal stated, "If by nationalism, they mean the merging of various religious communities into one in a vital sense, then I am indeed guilty of rejecting this idea of nationalism. I want to ask Pandit Nehru a simple question: How can the issue of India be resolved if the majority nation refuses to accept even the minimal safeguards required by a minority of one hundred million people, which they consider essential for their survival, and does not accept the decision of an impartial mediator, while continuously insisting on a singular nationalism that only serves its own interests? Two outcomes arise from this: either the majority Hindu nation will have to accept that it will remain an agent of British colonial rule in the East forever, or the country will have to be divided in a manner that considers the religious, historical, and cultural circumstances, such that elections and the communal issue in their current form will no longer arise."

This statement by Allama Iqbal in response to Pandit Nehru was certainly seen by Pandit Ji, and it

clearly highlights Iqbal's progressive, broad-minded, and humanistic approach from beginning to end. This statement does not deny the concept of Pakistan, but rather affirms it. In light of this, Pandit Ji's claim that Iqbal abandoned his vision of Pakistan after 1930 seems neither based on honesty nor historical truth, but rather as an attempt to cover up historical reality with the veil of bias. Let's consider some more authentic historical references:

When Pandit Nehru, in *Modern Review* (Calcutta), welcomed the promotion of nationalism and secularism regarding the situation of the Muslim world, in response, Iqbal also addressed Pandit Ji's intellectual misguidance in *Modern Review* (Calcutta), seeking to redirect his thoughts into the right intellectual path. At the beginning of his long article, Iqbal candidly said:

"I do not wish to keep from Pandit Ji and the readers the fact that Pandit Ji's articles have caused a painful upheaval in my mind. The manner in which he has expressed his thoughts indicates a mindset that, for me, is difficult to attribute to Pandit Ji. He does not like the religious and political stability of the Muslims of India. Indian nationalists, whose political thinking has crushed any sense of reality, are unwilling to accept that the Muslims of north-western India have developed a sense of autonomy."

Dear readers, please pay attention to Iqbal's analysis that "Pandit Ji's political thinking has crushed the sense of reality" — time soon proved this truth. When Pandit Ji finally became aware of the solid realities of South Asian life, he visited Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and began advising him to accept the hard truth — the truth of the creation of Pakistan. Maulana Azad mentioned this in his book *India Wins Freedom* in the following way:

"After a few days Jawaharlal came to see me again. He began with a long Preamble in which he emphasized that we should not indulge into wishful thinking, but face reality. Ultimately he came to the point and asked me to give up opposition to partition."

Through their votes in the 1946 elections, the Muslims of India made the political dreamers of Pandit Nehru and Gandhi realize the realities of life. The demand is that instead of running away from the facts of life, we should look them in the eyes and try our claws on them. In his article under review, Allama Iqbal had expressed his opinion on the question of separate Muslim nationality in an ambivalent manner. Iqbal shed light on the political creed of the Muslims of India in these words:

Islam is confronted when it becomes a political concept and claims to be the fundamental principle of human unity and demands that Islam recede into the background of personal belief and become a vital element in national life. The question of a separate Muslim nationality arises only in countries where Muslims are in the minority and where nationality requires them to erase their identity. In the countries where Muslims are the majority, Islam becomes compatible with nationalism because here Islam and nationalism are practically one and the same thing. I can say with full confidence that the Muslims of India will not become victims of any political ideology that will destroy their cultural unity. We will create harmony in patriotism".

Allama Iqbal's belief turned out to be absolutely correct, the Islamic of India eventually proved wrong the political concept of united Indian nationality and established Pakistan through the democratic process. Their cultural unity was secured and thus there was no contradiction between love for Islam and love for the country in Pakistan. Now our religion is Islam and our country is Dar es Salaam and

on the other hand you can judge the authenticity of Pandit ji from the fact that in front of the whole world he admitted in writing that he will give the right of self-determination to Kashmiris but himself. He deviated from his writing and this breach of promise has destroyed the illusion of his whole personality. How appropriate is this poem of Allama.

اپنے بھی خفا مجھ سے بیگانے بھی ناخوش
میں زہرِ ہلاہل کو کبھی کہہ نہ سکا قند

He is also unwilling to alienate himself from me
I could never call the poison of the crescent moon sugar
May the name of my Lord be true!

Tuesday 12 November 2024

Nuclear Pakistan: The Main Challenge to American and Israeli Interests in the Region

Global Conspiracies Against Muslims: Pakistan's Resilience and Significance

Since the attack by Hamas on Israel on October 7 last year, all eyes have been on the Middle East, with everyone wondering how severe and prolonged Israel's response would be, and how the people and governments of Arab countries would react. To date, there has been no definitive answer to the first question: Israeli bombardments have wreaked havoc in the Gaza Strip, and so far, 42,500 Palestinians have lost their lives, with no signs of this violence abating.

A part of the answer to the second question is somewhat clear. Anyone expecting large-scale protests or demonstrations in the capitals of the Arab world will be disappointed. While a significant portion of the Arab populace supports the Palestinians and sympathies with their plight, demonstrations have been largely contained within these countries. It is also a reality that the response of Arab governments has been very weak and disappointing. Beyond traditional criticisms of Israel or offers of mediation from the governments of Qatar and Egypt, no one has supported the Palestinians.

No Arab country has severed its ties with Israel or taken any action that would increase diplomatic or economic pressure on Israel, nor would help in halting this war. Yet, why has the issue of Palestine lost its significance in the region? The answer to this question is complex, considering the circumstances in the Middle East.

Saudi Arabia was also close to establishing relations with Israel prior to the outbreak of war in Gaza on October 7. For decades, and since the beginning of this recent conflict, every Arab country has pursued its own interests. They speak of supporting the Palestinians and showing solidarity, and it is not that these sentiments are insincere, but they prioritise their national interests, even as public opinion in the Arab world is strongly against Israel.

There is deep sympathy in the hearts of the Arab populace for the devastated citizens of Gaza, and they wish their governments would do more for the Palestinians. They want their countries to sever diplomatic relations with Israel, and at the very least, expel diplomats from their countries as a form of protest; however, this has not happened to date.

In fact, Arab governments had abandoned the Palestinians long ago. Throughout Arab history, the people have associated their identity with a common language and, to a large extent, a common religion. However, concerns stemming from European colonial influence in the region have persisted, and the interests of these governments have often been at odds with each other. The relationship between the Palestinians and Arab nations has also been fraught with difficulty, particularly with those countries that welcomed a large number of refugees after the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948. The Lebanese civil war and clashes between Palestinian militants and the Jordanian monarchy often remind one of the region's tumultuous history.

However, the Palestinian issue has also been a unifying factor for Arab countries over the decades, but, alas, no one has taken advantage of this and has forgotten this divine blessing in their quest to strengthen their own power. Today, despite having all the resources, the Muslim Ummah is facing unprecedented humiliation and disgrace.

Amid these circumstances, concerns have grown about whether Netanyahu seems poised to alter the Middle East's landscape soon in pursuit of his "Greater Israel" vision, and the world appears to be watching as a bystander. According to UN Secretary-General António Guterres, Israel's unilateral annexation of the West Bank would represent "a grave breach of international law." Although

Muslim nations and European countries have denounced and opposed Israel's plan to forcibly annex the Palestinian West Bank, their protests have had little effect. Netanyahu enjoys the unwavering support of former U.S. President Donald Trump and the powerful Jewish lobby, allowing him to push forward with this highly controversial action.

It is worth noting that 38 major corporations globally, controlling industries like oil, pharmaceuticals, arms, electronics, and other essential sectors, are predominantly owned by Jewish interests. These corporations have cleverly invested in several Chinese industries. However, over the past decade, China has strategically regained control of its economy, bringing these corporations into direct competition. Now more than ever, they are mobilizing to curb China's growing economic influence and likely collaborating with American supremacy to further their agenda. I explored this in depth in my article, "Is the Stage Set for World War III?" published on September 20, which received notable attention from readers.

Observers of Middle Eastern affairs agree that Netanyahu's aggressive plans will profoundly destabilize peace and stability in the region. If he could forcibly displace Palestinians from the West Bank after annexation, he likely would, but this remains unfeasible. Palestinians in the West Bank number around 2.5 million, and if annexed by Israel, they would make up approximately 40% of the Israeli population. Global opinion has urged Netanyahu to offer all Palestinians full Israeli citizenship with equal rights, yet he has voiced concerns about maintaining a Jewish demographic majority. Thus, Netanyahu opposes granting Palestinians equal citizenship rights, though any move to treat Palestinians as second-class citizens within their territory would provoke widespread anger and resentment.

Historically, South Africa's white minority similarly governed and exploited the Black population until international pressure led to the end of that oppressive system. For Israel, establishing such a discriminatory system in today's era might not be impossible, but it certainly would be difficult and could have serious consequences in the long run.

A strong immediate backlash may not occur; Arab leaders and other countries are likely to voice superficial condemnation out of solidarity with the Palestinians, but the world seems to have largely abandoned Palestinians to their fate. Most nations recognize that they can only oppose the U.S. and Israel on this issue up to a point; they are not willing to fight on behalf of the Palestinians. The Palestinian leadership itself has grown so disillusioned that, while they express firm opposition, they have said they would not endorse violent protests against Israel.

Since the 1990s, the international community, including the U.S., has pursued a two-state solution in the region as part of the Oslo Accords. Yet Netanyahu's actions are widely seen as a direct blow to Palestinians' longstanding dream of an independent state. Jared Kushner, former President Trump's Jewish-American son-in-law, has heavily influenced and coloured Netanyahu's ambitions, even playing a significant role in recent Arab Israeli agreements, in a way comparable to Lawrence of Arabia's divisive actions against the Ottoman Caliphate. In Netanyahu and his supporters' view, the West Bank is an inseparable part of Israel, both for religious reasons and for national security. Yet, in the eyes of the world, Israel has occupied these areas since the 1967 war.

Over recent decades, Israel has pursued a policy of creating "new facts on the ground" in these occupied areas, consistently building new homes and settlements to bring Jewish families from outside into the West Bank. These constructions are regarded as illegal by the international community, yet approximately half a million Israeli Jews now live in these state-of-the-art settlements in the West Bank. Netanyahu believes he is prepared to realize the dream of "Greater Israel" by force. However, the world views his actions as a path to devastation and conflict in the region, posing severe risks even to Israel's own security and existence.

The Ideology of Two Nations as the True Cause of Partition

The concept of the Two-Nation Theory became the central motive for the Partition of India, which established that Muslims and Hindus are two distinct nations, each with unique religions, cultures, histories, lifestyles, and civilizations. Based on this philosophy, Pakistan emerged, dividing India into two separate countries. The founder of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, conveyed in a message to the United States in February 1948, "I do not know what the ultimate form of Pakistan's Constitution will be, but I am sure that it will be based on the fundamental principles of Islam and be democratic in nature. The principles of Islam are as applicable in our lives today as they were 1300 years ago. Islam taught us unity, justice, and integrity." This was the ideology that brought Pakistan into existence.

This idea was not new; rather, it was the very message that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) conveyed to humanity about 1450 years ago. In this light, Pakistan is not just any country; it represents a vision prophesied 1450 years ago. The noble personality of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was acknowledged even by Jews and Christians as truthful and trustworthy, though the Jews refused to recognize him as a true prophet of God simply because he was a descendant of Ishmael. The Jews believed themselves to be the chosen people of God, claiming that all prophets came from among the Israelites. They could not accept a prophet not of the Israelites, and so began their enmity toward Muslims, which continues to this day.

Just nine months after the creation of Pakistan, the forced state of Israel was established on the land of Palestine in 1948. Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, said in his initial address that "If the State of Israel is threatened by anyone, it is by Pakistan because Pakistan came into existence in the name of Islam." Remarkably, Pakistan was established on 14 August 1947, while Israel was proclaimed on 14 May 1948. From its birth, Israel perceived Pakistan as its greatest threat. Ben-Gurion asserted, "The day Pakistan ceases to exist, Islam will cease to exist."

Pakistan was born from an ideology, and dismantling such an ideology is not as simple as a child's game, so the enemy devised a cunning plan. Misinterpreting religion, they exploited linguistic, racial, cultural, and sectarian divisions to destabilize Pakistan. Today, some individuals are working within this ideological state, following foreign agendas to divide it. Although the history of Muslims is filled with courage and bravery, it is a bitter truth that this nation, like others, has had its share of traitors, both in local communities and in political circles.

Currently, Pakistan faces serious challenges. The Indian border



has always posed a source of tension, while adversaries have also used the Afghan border to stir up trouble. The army is tasked with protecting these extensive borders and managing extremist organizations and terrorists. In times of natural disasters or even severe weather, the civilian administration often turns to the army for assistance. The Pakistan military is continuously engaged on multiple fronts. With CPEC, the United States, Israel, and India have formed alliances to isolate Pakistan. Meanwhile, the inept civilian government remains entangled in corruption cases. It seems that even foreign and domestic affairs might soon fall under the army's purview due to this political instability.

Looking back in history, it becomes evident that the United States has consistently let Pakistan down. The betrayal of 1971 with the unfulfilled promise of American naval assistance remains unforgettable. It is now common knowledge that many American affairs are controlled by Israel, and the U.S. supports Israel under the guise of aid without justification. On 14 September 2016, the United States signed a ten-year military aid agreement worth \$38 billion with Israel, which considers Pakistan its biggest threat. Israel essentially shapes American policy, and this influence extends to international bodies like the United Nations, World Bank, and WHO. Given this situation, it is unrealistic to expect U.S. policies to favour Pakistan.

Pakistan remains the only nuclear power in the Islamic world, which Israel finds unacceptable. In 1981, Israel conspired unsuccessfully with India to attack Pakistan's nuclear facility in Kahuta. This and other historical facts highlight that the United States can never truly be an ally to Pakistan or the Muslim world. The roles of the U.S. and Israel in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Palestine are well-known, as are the violent outcomes of their actions. The bloodshed in these regions is part of the Greater Israel plan, and Pakistan is a significant obstacle to this plan. Thus, these nations are relentlessly striving to undermine Pakistan's existence.

The recent violence in Burma and the brutal ethnic cleansing of Muslims there is also linked to this plan. If you closely examine the situation, you will realize that the United States, notorious for committing grave human rights abuses in countries like Iraq and Afghanistan, seized upon the massacre of Muslims in Burma to drum up human rights concerns and call for peacekeeping forces—yet this, too, was part of a sinister agenda. In reality, the U.S. was searching for a secure foothold in the region, particularly one that could help it monitor Pakistan, China, and North Korea, following its disastrous defeat in Afghanistan. However, China swiftly uncovered this scheme and countered it by initiating various trade agreements with Burma through its "One Belt, One Road" initiative, effectively blocking the U.S. from establishing a presence there.

In short, Aung San Suu Kyi is a figure cultivated by the United States, supported by India to facilitate American influence in Myanmar. Behind this entire strategy is the brain of Israel, which relentlessly pursues the vision of a "Greater Israel." To advance this agenda, Israel seeks to provoke Iran, fuelling the flames of conflict to plunge the region into turmoil. This would create the conditions necessary for Israel, with the backing of the U.S. and the West, to proceed with its larger plan. However, the most formidable obstacle to this grand design is Pakistan, the only nuclear power established in the blessed month of Ramadan on the basis of the declaration of faith, *kalima tayyibah*. May the Almighty protect our Pakistan. Amen.

Friday 15 November 2024

Power Players in Trump's Administration: A Look at Key Nominees

The Future of US-Global Relations Under Trump's New Administration

Donald Trump will take the oath of office as the 47th President of the United States on 20th January. However, even before his inauguration, Trump has already announced key appointments for his second term. These appointments are being closely observed worldwide, as analysts try to discern the stance and history of each individual on critical issues. So far, his choices range from Elon Musk, the owner of X, to Trump's close allies and friends. Experts are attempting to gauge Trump's potential policies, especially regarding the Middle East, and whether he will continue to support Israel.

From the appointments so far, it appears Trump is rewarding his loyal supporters. For instance, Steve Witkoff, a long-time donor to Trump's campaigns and his golfing partner, has been appointed Special Envoy to the Middle East. On the other hand, Mike Huckabee, nominated as the U.S. ambassador to Israel, is well-known for his pro-Israel stance and business acumen. Although Witkoff has no direct connection to the Middle East, his nomination, along with Huckabee's, and the choice of the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, clearly indicates that Trump plans to offer unequivocal support to Israel.

Trump has also nominated retired Army Colonel Mike Waltz as National Security Advisor. Waltz has previously referred to China as the greatest economic and military threat to American influence, describing the situation as akin to a new Cold War. Similarly, Elise Stefanik, nominated as the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, has accused China of meddling in elections, citing allegations that Chinese-backed hackers attempted to extract information from former U.S. presidents' phones. While Trump has generally limited his criticism of China to trade issues, his foreign policy team is increasingly composed of outspoken critics of the country.

For the pivotal position of Secretary of State, Trump has nominated Senator Marco Rubio, who was once one of his political adversaries but is considered an expert in foreign policy. Announcing Rubio's nomination, Trump described him as a "strong voice for liberty" and a "powerful advocate" for the U.S. Rubio, who comes from a family of Cuban immigrants, would become the first Latino Secretary of State if confirmed. Rubio has also been a vocal critic of China, which is one of Pakistan's closest allies.

In September this year, Rubio wrote in *The Washington Post* that China is "America's greatest and most advanced adversary. Communist China is neither a friend of democratic nations now nor will it ever be." In 2020, the Chinese government-imposed sanctions on Rubio after he led efforts to impose U.S. sanctions in response to Beijing's crackdown on protests in Hong Kong. He is also known for his tough stances on Iran and China.

In July, Rubio made headlines when he introduced a bill in the U.S. Senate supporting India and opposing Pakistan. Titled the *U.S.-India Defense Cooperation Act*, the bill aimed to deepen defence partnerships between the two nations to counter "China's growing aggression" in the Indo-Pacific region. It proposed providing India with security assistance and strengthening cooperation in defence, civil space, technology, and economic investments. The bill suggested extending to India

the same approach regarding "technology transfers" as applied to U.S. allies like Japan, Israel, South Korea, and NATO countries.

Regarding Pakistan, the bill recommended that Congress receive a report on Pakistan's alleged use of terrorism and proxy groups against India. It further stated that if Pakistan were found sponsoring terrorism against India, it should be denied security assistance. Rubio has also taken a hardline stance against Iran, referring to it as a "terrorist" state, and he supports strong action against Israel's neighbour.

Following recent Iranian attacks on Israel, Rubio supported Israel's retaliatory actions against Hamas, stating on social media: "Israel should respond to Iran the same way the U.S. would if a country launched 180 missiles at us. I want them [Israel] to destroy every element of Hamas. These [Hamas members] are animals who have committed horrific crimes."

Marco Rubio: A Key Appointment in Trump's Team

Marco Rubio, a senior member of the Senate Foreign Relations and Intelligence Committees, has evolved from being one of Trump's harshest political rivals and critics to now being considered one of his close allies. Serving as the Vice Chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee and a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, Rubio is widely regarded as a shrewd foreign policy expert. In the past, he has stated that the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine needs to be "brought to a conclusion." Accepting his nomination for the position of Secretary of State, Rubio described it as a "weighty responsibility" and stated, "As Secretary of State, I will work daily to advance President Trump's foreign policy agenda. Under his leadership, we will establish peace through strength and always prioritise Americans and the interests of the United States above all else."

In this analysis, we will examine the key appointments made by Trump to understand the backgrounds and political ideologies of the individuals joining his team. Analysts, taking these decisions into account, are attempting to predict the Republican president's policies for South Asia, the Middle East, and specifically Pakistan. Many of the appointees have previously made headlines for their views on South Asia—particularly Pakistan and India—as well as the Middle East. However, it remains challenging to definitively ascertain their policy directions prior to the inauguration.

Mike Waltz

Mike Waltz, a Congressman from Florida, has extensive military experience, having served in Afghanistan, the Middle East, and Africa. Last year, in an interview with the Indian news channel WION, he remarked on Pakistan: "Terrorism cannot be part of foreign policy. Be it Lashkar-e-Taiba or other terrorist groups, this is unacceptable. The Pakistani government, military, and intelligence must move beyond this, and we will continue to press them to take the right direction." In an interview with *Florida Politics* earlier this year, he praised Trump, stating: "We had a president who defeated ISIS, broke Iran, always stood with Israel and other allies, and made China pay for its actions. You never saw spy balloons over America during President Trump's time."

Tulsi Gabbard

Tulsi Gabbard, a former Congresswoman and Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. military, has been nominated by the newly elected president to serve as Director of National Intelligence. Gabbard

has also previously criticised Pakistan. In 2017, she accused Pakistan of providing refuge to Osama bin Laden and criticised the release of Jamaat-ud-Dawa chief Hafiz Saeed, calling him the "mastermind" behind the Mumbai attacks, which resulted in the deaths of hundreds, including six Americans. In March 2019, commenting on U.S.-Pakistan relations, she posted on social media: "As long as Pakistan provides safe havens for terrorists, tensions between the two countries will remain. It's time for Pakistani leaders to take a stand against extremists and terrorists."

John Ratcliffe

John Ratcliffe, who served as Director of National Intelligence during Trump's first term, has been re-nominated to lead the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). He was initially nominated in 2019 shortly after gaining attention for high-profile questioning of Special Counsel Robert Mueller during congressional hearings. Mueller, the former FBI Director, had led investigations into allegations of collusion between Russia and Trump's 2016 election campaign. Ratcliffe's nomination was withdrawn after bipartisan concerns regarding his qualifications. However, Trump re-nominated him in 2020, stating, "The press treated him very unfairly."

Ratcliffe is known for his hardline stance on China and Iran. In December 2020, he wrote in *The Wall Street Journal*: "The intelligence is clear: Beijing seeks dominance over the U.S. and the world in the economic, military, and technological spheres. China's major corporations work under the guise of business but serve the Communist government's interests."



Broader Implications

Political analysts closely observing U.S. politics and policymakers believe it is difficult to predict Trump's exact policies before his inauguration. However, many agree that Pakistan is unlikely to be a priority for the new president. Reviewing the statements of Trump's appointees suggests that his administration will operate in line with its ideological beliefs. That said, ideology alone rarely dictates policymaking. Instead, policymaking involves navigating complex challenges and crafting strategies to address them effectively.

There is no doubt that these individuals hold strong stances on a variety of issues, yet they often demonstrate a pragmatic approach, when necessary, without fear of appearing weak. Ultimately, they will operate under the directives of the president, who is not an ideologue but a dealmaker and an opponent of prolonged wars.

As far as Pakistan is concerned, existing policies are likely to remain unchanged unless significant crises emerge, or relations deteriorate. Pakistan is expected to remain a low priority for the Trump administration unless it actively positions itself as a valuable ally. However, its strategic relationship with China will continue to be a challenge in any scenario.

Challenges for the New Administration

The incoming American administration faces a host of pressing challenges. Pakistan, especially its internal politics and relationship with India, will rank low on their agenda. The Trump administration's primary focus will likely remain on the Middle East, particularly Iran. Analysts predict that Trump's Middle East policy will revolve around exerting "maximum pressure" on Iran while attempting to revive the Abraham Accords and fostering Saudi Arabia's recognition of Israel. Achieving this, however, may be difficult given the volatile situation in Palestine. Notably, in a recent speech at the Islamic Conference in Riyadh, the Saudi Crown Prince emphasised Israel's need to cease hostilities immediately while reiterating Saudi cooperation in the event of an attack on Iran.

Pakistan's Diminished Importance

Pakistan's importance in the eyes of the US has diminished after the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. Pakistan is not yet on Washington's radar. Amid the strategic relationship between Pakistan and China and the partnership between India and the US, Pakistan will have to find some space and improve relations with the US. If anti-China figures in the Trump team view Pakistan through the lens of China or India, the scope for meaningful bilateral relations between the US and Pakistan will further shrink. Other analysts also estimate that the new administration's policy may not bring any pleasant changes for Pakistan.

US policymakers believe that the policy of ignoring Pakistan and not giving Islamabad access to the chambers of power in Washington is suitable to put Pakistan in a difficult position, but Pakistan has a better chance than Iran and China to improve relations with the Trump administration by making some efforts.

Key Appointments and Middle East Focus

Mike Huckabee has been nominated as the US ambassador to Israel. Though not Jewish, Huckabee has long been an outspoken supporter of Israel. In 2008, he famously stated, "There is no such thing as Palestine." His nomination was celebrated by Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, who shared the news on social media with flags and heart emojis. Huckabee first visited Israel in 1973 and has since led numerous Christian missions there. During a 2018 visit, he laid the cornerstone for a new housing complex in the West Bank and expressed interest in purchasing a home there.

In a more recent nomination, Donald Trump named Steve Witkoff, a real estate mogul and campaign donor, as his special envoy for the Middle East. Trump praised Witkoff as a tireless advocate for peace and a close friend, noting their decades-long friendship that began in 1986 after a business transaction. Witkoff famously testified in Trump's defence during the Manhattan fraud case and has been a long-time golf partner of the former president.

Pete Hegseth, a former US Army officer and Fox News host, has been nominated as Secretary of Defense. Hegseth has also served as the leader of two veterans' advocacy groups and ran unsuccessfully for a Senate seat in Minnesota. Announcing his nomination, Trump wrote, "Pete is tough, smart, and truly believes in putting America first. Under his leadership, our military will once again become the best, and America will never fall. Pete fights for our troops like no one else, and he is a brave, patriotic champion of our 'peace through strength' policy."

Conclusion

Experts believe that while the Trump administration will operate within a framework of ideological preferences, actual policymaking will remain pragmatic, driven by the need to address complex challenges. For Pakistan, navigating its relationship with the US under the new administration will require careful diplomacy, particularly given its close ties with China and the shifting dynamics in the Middle East.

Mike Waltz, a 50-year-old member of Congress from Florida, has previously served in the US military and has visited Afghanistan, the Middle East, and Africa several times. He has been nominated as the new National Security Advisor in Donald Trump's second presidential term. He has long been a supporter of Trump. In a message on X, he wrote that he felt "deeply honoured" to serve in Trump's cabinet. "There is nothing more important than defending the values of our nation, freedom, and the safety of every American."

As the Chairman of the Armed Services Subcommittee, Mike Waltz holds a tough stance on China and stresses that the US needs to take more action regarding conflicts in the Pacific. He has also stated that the US should continue its support for Ukraine, although he has recently advocated for a review of the American expenditures in the ongoing war.

Trump's major backers and financiers, Elon Musk and former Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy, have also been assigned leadership roles in new government departments. Notably, Elon Musk, one of Trump's most significant supporters and one of the wealthiest people in the world, donated \$119 million to Trump's election campaign. Trump stated in a statement, "These two outstanding Americans will work together to eliminate the bureaucratic system, reduce unnecessary regulations, cut wasteful spending, and reorganise federal agencies, which is essential for the 'Save America' movement."

Responding to this responsibility in the Trump administration, Elon Musk, the CEO of Tesla, wrote, "This will shake up the system." On the other hand, Vivek Ramaswamy also stated that he would "not allow any leniency." Similarly, Trump confirmed that he would appoint South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem to head the Department of Homeland Security. Noem's name had been floated as a potential Vice-Presidential candidate during the summer. She has long been an ally of Trump and ran a vigorous campaign for the elected president. She was also in the media spotlight earlier this year when she revealed that she had shot her dog because it was "untrained" and "dangerous."

These nominations suggest that Trump is rewarding his supporters and, moreover, taking a very hard stance towards China and Iran while openly supporting Israel, which casts doubt on his election promise to end wars.

Sunday 17 November 2024

Trump and the Middle East: War, Peace, or Solution?

Trump's Politics and the Middle East

Kamala Harris, in an emotional announcement at her stronghold, Harvard University, conceded her defeat and congratulated Donald Trump on his victory in the presence of tearful supporters. Trump has thus become the second president in U.S. history to be elected twice in non-consecutive terms, the first being Grover Cleveland, who held office from 1885 to 1889 and then again from 1893 to 1897. However, questions remain about what Trump's second term will look like: what will his foreign policy entail, and which unfinished projects might he aim to complete?

Alongside, a key question also arises: what are the prevailing concerns regarding Trump, and why? Answers to these questions may lie in clues from Trump's first term, which could suggest how he might lead the U.S. this time. Analysts believe that President Trump will resume from where he left off in 2020. Expressing gratitude to his supporters in Florida, Trump reiterated his commitment, calling it a political victory that made him the "47th President." He renewed his campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again," saying that this win will allow them to "make America great once again."

Trump has also indicated plans to impose tariffs between 10% to 20% on most foreign goods, and up to 60% on imports from China. Many economists warn that such measures could significantly impact American consumers, who may face increased prices for goods. During his first term, Trump initiated a trade war with China, accusing it of unfair trade practices and intellectual property theft, though China's swift responses hindered his efforts. In this term, the number of Republican and Democratic lawmakers in Congress will likely determine how successfully Trump can implement his policies as intended.

It's noteworthy that from 2017-2019, Republicans controlled both the Senate and the House of Representatives, yet despite this majority, Trump faced challenges in passing his policies due to inexperience. Since Republicans have now gained control of both chambers of Congress, the Trump administration might introduce legislation for issues including border security, completion of the border wall, and tax relief. Additionally, Trump will likely seek Congressional support to pursue large-scale deportations of undocumented individuals.

According to estimates by the Pew Research Center, there were approximately 11 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S. in 2022, though Trump claimed this number was even higher. Experts warn that mass deportations would be both costly and difficult to execute and could have negative economic impacts on sectors where undocumented immigrants play crucial roles.

It is likely that Trump's second term in foreign policy will resemble his first. He has expressed a desire to keep the U.S. away from international conflicts and claims he could end the Ukraine war "within hours" through negotiations with Russia. While he has positioned himself as a staunch ally of Israel, he has offered limited commentary on how he would address the ongoing conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon.

Martin Griffiths, a former Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator at the United Nations and an experienced conflict mediator, noted that Trump's "America First" policy might deepen global instability and embolden Putin by leading to a full U.S. retreat from the region.

Currently, however, the war in the Middle East overshadows even the conflict in Ukraine, posing a severe threat to global peace. On October 7 last year, Hamas launched a desperate attack against what it described as Israel's "perpetual oppression," killing over 1,200 Israelis and taking hundreds of hostages to Gaza. In Israel's retaliatory strikes, nearly 50,000 Palestinians have been killed and over 100,000 injured, with Gaza reduced to rubble. The flames of this conflict have now spread to Lebanon, Syria, and Iran, with no end in sight to Israel's relentless aggression.

In May 2024, the Biden administration informed Congress of its plan to send over 84 billion rupees worth of weapons to Israel, a decision that was soon implemented. This package included tanks and ammunition worth \$7 billion. According to a report from the Watson Institute, the U.S. has provided approximately \$18 billion in military aid to Israel since the onset of the Gaza conflict. As America continues its support for Israel amid the ongoing Gaza war, discontent has grown among Muslim voters in the United States, a sentiment that Trump has skillfully leveraged to his political advantage. During the campaign, both presidential candidates openly expressed strong support for Israel, with Trump even advising Israel to target Iran's nuclear sites and destroy them.

Despite these statements, Trump also claimed on multiple occasions during his campaign that a significant number of Arab and Muslim Americans would vote for him. He argued that the Muslim community understood that Kamala Harris and her "war-hungry cabinet" would attack the Middle East, kill millions of Muslims, and trigger a third world war. On November 4, the day before voting, Trump posted on the social media platform "X" that "we are building the largest alliance in American political history. Michigan's Arab and Muslim voters are with us because they want peace." In closing, he appealed to all Arab and Muslim communities to support him in the upcoming presidential election so he could, as president, halt the wars and bring peace to the world.

Michigan is a pivotal state where Arab and Muslim votes can be decisive. Despite a close race in this major state with 15 electoral votes, Trump emerged victorious, demonstrating his success in winning over local voters with his promises and statements. Ahead of the election, Trump even visited a halal café in Dearborn, an area known as "America's Arab capital" due to its strong Arab community presence. Similarly, during a rally in Michigan, a group of Muslim leaders endorsed Trump, expressing hope that his victory would bring peace to the Middle East.

A crucial question arises: Were the Muslim communities in America disappointed with the Democratic Party because of the Israeli attacks on Gaza and Lebanon, allowing Trump to capitalize on this discontent and return to the White House with a historic victory, ready to influence decisions in the U.S. and beyond over the next four years? It is clear that the Muslim world's primary focus right now is "Palestine," and their hopes, political concerns, and fears are all centered around this issue. Muslims and Arabs have not suddenly started liking Donald Trump; rather, they feel they have no other option, as their choices boiled down to Kamala Harris on one side and Donald Trump on the other. Disliking Kamala Harris and supporting Trump are two distinct issues. Protests across the U.S.

after the Gaza war have shown frustration with the Biden administration's silence and its support and aid for Israel. However, expectations of Trump in this regard should remain realistic, as he has previously shown strong support for Israel. During his first term, Trump controversially relocated the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, a move that was met with international controversy yet popular in Israel. During Trump's tenure, his Jewish son-in-law, Jared Kushner, played a role similar to a modern-day "Lawrence of Arabia," fostering relationships with key Saudi officials and facilitating transformative shifts in the region, leading several Arab nations to recognize Israel and establish diplomatic ties, along with increased trade agreements. Saudi Arabia even granted Israel access to its airspace as a transit route. It was also expected that Saudi Arabia was on the brink of establishing formal diplomatic relations with Israel, which could have encouraged over a dozen other countries to follow suit, until the sudden eruption of the Gaza war put these developments on hold.



One must ask whether America's Muslim and Arab voters truly believed in Trump's promises or if they felt they had no alternative, which led to their support. In response to Trump's victory, Netanyahu called it "the greatest success," while the Israeli president hailed him as the "champion of peace," and the Israeli opposition leader described him as a "true friend of Israel." They expressed confidence that, as president, Trump would continue, if not increase, military and diplomatic support for Israel. However, opinions on Trump's future policy regarding Israel remain divided. In his victory speech, Trump emphasized that he intends to "end ongoing wars and start no new ones."

Israeli media reported that Trump had informed Netanyahu he wanted to end the conflict in the Middle East. However, one thing we know about Donald Trump is that predicting his decisions or actions is exceedingly difficult. It's worth noting that in 2020, under American mediation, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain signed a historic agreement with Israel, known as the "Abraham Accords," under which these Muslim countries recognised Israel's existence. Talks were underway with other Muslim countries along similar lines, but this progress was interrupted by the end of Trump's presidency.

Many diplomatic and political analysts believe that in Trump's second term, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu might have greater freedom to take action against Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran. This raises the possibility of an Israeli attack on Iranian nuclear facilities. However, Trump could also potentially support a major deal in the Middle East involving both Saudi Arabia and Israel. Yet, Iran remains a significant player in the region, and US-Iran relations were tense during Trump's previous term.

During Trump's tenure, the United States withdrew from the nuclear deal with Iran, a deal brokered in 2015 under Barack Obama. The deal had lifted severe sanctions on Iran in exchange for halting its nuclear programme. But under Trump, the agreement was scrapped, and extensive sanctions were reimposed on Iran. It's also true that Trump played a significant role in fostering new relationships between the Arab world and Israel. Under this agreement, Israel postponed its plan to annex large

parts of the West Bank, and for the first time in nearly 50 years, diplomatic relations were established between Israel and the UAE—a significant achievement in itself.

Trump is both a politician and a businessman who tends to view matters in black-and-white terms. He doesn't interfere in the internal politics, culture, sovereignty, or monarchies of Muslim countries. On the other hand, Democrats speak of imposing sanctions on Saudi Arabia, promoting human rights, and pushing for power-sharing—rhetoric Trump avoids, which appeals to Muslim leaders in the region. When Trump became president in 2016, he surprised many by choosing Saudi Arabia for his first official overseas visit. Most American presidents opt to visit either Canada or Mexico.

The reality, however, is that the Muslim world in the region is now largely weary of carrying the “Palestine” banner, as they realize that mere protest yields little. This issue also has an economic dimension, as the current era is one of economic prosperity. The Muslim world understands that its support for Palestine and opposition to Israel make it difficult to improve relations with Europe. The world is focused on climate change, investment, and the knowledge economy, while they are entangled in the Palestinian issue. The modern history of the Middle East has become a history of failed peace efforts.

Attempts at peace between Israel and the Palestinians began with the Oslo Accords in 1993. Decades of negotiations followed, but the region failed to achieve peace; Israel's occupation of territories continued, and the establishment of two separate states did not materialise. However, after the October 2023 Israel-Gaza war, the Middle East has been irrevocably changed, and the pressing question now is whether Trump can fulfil the expectations many people, including his voters, have for him.

Arab voters in the United States believe Trump's return could improve the odds of peace, though Israel and Hamas will play crucial roles in ending the war. If you recall, Trump had already declared his intentions to withdraw American troops from the Middle East and end the war in Afghanistan, demonstrating his stance against prolonged conflict. Reflecting on Trump's previous term, it's fair to say that he won't simply mediate; rather, he will attempt to impose a solution. He recognizes America's immense power and is a forceful politician who doesn't believe in delay tactics. Trump's policies and foreign affairs are deeply rooted in his strong faith in American supremacy. If he chooses this path, it may harm Palestinians more than Israel, as solutions are generally imposed on the weaker party.

Tuesday 19 November 2024

Financial Bankruptcy: Has the Day of America Passed?

Is the US Economy on the Brink of Collapse

After 9/11, a deliberate conspiracy was set into motion, with Pentagon's Colonel Ralph Peters releasing a map that depicted Pakistan broken into multiple parts along with a specific timeline. Each year, he attempted to mask this malice with various justifications. When there was silence in Pakistan's media, I responded consistently with detailed, well-reasoned articles, and on August 28, 2017, I wrote a piece titled, *Will America Break Apart?* At that time, I faced significant backlash, and many labelled it as wishful thinking, even mockery from some pro-American voices. But today, the demand has begun to surface within several wealthy U.S. states, insisting that their tax contributions not be used to fuel wars, even if it means separating from the United States—suggesting that, like the Soviet Union, America, too, is headed towards fragmentation.

A few months ago, who would have imagined that an arrogant leader, after dropping the “Mother of All Bombs” on Nangarhar to intimidate the world, claiming that America could turn it to ashes in five minutes, would see the mighty U.S. brought to its knees by a tiny, invisible virus, COVID-19? The world shook, and the sole superpower was left in disarray. The economy ground to a halt; production ceased; commercial activities dwindled to the extent that American oil became cheaper than water. Educational institutions shut down, and consumer confidence suffered such a blow that it has yet to recover fully. Had the pandemic lasted any longer, the alarm would have rung, indicating an impending financial collapse, not only for America but for the entire world, pushing everything toward utter chaos.

COVID-19 exposed numerous flaws and weaknesses within the global economic infrastructure. The pandemic's impact has amplified the economic challenges. Even before COVID-19 spread, there was widespread concern in the U.S. that the current account deficit could reach a staggering \$1 trillion. However, with the deficit approaching \$2 trillion, other debts have also placed an unprecedented strain on the economy, leading President Biden to inform the nation that if the Senate does not approve further borrowing, a financial collapse is inevitable. Meanwhile, in Israel, economic conditions have deteriorated to the point where, according to global financial institutions, it is effectively bankrupt, and Netanyahu is using war as a guise to maintain his hold on power.

Economic activities, dampened by COVID-19, have severely impacted the banking system, with many branches either closed or merged. Countless buildings now stand empty, symbolic of the present-day capitalist crisis. As a result, thousands face unemployment, adding to the government's tax and duty losses. During the 2008 recession, the federal tax loss to the U.S. treasury exceeded \$400 billion—a burden that continues to this day. Now, the federal tax revenue shortfall is anticipated to be even greater, necessitating extraordinary spending on social welfare. Given the current system, no separate fund allocation is needed, as funding automatically rises to meet demand. Economic experts are speculating on the scale of the current account deficit, with some warning it could exceed \$4 to \$5 trillion, posing a grave threat to the American economy.

In 2019, U.S. GDP was projected to reach \$21 trillion, without any hint of the looming pandemic. But with the economy severely impacted, predictions missed the mark. By 2020, GDP had dropped to

\$18 trillion, a 15% decline, making the current account deficit more than 28% of the GDP.

Many experts believe that the economic burden of the Ukraine war was already too much when Israel's recent brutality in the Middle East emerged as the proverbial final straw, with this looming disaster hovering over like a haunting specter. International financial institutions, also concerned with their survival, continue to impose fresh restrictions, squeezing developing nations ever harder. Consequently, people in these countries may increasingly turn against their governments, potentially triggering a recession so severe that it could culminate in a global economic famine, unleashing a new wave of widespread devastation.

It is important to note that many experts believe these figures are not definitive. A key point to remember is that the United States' current account deficit will likely be so large this time that securing funding to mitigate its severe negative impact will be nearly impossible. One major issue is that interest rates are not expected to rise; in fact, there's a visible trend toward a decrease in interest rates. This raises the question: without the prospect of higher returns, how can investors be drawn in? Convincing the largest investors in the U.S. to increase their stakes now seems like an almost impossible task. Major investors in the U.S. include China and the Gulf states, particularly the UAE. China is facing a decline in external demand, meaning its exports are decreasing, while Gulf states are also seeing a drop in oil revenue. In such circumstances, American policymakers will need to think critically about where the investment needed to sustain the U.S. economy will come from. Both China and Saudi Arabia play crucial roles in global capital recycling, and if their flow of capital is interrupted, the global position of the U.S. dollar could weaken significantly.

This raises the question: what can the U.S. do to prevent its economy from collapsing? Currently, the only option for the U.S., similar to the 2008 recession strategy, is to buy its own treasury bonds rather than waiting for other investors to step in. The Federal Reserve will play a key role in this approach.

It's not just the current account or budget deficit looming over the U.S.; the corporate sector debt crisis is also persistently severe. Corporate debt is now over \$10 trillion, exceeding 50% of the U.S. economy's total turnover. To make matters worse, most of this debt is issued by non-investment grade companies, meaning much of it is essentially junk.

As a result, the wheels of the American economy have come to a standstill, and this has impacted the nation's overall integrity. The economy is likely to deteriorate further, and many institutions may go bankrupt. This will serve as a harsh blow to the U.S. banking system. Syndicated loans can be considered a "bonus" in this scenario, as a significant portion of corporate bonds is directly or indirectly tied to the energy sector, which itself is facing substantial challenges. Experts estimate that about 20% of global production capacity is "excess capacity."

China, too, has its own challenges. Chinese leadership has recently opted to conceal rather than resolve some fundamental economic issues, overlooking the fact that problems can only be solved by addressing them directly, not by hiding them or diminishing their impact.

The European Union has made attempts to stabilise its situation. Through the (ECB) European

Central Bank, some measures have been implemented, although Germany and a few other members oppose such moves. No one is willing to risk their currency. A few years ago, the ECB announced the purchase of €850 million in government and corporate bonds, an endeavour that is still incomplete, revealing the internal challenges the EU faces.



It appears that policymakers in Washington are determined to prevent a recession at all costs, which could be a serious misstep. Trying to stop any economic decline through artificial means often results in more complications or intensifies existing issues. No matter how large a bailout packages the government offers, preventing economic downturns completely is rarely feasible. Eventually, the real effects of a bailout package reveal themselves, and issues resurface more prominently.

The economic activities in the U.S. and Europe that were halted due to lockdowns have yet to fully resume. Industrial units that shut down and commercial institutions that closed their doors are still struggling to recover due to financial hurdles. Movement and mobility are still limited or minimal. The aim is to prevent a decline in GDP, but that seems unrealistic; when economic activity stalls, a GDP reduction is inevitable. Rather than attempting to halt this decline, efforts should focus on ensuring that the downturn is only temporary.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there were attempts to introduce a massive bailout package to inject funds to minimise the effects of the crisis. The idea was that, once the pandemic ended and economic activities resumed, a complete recovery would require extraordinary measures. However, according to global financial institutions, actual events have outpaced all projections.

Now the question is whether America is financially and agriculturally bankrupt? If the crisis created by the ongoing war spending in the Middle East along with the war in Ukraine after the corona virus leaves the US financially and agriculturally bankrupt, how will the reality of a full-blown economic crisis be prevented? Looking at what American policy makers are doing at the moment, it can be said without fear that America is suffering from a serious financial and agricultural failure. U.S. policymakers say the wisdom is to give aid to those in extraordinary need, and to ask those who are marginally better off to bear the short-term effects of the crisis in some way. This clearly means that the economy should be put on hold for a minimum period of time. Only the needy should be helped.

Many in Washington believe that the stock market crash is the real problem. That view turns out to be wrong. Trump gives extraordinary importance to the stock market when evaluating the performance of the economy. As a result, if an improvement is attempted on a temporary basis or if an attempt is made to provide artificial respiration to the stock market, there is a possibility that economic confidence will fall further instead of being restored. According to experts, the economy will actually To be restored, the restoration of trust should be given utmost importance.

In terms of the ability to deal with the severe negative effects of any major crisis, the public trust in

the Trump administration remained at a very low level, which was inherited by the Biden government after his departure, but despite millions of efforts, it has not fully recovered from this crisis. They could not get out and now in the presidential election, the candidates blamed each other and called them responsible for the destruction of America. The lack of trust is not limited to expertise, i.e., economic policymakers and professional investors at home and abroad. Currently, more than 50 percent of Americans believe that Trump is not suitable for the position because of Trump's handling of the Corona virus. Declaring the failed policies of Let alone the rest of us, Trump has failed to instill trust in his favourite Fox News TV channel. Despite the heavy criticism during his tenure, Trump has not taken matters seriously, misrepresented the facts and made policy blunders.

Instead of surrendering to Trump's thinking that the stock market is everything, American policy makers should have evaluated all the flaws and strengths of the economy and formulated a balanced and acceptable policy. Policy makers should not have ignored the fact that this is not a reality TV show. As a result, the last straw on the economic camel of the United States is now coming to light that China, Russia, and other two countries have made a plan to replace the dollar in the future of buying and selling oil and in all their imports and exports, as if the world Due to the use of dollars in trade, the daily commission of two and a half million dollars has been reduced to half, now it will also have to be lost. It is as if it is necessary to ask that the five major states of the United States themselves have strongly protested against the spending of their people's taxes in more war frenzy and have indicated that they will go to the last limit, even if it is from the American Union. If we don't have to opt for separation, is America going to break up in these circumstances?

Thursday 21 November 2024

Tension Between Russia and the US

Trump and Russia's War Strategy

The recently elected President of the United States, Donald Trump, has not even stepped into the White House yet, and challenges to fulfilling his campaign promise of "ending wars worldwide" have already begun to emerge. Outgoing President Joe Biden has granted Ukraine permission to fire long-range American-made missiles into Russian territory. This decision, which involves allowing Ukraine to use ATACMS missiles against targets within Russia, was met with a stern warning from Russia, which described it as an action warranting a "proportionate and resolute" response.

Russian President Vladimir Putin reacted swiftly by approving changes to the nation's nuclear weapons policy, outlining new rules and conditions for their use. These amendments, initially proposed in September, were formally adopted on the 1,000th day of the war with Ukraine. According to Russia's foreign ministry, such attacks on Russian soil would be interpreted as direct involvement of the U.S. and its allied states in the war against Russia. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated that the updated nuclear doctrine was published "in a timely manner" and had been requested by Putin earlier in the year to align with the prevailing geopolitical situation.

A Kremlin-issued statement emphasized that if U.S.-supplied missiles are launched at Russia, Moscow would consider it an American attack rather than a Ukrainian one. It added that the Biden administration's decision marked a "new level of Washington's involvement in this conflict," underscoring that the outgoing administration was "pouring fuel on the fire" and deliberately escalating existing tensions.

Responding to Kremlin accusations of exacerbating the Ukraine-Russia war, U.S. Deputy National Security Advisor Jon Finer stated that Washington was monitoring Russia's tactics, including the involvement of North Korean forces, and made it clear that the U.S. would respond accordingly. He reiterated President Biden's commitment to supporting Ukraine militarily during his remaining term, with the aim of strengthening Ukraine's position in any potential peace negotiations.

Finer further remarked that the conflict originated from Russia's aggression against Ukraine and that the involvement of North Korean forces and intensified airstrikes across the country had exacerbated the crisis. He questioned Russia's claims by asking, "Who is fueling the fire here?" and expressed doubt that the Ukrainian people were to blame.

For months, Ukraine has sought U.S. approval to use these missiles for strikes within Russian territory. The Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS) is a ground-to-ground ballistic missile with a range of up to 300 kilometers, making it particularly valuable for Ukraine. It can be launched via the M270 Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS) or the highly mobile M142 HIMARS platform, offering both stationary and mobile deployment options.

Fuelled by solid rocket propellant, these missiles are difficult to intercept due to their high speed. Navigation is pre-programmed before launch, using inertial and satellite guidance systems to ensure precision within 10 meters of the target. They can be equipped with two types of warheads: one

capable of dispersing submunitions to neutralize enemy air defenses, and another with a 225-kilogram unitary warhead designed for destroying large installations or infrastructure. First deployed during the 1991 Gulf War, the U.S. is currently working to extend their range to 500 kilometers.

While it remains unclear whether Ukraine will receive these missiles, they would enable targeted strikes against Russian military bases, infrastructure, and supply depots. Initial use might focus on areas like Kursk, where Ukrainian forces are currently positioned across a 1,000-square-kilometer region.

Anticipating such attacks, Russia has strengthened its defense, including relocating fighter aircraft and other military assets within its borders. However, logistical challenges may slow its ability to send additional reinforcements. A Western diplomat described the missile provision as symbolic, noting it might increase Russia's wartime costs but was unlikely to be decisive in altering the conflict's trajectory.

Ground Realities Suggest Imminent Russian Action in Kursk

The ground realities indicate that Russia might launch a major offensive any day to expel Ukrainian forces from the Kursk region of Russia. Ukraine may use US-supplied ATACMS missiles to defend against such an attack, targeting critical Russian positions, including military bases, infrastructure, and ammunition depots. These weapons could provide Ukraine with an advantage at a time when Russian forces are consolidating their presence in the eastern parts of the country.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had been lobbying for months for the US to lift restrictions on the use of long-range missiles, enabling Ukraine to strike targets inside Russia. However, Russian President Vladimir Putin had repeatedly warned Western nations against such actions, stating in September this year that Russia would view it as direct NATO involvement in the conflict. Putin explicitly cautioned that it would mean NATO, the US, and European countries were "fighting against Russia."

The ATACMS missiles, produced by the US-based company Lockheed Martin, have a range of up to 300 kilometres, making them difficult to intercept due to their speed. The US has provided these weapons to Ukraine as part of its support packages, and Ukraine has previously used them in Crimea. However, Washington had never permitted Kyiv to use these missiles against targets inside Russia.

Ukraine has argued that withholding permission for such use is akin to "tying one hand behind its back in a fight and asking it to continue." President Zelensky has not yet confirmed the US decision, but on Sunday, he remarked that "words cannot launch attacks... missiles will make their presence known."

The US policy shift reportedly occurred after North Korean troops entered the Kursk region to support Russian forces. Ukraine has controlled parts of Kursk since August, and reports suggest Kyiv might use these long-range missiles to counter Russian advances in the area.

What Is Russia's Nuclear Doctrine, and What Has Changed?

The Kremlin first established its nuclear doctrine under President Vladimir Putin in 2020, and the latest version was approved only days ago. This updated doctrine outlines the conditions under which Russia may use its nuclear weapons. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, President Putin and other Kremlin officials have frequently issued warnings about Russia's nuclear capabilities to Eastern powers. However, Kyiv's allies have continued supplying Ukraine with billions of dollars' worth of advanced weaponry, some of which has reportedly been used on Russian soil.



The revised document describes Russia's nuclear arsenal as a "deterrent." It emphasises that their use would be a "last resort and forced measure." The doctrine stresses that Russia makes every effort to "reduce the risk of nuclear weapon use and prevent escalations in interstate relations that could lead to military conflicts, including nuclear ones."

The strategy is framed as a means to "preserve the state's sovereignty and territorial integrity" and deter potential aggressors from initiating hostilities. One of its objectives is to "halt escalating military conflicts under terms acceptable to Russia."

The doctrine also aims to ensure that any adversary contemplating aggression against Russia or its allies understands the severe consequences of such actions. While the document does not specify the exact circumstances under which nuclear weapons would be used, it leaves room for interpretation, ensuring adversaries remain uncertain about Russia's next move.

Notably, the updated doctrine highlights that President Putin reserves the right to use nuclear weapons even in conventional conflicts. The revisions had been in the works for months, and it is no coincidence that the announcement on Tuesday followed the US decision to allow Ukraine to use long-range missiles against Russia.

The recent changes to Russia's nuclear doctrine indicate that if a non-nuclear state attacks Russia with the backing of a nuclear power, it will be considered a joint attack on Russia. Under these amendments, a significant assault on Russia using conventional missiles, drones, or aircraft could now meet the criteria for a nuclear response. For instance, if an attack were to occur on Belarus or a severe threat emerged to Russia's sovereignty, a nuclear reaction could be triggered. Following these changes, aggression against Russia by a nation that is part of an alliance will now be viewed by Moscow as aggression from the entire bloc. Consequently, the number of countries, alliances, and military threats that fall under the scope of a potential nuclear response has increased.

President Putin has previously issued threats regarding the use of nuclear weapons, which Ukraine has criticized as "nuclear blackmail" and described as an attempt by Russia to deter Ukraine's allies from providing additional support. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated, "We firmly believe that nuclear war must be avoided at all costs." During a press conference at the G20 summit in Rio de Janeiro, Lavrov highlighted that Russia, along with other members of the group, had signed a declaration emphasizing the desire for a world free of nuclear weapons.

Regarding the amendments to the nuclear doctrine, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov urged other nations to study these changes closely, describing the document as a critical and significant text requiring careful analysis.

Key Western news agencies have confirmed Ukraine's use of the Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS) against Russia. Just one day after the U.S. allowed Ukraine to use long-range American-made missiles to strike within Russia, Ukraine launched these weapons for the first time on Russian soil. Early Tuesday morning, the Bryansk region, near the northern border with Ukraine, was targeted.

Russia's Ministry of Defense confirmed the attack, reporting that at 3:25 a.m. local time, Ukraine launched multiple missile strikes. Five missiles were intercepted, while one caused damage, with fragments igniting a fire at a Russian military installation in the area. The fire was promptly extinguished, and no casualties were reported. Earlier, Ukrainian forces had confirmed a separate attack near the town of Karachev, approximately 100 kilometers from the border, where 12 explosions were reported at an ammunition depot.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused Washington of escalating the conflict, stating, "Last night in Bryansk, American missiles were repeatedly used, which clearly signals their intent to increase tensions." Lavrov reiterated that without U.S. involvement, the use of such high-tech missiles would be impossible, implying American military experts are actively guiding their deployment. Speaking at the G20 summit in Rio, he asserted, "We will view this as a new face of the Western war against Russia and respond accordingly."

Ukraine has already been using these missiles for over a year in Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories. Capable of targeting objectives up to 300 kilometers away, these missiles are challenging to intercept. With their extended range, Kyiv can now strike deeper within Russia, including areas around Kursk, where Ukrainian forces control over 1,000 square kilometers. Both Ukrainian and U.S. officials anticipate retaliatory action from Russia in the region.

The pressing question is: how will outgoing U.S. President Joe Biden's actions in this volatile region impact President-elect Donald Trump, who has vowed to end wars? Will Trump fulfill his promise, or will he succumb to the influence of the military-industrial complex, choosing pragmatism over principle? If the latter, the world might dismiss his pledge as mere rhetoric and wait for the next election cycle.

Saturday 23 November 2024

Saudi Arabia's New Strategy in the Middle East

Change in Saudi Arabia-Iran Relations

Since the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Saudi Arabia and its Sunni Arab neighbours have considered Iran a major regional threat. This concern was especially heightened after the 2019 drone attacks on Saudi oil facilities, which highlighted to the Gulf Arab states their vulnerability in the face of a potential Iranian assault. The protracted war in Yemen, with Saudi involvement, further exacerbated these fears. In this context, both countries were investing significant resources in a bitter rivalry, resulting in severe losses of life and escalating hostilities.

China's intervention was instrumental in cooling tensions and preventing further damage. By encouraging dialogue between the adversaries, China not only poured water on the rising flames but also helped open avenues for negotiations, benefiting all regional players. This diplomatic move was a setback for the colonial powers that had long reaped benefits from the ongoing conflict.

Through Chinese mediation, Saudi Arabia and Iran agreed to resolve their differences, effectively ending a seven-year period of hostility that saw Saudi airstrikes against Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen. Recently, significant shifts have taken place in the region: Saudi Arabia's Chief of Army Staff visited Tehran and held discussions with his Iranian counterpart. Both nations are now exploring ways to increase cooperation on defense and security.

While the Arab and Islamic summit calls for an end to the conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon, there is a sense of both hope and uncertainty about potential changes in the Middle East, particularly regarding Donald Trump's possible second term as U.S. president. Amid the ongoing Israeli attacks on Gaza and Lebanon, the Saudi capital, Riyadh, is hosting a major conference of Muslim and Arab nations, even as high-level talks are occurring between Saudi and Iranian officials.

Recently, a high-ranking Saudi military delegation visited Iran, while Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian held discussions with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. According to Iranian media, the Saudi delegation exchanged views with Iranian military officials on bilateral military relations. Saudi Arabia's Chief of General Staff, Lieutenant General Fayyadh bin Hamid Al-Ruwaili, met with Major General Mohammad Bagheri of Iran's Armed Forces to discuss defense relations.

Iranian media has deemed this visit "extraordinary," as it marks the first direct military engagement between the two nations since their last telephone exchanges in December 2023. Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Defense shared details of the meeting on X (formerly Twitter), indicating that the discussions focused on military and defense cooperation. However, recent events underscore that the situation remains complex. For instance, a recent attack on a Saudi military camp in the Yemeni city of Sayun killed a Saudi officer and a soldier, signalling that foreign interests in the region could undermine peace efforts.

Iran supports Houthi rebels in Yemen, while the Saudi-backed coalition aligns with the Yemeni government. Following the camp attack, Saudi Arabia denounced the assault as "cowardly."

Meanwhile, dozens of Arab and Muslim leaders have gathered in Riyadh, speculating about the implications of a potential second term for Donald Trump and what it would mean for the Middle East. Although Trump's unpredictable style raises concerns in Europe, the Gulf Arab states regard him as a stabilizing leader. According to regional political analysts, security in the Middle East is paramount, and Trump's strengthening of ties with U.S. allies in the region and focus on countering extremist forces represent the best path forward.

However, Saudi Arabia favours Trump over Joe Biden, possibly because Trump, uniquely in U.S. history, chose Riyadh over Canada or Mexico as his first foreign destination upon taking office in 2017. It is believed that this decision was influenced by Rupert Murdoch. Trump also maintains strong ties with Saudi leaders, including Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, partly due to his son-in-law Jared Kushner's close relationship with them. MBS has never forgiven Biden for comments about holding Saudi Arabia accountable for human rights abuses, particularly in connection with the brutal murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Turkey. There remains a mix of opinions on Trump's legacy in the Middle East.

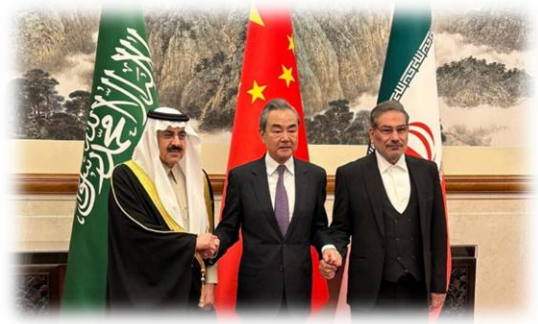
On one hand, Trump pleased Israel by recognizing Jerusalem as its capital and acknowledging Israeli sovereignty over the occupied Golan Heights. However, this move caused concern in the Arab world. Later, in 2020, Trump initiated the 'Abraham Accords,' under which the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Morocco established full diplomatic relations with Israel, while Sudan also agreed to normalize relations. Yet, Trump maintained an aggressive stance toward Iran to win over the hearts of the Arab nations in the region.

In 2018, Trump withdrew the U.S. from the nuclear deal with Iran, calling it the "worst deal in history." He echoed the views of many governments in the region. The deal aimed to limit Iran's nuclear ambitions but failed to address its ballistic missile program, while the Iranian Revolutionary Guard became enriched, using this wealth to fund proxies in the region. In response, Trump ordered the 2020 killing of Qasem Soleimani, head of the IRGC's Quds Force, which pleased Gulf Arab states but angered Iran.

Today's Middle East is quite different from the region Trump left four years ago when he exited the White House. Israel is now at war with Hamas and Hezbollah, while also acting against the Houthis in Yemen and their backers in Iran. The Biden administration is viewed as less effective in curbing its close ally Israel amid conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon. It is believed that a return of Trump to the White House would give Israel more of a "free hand" to target facilities in Iran, such as oil and nuclear sites, which have been restrained under Biden's administration.

Former Israeli intelligence officer Joshua Steinerch comments on Trump, saying that "he is Israel's crucial ally in the region, openly supporting Israel and taking a firm stance against Iran's destabilizing efforts. His return would likely mean more concrete measures to curb Iran's influence." Following the arrival of a high-level Saudi delegation in Iran, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian contacted Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman via telephone to discuss the Arab Islamic Conference. Leaders from Arab and Muslim countries have gathered in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia's capital, to attend the conference. Representing Iran at the conference is Vice President Mohammad Reza Mohammad Reza Aref.

On Monday, during this meeting in Riyadh, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman strongly condemned Israel's actions in Gaza, calling them "genocide," and issued a warning against attacks on Iran. This strong stance marks a shift and indicates improved relations between Tehran and Riyadh. It is the first time Saudi officials have made such a strong statement since the onset of last year's Gaza conflict. Addressing the summit of Arab and Islamic nations in Riyadh, the Crown Prince also condemned Israeli attacks on Lebanon and Iran. The conference's primary aim is to curb Israeli aggression in Palestinian and Lebanese areas, ensure civilian protection, and pressure the international community to support peace and stability in the region.



Once seen as rivals, Iran and Saudi Arabia have been moving closer since last year. China mediated an improvement in their relations, which had been strained since 2016, when Iranian protesters attacked Saudi diplomatic missions in Tehran and Mashhad. In early October, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi visited Riyadh and met with the Crown Prince, leading to a gradual improvement in ties. The two nations conducted joint military exercises last October. The Saudi Ministry of Defense stated that Saudi Arabia conducted naval drills in the Arabian Sea with several countries, including Iran.

Meanwhile, Iran's news agency ISNA reported that Iran's military was conducting joint exercises in the northern Indian Ocean with Russia and Oman, joined by six other countries, including Saudi Arabia.

Iranian military commander Admiral Shahram Irani mentioned that Saudi Arabia had requested joint exercises in the Red Sea, though no specific dates were provided. The visit of Saudi Arabia's high-level military delegation to Iran came at a time when Israel made a new claim. Israel announced the formation of a regional alliance led by the U.S. in the Red Sea, involving Israel, Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. According to Israel, this military cooperation in the Red Sea aims to protect maritime transport, oil, gas, and strategic assets from Iranian threats. The Israeli news website "Zman Yisrael" reported that this "regional defense alliance" is being formed to counter threats posed by Iran and its allies in Iraq and Yemen.

It is also a fact that over the past decade, with the rise of Mohammed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia, relations between Riyadh and Tehran have started to shift. Despite Saudi Arabia's historically close relationship with the United States, the Crown Prince has emerged as a significant regional figure who has approached the issue of Iran with considerable determination. Although Iranian and Saudi relations have drawn closer within the last two years, partly due to Chinese mediation, this rapprochement has not emerged from any alliance, as neither Tehran nor Riyadh has shifted its fundamental foreign policy stance.

Traditionally, Saudi Arabia has been one of the United States' most prominent allies in the Middle East, adhering closely to American interests and demands within its foreign policy. Meanwhile, the regional rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran has a lengthy history, one that extends well beyond

the inception of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Amid Israel's ongoing military advances in Lebanon and the continuous loss of Palestinian lives in Gaza, there appears to be no imminent prospect of a ceasefire in this conflict. At this moment, the U.S. presidential election has been won by an individual who is a staunch supporter of Israel and has pledged a firm agreement with Iran. Many experts speculate that Donald Trump's return to the White House could lead to further tension in the Middle East. Should these predictions materialize, numerous countries in the region—especially allies of the U.S. like Saudi Arabia—may face a challenging decision: to either support Iran or remain neutral amid rising military tensions.

However, in the current climate, where anger towards Israel has reached its peak across the Muslim world, nations such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates may pay a steep price for their “neutrality” toward both Iran and Israel. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, in his recent address, has made it clear that he has no desire to be seen as a mere puppet of the U.S. and Israel. This stance not only strengthens his position within the region but also could significantly enhance Saudi Arabia's role in shaping power-based relationships across the Middle East.

Rather than remaining silent or disregarding the escalating tension between Iran and Israel, Saudi Arabia has now openly sided against Israel and leaned in support of Iran. In carefully chosen words, Mohammed bin Salman addressed the “international community,” with the Western world effectively as his primary audience. This move is part of a broader campaign to redefine Saudi Arabia's image and position on the global stage, an initiative that began several years ago.

This speech indicates that bin Salman no longer seeks proximity to Israel or the U.S. to counterbalance Iran. Instead, he is now apprehensive about Israel's increasing strength, an expansion that continues and, if unchecked, may eventually grant Israel dominance over the region. In response, there are indeed concerted efforts underway to forge an effective alliance, with regional countries aligning to devise a comprehensive and robust strategy that could pre-emptively address such future threats. This united response is deemed essential to turn back the tide of instability facing the region.

On the contrary, this time they are worried about the increase in Israel's power: a similar process is also underway and if there is no major change in it, it could increase Israel's dominance in the region. To prevent this, efforts are certainly underway to form an effective alliance, for which all the countries of the region have certainly come together to bring forward a comprehensive and concrete response in the field to avoid possible future threats that cannot turn back this storm.

Monday 25 November 2024

The Impact of the Arab Spring and the Palestinian Issue

Palestine in the Arab World: Solidarity or Political Interests

For the past 13 months, relentless scenes of brutal Israeli aggression have been searing into our eyes, leaving them stony from witnessing humanity's darkest moments. Yet, the cries of the oppressed and the anguished pleas of innocent lives continue to fall on the deaf ears of neighbouring Arab states, their consciences unstirred. Parents and relatives, bearing the lifeless bodies of innocent children, call out to the rulers and people of these Arab nations, asking, "Where have you gone?"

Those who emerge alive from the rubble of Gaza's bombed-out buildings—clutching the bodies of their dead children—face cameras with cries of despair, speaking not only words of praise for God but words of mourning for the Arab world's indifference. The people of Gaza are left wondering why their Arab neighbours do not rise to defend them against Israel's unrelenting bombardment. Since Hamas's attack on Israel on October 7 of last year, the world's eyes have been fixed on the Middle East, with everyone questioning how severe and prolonged Israel's retaliation would be, and what response the governments and people of the Arab nations would give. But the first question still has no clear answer: Israeli bombings have unleashed devastation across Gaza, taking over 50,000 Palestinian lives with no signs of cessation. The conflict is now spreading beyond Gaza to Syria, Yemen, and even Lebanon.

The partial answer to the second question is evident. Those expecting large-scale protests in Arab capitals have been left disappointed. While many Arab populations feel deep sympathy and solidarity with the Palestinians, public demonstrations have been restricted in these countries. As for Arab governments, their responses have been tepid at best, and often disheartening. Apart from traditional criticisms of Israel and mediation offers from Qatar and Egypt, no country has stepped up to support the Palestinians in a meaningful way.

Tragically, despite Israel's merciless bloodshed, no Arab country has severed diplomatic ties with Israel or taken significant action to increase diplomatic or economic pressure that could help to end the violence. The question arises: why has the Palestinian cause lost its importance in the region? Considering the complex political dynamics in the Middle East, the answer is multifaceted. Historians will record these realities for future generations, preserving the role of each Arab state. However, the rulers of these nations seem unconcerned about the legacy of shame and grief they leave behind. Dancing to the tune of powerful nations to secure their rule, they believe their safety lies in appeasing their patrons.

Historically, the Arab nations have shared an identity bound by a common language, religion, and, to an extent, shared cultural roots. Yet European colonial influence introduced new insecurities, creating a region where each country's interests are often at odds. Relations between Palestinians and Arab states have also not been simple, particularly with those nations that hosted large numbers of Palestinian refugees after Israel's establishment in 1948.

The Lebanese Civil War and conflicts between Palestinian militants and the Jordanian monarchy at times reflect the region's fraught history. However, for many decades, the Palestinian issue remained

a unifying cause among Arab countries. During this period, Israel was viewed as an extension of former colonial powers—initially Britain and France, and now the United States—positioned as a Western outpost to protect their interests in the Middle East.

Countries like Egypt, Syria, and Jordan once fought wars against Israel to defend both their national interests and the Palestinian cause. Those wars, however, are now a thing of the past. Egypt and Jordan signed peace treaties with Israel decades ago. Morocco, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain have established diplomatic relations with Israel, a shift from the region's former aversion to such ties. Saudi Arabia, too, was on the verge of formalizing relations with Israel before the October 7 outbreak of war in Gaza halted this diplomatic momentum, at least temporarily.

Dov Waxman, Director of the Nazarian Centre for Israel Studies at the University of California, explains, “For decades and even in the recent crisis, each Arab country has pursued its own interests. They speak of solidarity with the Palestinians, and these sentiments are not insincere, but their national interests come first.” Meanwhile, numerous researchers and analysts still contend that public opinion across the Arab and Muslim world remains staunchly opposed to Israel.

The people of Arab countries feel great sympathy for the citizens of devastated Gaza, and they wish for their governments to take more action in support of the Palestinians. They desire for their countries to cut diplomatic ties with Israel, at the very least by expelling Israeli diplomats. However, this has not happened yet. The reason is that Arab governments distanced themselves from the Palestinians quite some time ago. This was a pivotal turning point that changed the entire landscape of the region. Today’s bloody scenes are not the result of sudden events but trace back to the public uprisings, known as the “Arab Spring,” which shook the Middle East and North Africa between 2010 and 2012.

Since then, the situation has drastically shifted, and the failure of these uprisings has destabilized the region. Many countries remain entangled in civil conflicts, such as Yemen, Syria, and Iraq. Syria and Iraq, which were once politically powerful states that could challenge the United States, are now absent from the scene. Libya has not only been destroyed, but its leader, Muammar Gaddafi, was displayed to the world media in a manner intended to signal to other Muslim leaders that they too must submit to Western authority. Egypt struggles with economic instability, while Sudan is mired in civil war. Pakistan, the world’s first nuclear Muslim state, has been consistently pushed toward instability, mired in internal terrorism and economic hardship to such an extent that it cannot regain its footing. In Pakistan, political disarray is deepened by the widening gaps between politicians and key institutions, leading even those aware of the real enemy to seek their survival within the very trap set by those enemies.

In this state of perpetual crisis, Arab societies continue to feel sympathy for the Palestinians but feel powerless under the oppressive regimes they themselves live under. The Arab world is in a tragic state; people are without the freedom, capability, or even the desire to live with dignity. Despite this, the social support for Palestinians has been stronger than the official government stance, primarily expressed through social media. Since the Arab Spring, the streets of many regional countries have become limited for such activities. Where authoritarian governments once permitted protests in defense of Palestinians, they now fear that such gatherings might incite something far worse, even

a fate like Libya, Syria, or Iraq, where people now yearn for basic necessities. But the years of turmoil have changed more than just this. The years 2010–2012 saw millions of people in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Bahrain, and Morocco take to the streets, demanding democracy and social rights.

The Arab Spring was indeed an earthquake, reshaping the conditions and priorities of many countries. Some old regimes fell, while others worried they would be next and scrambled to find security and protection. According to a calculated strategy, global colonial powers not only tilled the ground in these Arab



states but also sowed seeds of fear in the fields of their weak rulers, forcing them to reap a crop of submission. They were convinced that Israel, with its promise of protection against the nuclear threat from Iran, was their only true ally in the region, turning one move into multiple strategic gains.

A few years after the Arab Spring, under U.S. mediation during Donald Trump's presidency, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates formalized diplomatic relations with Israel. Morocco and Sudan later joined this agreement. The U.S. response was swift, with Washington formally recognizing Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara, effectively preventing a self-determination referendum there. In examining these countries' relations with Israel, we find that Israel has sold them surveillance systems, which they use to secretly monitor their own citizens.

The alleged use of the Pegasus software developed by the Israeli company NSO Group has impacted Morocco, the UAE, Bahrain, and even Saudi Arabia, which lacks official ties with Israel. According to the *New York Times*, Riyadh acquired this software in 2017, but lost access to it the following year after the assassination of Saudi dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. However, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman reportedly contacted Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, enabling him to regain access to the software.

In addition to national interests, another factor pushing Arab countries away from the Palestinian issue is the rise of Islamist militias in their own countries. After the 1967 war and the first wave of Palestinian resistance led by Yasser Arafat, this movement was largely nationalist. Today's resistance, however, is primarily religious, spearheaded by Islamist groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, rooted in Islamic ideology. The ultimate aim of these groups is martyrdom, a value that the United States, its allies, and Israel have long sought to eradicate from the hearts of Muslims. This is why, even before the partition of India, Britain planted a self-created group in Qadiani, injecting its poison into the faith of the Muslim Ummah. In Pakistan, this sect was declared a minority after deliberation in the elected assembly, and now, efforts to sustain this group are ongoing in Britain.

The rulers of these states have been led to believe that Hamas's links with the Islamic organization, the Muslim Brotherhood (currently in conflict with several governments in the region), present a significant threat. Many of these governments view Hamas as the final stronghold of the Muslim Brotherhood, still standing and militarily strong. This perspective fueled actions such as the ousting of Egypt's elected Muslim Brotherhood leader, President Morsi, and the installation of their agent, Sisi. The regime change received financial support and open backing from Saudi Arabia and other

Gulf states. To this day, the Muslim Brotherhood faces oppression, and the global media often complies with a mandate to refrain from reporting on the extent of these atrocities.

Israel is, in a way, accomplishing its insidious goal by targeting Hamas. Hamas and Hezbollah's ties with Iran also fuel suspicion in Arab states. For Gulf countries, for instance, Iran poses a more significant threat than Israel. As previously mentioned, many Arab governments have accepted the "Israeli and American narrative that these movements are Iranian weapons intended to destabilize regional peace and disrupt any plans for stability in the area, ignoring the plight of Palestinians."

Analysts say that this narrative is actively promoted by state-run media throughout the Arab world, a region where independent media is rare. According to Professor Walid Qazi, "For the Saudi media, for example, the primary concern is not the Palestinians but how Iran seeks to exert control over the region." Although Hamas now receives support and funding from Iran, the Palestinian liberation group initially had good relations with several Arab countries, but their growing influence later became a source of concern for those states.

Think about it: with escalating Israeli oppression, when Arab countries shut their doors to them and nobody was willing to provide weapons to resist Israel, Palestinians were left with no option but to turn to any available support to defend their lives and properties. The same applies to Hezbollah and other groups receiving support from Iran, as they strive to defend the Palestinian cause.

When Iran is portrayed as their main backer, the Arab people are almost forgotten in this picture. However, in my opinion, some Arab movements genuinely stand in solidarity with Palestinians and are willing to sacrifice for their cause, such as Hezbollah, the Houthis in Yemen, and some Shia movements in Iraq.

Aside from the geostrategic interests and crises in the Arab world, the Palestinian cause has gradually faded into obscurity. The ideals that once moved hearts in the Middle East, like Arab nationalism, have now become echoes of the past. Most of the younger generation in the region sympathize with Palestinians, but they do not understand the root causes of the conflict, as these topics are no longer taught in schools. Today, society and even identity have evolved alongside globalization.

This shift is also reflected in new leadership. For instance, Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia now have a new generation of leaders such as Mohammed bin Salman, who were largely educated in the West. They do not see themselves as traditional Arabs and do not regard Palestine as a central issue. They openly declare that "their priorities and ambitions are different now."

Wednesday 27 November 2024

The Strategic Dynamics of Drones: India, Pakistan, and China

The Evolution of Drone Technology in China, Pakistan, and India and Its Impact on Warfare

With Trump's re-election and key appointments to his cabinet, it is becoming increasingly evident that his administration will once again intensify measures against China's economic rise. This includes expanding trade restrictions and strengthening initiatives like the "Quad" alliance to counter China's regional influence. Meanwhile, India, under Modi, is positioning itself as a key player in these dynamics, leveraging its geographical advantage to act as a "rented soldier" in this strategic confrontation. India has been indulging in a military buildup, amassing weaponry from across the globe in an effort to intimidate its neighbours.

A significant element of this buildup is India's focus on expanding its arsenal of military drones. Pakistan, naturally, cannot remain a passive observer in this escalating competition. Both countries are acquiring and developing drone technology capable of surveillance, reconnaissance, and precision strikes without human pilots. This shift in military strategy underscores a significant transformation in how conflicts in South Asia are likely to unfold in the near future.

The Escalation of Drone Warfare in South Asia

The increasing deployment of drones by the three neighboring nuclear powers—Pakistan, India, and China—signals a dangerous trend that could exacerbate tensions in the region. The inclusion of drones in military operations has already altered the nature of warfare in South Asia. Future skirmishes or conflicts are expected to feature extensive drone use, significantly influencing their scale and outcome.

The widespread presence of drones for surveillance and intelligence gathering among these nations hints at a growing likelihood of confrontation. As spying and monitoring activities increase, so does the potential for mistrust and escalation.

Military Drone Capabilities: India and Pakistan

Military drones, particularly those used for reconnaissance and strikes, offer significant advantages. These unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) are capable of operating at high altitudes, remaining airborne for extended periods, and evading radar detection. They are particularly effective in observing troop movements, monitoring infrastructure, and targeting enemy installations.

According to defense analysts, military drones serve three primary purposes:

Surveillance: Monitoring enemy movements and activities.

Reconnaissance: Identifying the locations of enemy troops and weaponry.

Target Elimination: Identifying and neutralizing high-value targets.

While some drones are equipped to perform all three functions, others are specialized for specific roles. Both India and Pakistan have expanded their drone capabilities in recent years. Reports suggest that India could possess approximately 5,000 drones within the next four years, whereas Pakistan's arsenal, though smaller, includes more advanced and diverse models—about 10 to 11 distinct variants.

India's Drone Strategy and Acquisitions

India has aggressively pursued high-tech drones to enhance its military capabilities. During a visit to the United States in October, Prime Minister Modi finalized a \$3.5 billion deal to procure 31 MQ-9B "Predator" drones. These high-altitude, long-endurance drones are among the most sophisticated available, capable of both surveillance and precision strikes. In addition, the deal includes \$500 million worth of bombs and laser-guided missiles for these drones.

The Predator drones, each costing approximately ₹950 crore Indian Rupee, will be divided among the Indian Navy (15 units), Army, and Air Force (16 units split evenly). These drones are renowned for their effectiveness in conflict zones such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Somalia.

India has also acquired Israel's "Heron" drones, which it now manufactures domestically under license from Israel Aerospace Industries. Following the 2020 border clashes with China in Ladakh, the importance of drones has surged in Indian military strategy, particularly for naval operations in the Indian Ocean, where China's presence is increasingly prominent.

Pakistan's Drone Capabilities

Pakistan, while possessing fewer drones than India, has focused on quality and technological sophistication. It has developed and deployed a range of advanced UAVs designed for reconnaissance and combat missions. The emphasis on indigenous development and collaboration with nations like China has allowed Pakistan to maintain a competitive edge in drone technology.

Implications for Regional Stability

The growing reliance on drones among South Asian powers points to a shift in military strategy, but it also raises serious concerns about regional stability. The potential for miscalculation and unintended escalation is high, as increased surveillance and spying can easily be misinterpreted as acts of aggression. Furthermore, the inclusion of drones in military arsenals lowers the threshold for initiating conflicts, as they enable strikes without the immediate risk of human casualties.

The introduction of advanced drones into the military doctrines of India, Pakistan, and China has transformed the nature of warfare in South Asia. While they enhance tactical capabilities, they also intensify the risks of conflict in a region already fraught with historical rivalries and nuclear tensions.

Analysing the Role of Drones in the Armed Forces of India and Pakistan

In the evolving landscape of modern warfare, drones have emerged as a pivotal factor in military strategies. Let us examine the inclusion of drones in the armed forces of India and Pakistan and their implications on regional security.

India's Drone Program: The Inclusion of Swarm Drones

A significant advancement in India's drone program is the integration of swarm drones. These Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) operate in large groups and are designed for complex missions. Swarm drones are a key component of India's defence strategy, particularly in countering potential threats from Pakistan. Developed by India's New Space Research and Technologies, these drones can neutralize enemy defence systems, destroy nuclear-launch platforms, and execute simultaneous strikes on multiple targets.

Drones, or UAVs, are relatively inexpensive, easy to operate, and possess capabilities that revolutionise conventional warfare strategies. While the drones used in the attack on Russia's Khmeimim Airbase were basic in design, they symbolised a future where multiple drones, operating autonomously and with minimal human intervention, could coordinate attacks with exceptional speed and precision.

In military terminology, these advanced UAVs are referred to as "swarm drones." They operate as a coordinated group, potentially involving 10, 100, or even thousands of drones, each functioning independently while maintaining synchronization with the group. This allows them to execute missions effectively without constant human supervision. Sameer Joshi, the founder of a company manufacturing swarm drones for the Indian Air Force, asserts that "swarm drones are the future of warfare, and India is striving to become a key player in this domain."

However, India's drone capabilities, whether domestically produced or imported, are currently limited to low- and medium-altitude UAVs. For high-altitude drones with advanced capabilities, India relies on imports. Contracts have been signed to procure vertical and high-altitude drones capable of operating in extreme conditions, such as sub-zero temperatures in border regions. These drones, which have also been used for civilian purposes, including tracking militants in Kashmir, can remain airborne for extended periods and evade detection.

Pakistan's Drone Program: A Blend of Indigenous and Imported Technology

On the other hand, Pakistan imports drones from Turkey and China and has also acquired UAVs from Germany and Italy. Pakistan's arsenal includes advanced Turkish drones such as Bayraktar TB2 and Akinci, alongside Chinese models like Wing Loong II and CH-4. Additionally, Pakistan has developed its own drones, such as Burraq and Shahpar.

In 2022, Pakistan unveiled its flagship drone, Shahpar-II, capable of flying up to 1,000 Kilometre and targeting objectives using laser-guided missiles. Pakistan Ordnance Factories previously developed Ababeel, initially a surveillance drone later adapted for combat purposes. The latest iteration, Shahpar-III, represents a significant leap forward with its advanced combat features. This medium-altitude UAV, equipped with state-of-the-art avionics and flight control systems, can remain operational for 30 hours and carry a payload of 1,650 kilograms. The Shahpar series reflects Pakistan's commitment to strengthening its drone capabilities. Pakistan's Global Industrial and Defence Solutions (GIDS) had earlier introduced Shahpar-I and II.

Pakistan's Strategic Advantage in Drone Technology

Pakistan's Air Force effectively integrates drones with conventional methods to target India's advanced air defence systems, such as the S-400 and Prithvi systems. Global defence analysts rank Pakistan as the fourth-largest drone power in the world, acknowledging its advanced UAVs deployed across the air force, army, and navy. Indian defence experts have also recognised Pakistan's superior drone capabilities, which continue to expand through indigenous innovation and international partnerships.

Experts note that Pakistan's high-altitude drones can fly for up to 50 hours, operating beyond the

reach of fighter jets. This provides Pakistan with a significant strategic and tactical advantage, enhancing its operational readiness and deterrence capabilities.

Drones: A New Challenge to South Asia's Stability

The increasing reliance on advanced drones by South Asian militaries poses a significant threat to the region's strategic stability. As drones become a central element of military planning, the potential for escalation and imbalance in traditional deterrence frameworks grows.

The ability of these UAVs to conduct targeted strikes on critical military assets, including nuclear facilities and arsenals, heightens the risks of catastrophic outcomes in the event of a conflict. The widespread integration of modern drones in South Asia's militaries threatens to destabilise the already fragile military balance in the region.

Conclusion

The proliferation of drones in the armed forces of India and Pakistan underscores a paradigm shift in modern warfare. While drones offer unprecedented tactical advantages, their potential to disrupt regional stability and escalate conflicts cannot be ignored. In a nuclear-armed region like South Asia, the unchecked deployment of advanced drones could have devastating consequences, highlighting the urgent need for dialogue and restraint.

According to the editor of the military affairs journal *Force*, "The current drones are either guided from the ground or via satellite in the air. If the adversary possesses the capability to jam communications, they can render these drones ineffective, and Pakistan has this capability. This is similar to what happened during India's Balakot strike when Pakistan had the ability to jam the Indian pilot's communications system. Pakistan jammed the communication of the Indian warplanes, leading to the downing of both aircraft and the capture of the pilot. The very next day, Pakistan launched a declared counterattack, demonstrating its capabilities, which made India and its allies, particularly the United States, realize the true state of their 'lame horse.'"

On the other hand, "China has advanced significantly in military technology. According to global defence analysts, Pakistan and China are collaborating on drone manufacturing technology. Pakistan now has substantial capabilities. Its air force has become significantly stronger, with China playing a major role in this progress. China has been working on military technology for the last 10-15 years. Since 5 August 2019, military cooperation between China and Pakistan has strengthened considerably, exemplified by the locally manufactured combat aircraft, the JF-17 Thunder, which has proven its worth globally. Pakistan has not only achieved self-reliance in this technology but has also entered agreements to sell it to other countries."

The **JF-17 Thunder Block III** is a 4.5-generation multi-role fighter jet equipped with an Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) radar and long-range Beyond Visual Range (BVR) missiles. It is capable of performing various combat missions. Block III represents the most advanced model of the JF-17 series, helping the



Pakistan Air Force maintain a balance of power amidst the evolving regional situation. Future versions of the JF-17 will include upgraded radars, new weapons, advanced missiles, and enhanced electronic warfare capabilities, reflecting continuous improvements from every perspective.

The nature of warfare is shifting from physical domains—land, sea, air, underwater, and space—to machines replacing human roles on a large scale. Different countries are at various stages of technological adaptation. Currently, drones are primarily controlled through communication links. This is not a mere drone race but a reflection of technological evolution in warfare. The world is now entering the era of **drone warfare**, which is both a present and future reality.

Drones have been extensively utilised in conflicts like the wars in Ukraine and Gaza. They are particularly effective in scenarios where the target lacks strong air defence systems. In places like Gaza, where air defence systems or armed air forces capable of countering drones are absent, drones have proven devastating.

However, in the context of countries like India and China, advanced drones in China's arsenal would only be effective in areas with weak or non-existent air defences or fighter aircraft. Elsewhere, their effectiveness would be limited.

Pakistan, China, and India have robust air defence systems, including radars, command-and-control systems that manage airspace, and strong air forces. Even drones can intercept enemy drones. In such contexts, drones are primarily used for high-altitude reconnaissance, target surveillance, and acquiring crucial imagery of enemy positions.

In the past 8-10 years, the nature of warfare has changed, with drones becoming a key component. They can significantly impact traditional military platforms like tanks and artillery. Both India and Pakistan are focusing heavily on drone technology, with an escalating arms race evident. India's warlike fervour, driven by Modi's militaristic ambitions and the Brahminical Chanakya philosophy, seeks to dominate the region and intimidate its neighbours.

Remote-controlled warfare is likely to increase as technology continues to replace human roles with machines. However, there is no doubt that the growing use of military drones by India and Pakistan poses a "serious threat" due to the risk of "errors." Both are nuclear-armed nations, and even an accidental drone intrusion over a nuclear facility could trigger catastrophic consequences, leading to a disaster of unimaginable proportions and the annihilation of humanity.

Friday 29 November 2024

The Death of Ego, The Reality of Life

Ego and Self: The Quest for Truth

Their approach was quite peculiar. There were no sermons or lectures, no bombastic speeches, no pretentiousness... no grandeur, no pomp, no certificates or degrees. They never said, "Look here, on page so-and-so, it is written like this—see for yourself." There was none of that. What they possessed was humility, modesty, and self-effacement. In very brief sentences, they conveyed volumes, filled with compassionate and loving words. They were a personification of love, sacrifice, and loyalty. Despite countless mistakes, misbehaviour, and even disrespect, they never got angry. We made every possible blunder, but these signs of the Almighty never rejected us. The more rebellious we were, the more affection they showed. What kind of material were they made from, and still are?

They would say: "A good child is worth a million, but a bad one is worth even more than that." I didn't understand, so I asked, "What do you mean by that?" They smiled and replied, "If a child is already good, there's no need to worry about them. But the one who has gone astray, they are the ones who need love and care. You need to ensure they don't sink into a swamp, fall into a pit, get lost in darkness, or ruin themselves. You need to take great care of them."

They were the kind of people who said such strange things that people thought they were mad, foolish, or ignorant. But they were merely lovers of truth—simple-hearted individuals, devoted to love. They would say, "When death comes, you will die. There will be no intercession, no one will be able to help—no bribes, no threats. If you want to taste death, why not die now?"

Experience it and see how peaceful it is, how comforting, how sweet." I asked, "How?" They simply said, "That's for you to find out," and then they fell silent. Then one day, I finally understood, and they said, "Begin to think of yourself as already dead." They taught me how, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. Yes, there is sweetness, serenity, and calmness in it.

The dead never harm anyone, they do not trouble anyone, they do not gossip or backbite, they do not conspire. In appearance, be alive, but in spirit, be dead. Have no desires, no care for reward or praise. Let insults and taunts mean nothing to you. Just keep giving, keep giving. You will keep receiving. After all, the creation of God is varied. They are not all the same, nor can they be. Our task is to serve God's creation and find Him within them. Let people say whatever they want. Don't let their accusations or taunts divert you from your path, nor let anyone's praise inflate your ego. Focus only on God and His people. If someone is hungry, don't give them advice; give them food. If someone is thirsty, offer them water. Be the bridge between two estranged individuals, and bear the burdens of others. Don't seek for yourself but for the sake of others.

Exhaust yourself for others, and you will find that only those who seek something get tired. Worldly trade and business tire a person out, but in love, one never tires, never. A lover is always ready, always eager. Love never lets a person tire. Love never gets old, never fades. It remains ever fresh, always vibrant. The tree of love is evergreen; autumn cannot touch it.

Selfless, unconditional love is like an oasis—a cool, sweet, flowing stream, a peaceful river, and a deep lake. Become love itself, a manifestation of love and prayer. Open your hands for others, become their shade. If someone needs a kind word, speak it. If someone is sad, tell them a joke, give them hope. Speak with a smile and make them laugh. Hide your own wounds, and place balm on others' wounds. Become like the dead, who seek nothing.

If someone comes, places flowers at your feet, and leaves, or lights incense and spreads fragrance without asking, God will fix what is broken, He will carry your boat of needs across. He will bring dawn out of the darkest night.

He can bring life out of death and turn the living into dust. Cover others' faults, and God will cover yours. Embrace the needy, the destitute, live for them, and die for yourself. When blessings come, be grateful; when they don't, be patient. And what wealth could be greater than patience? When the Creator and Owner of the universe is with those who are patient, what room is there for sadness or despair? Yes, whether ordinary or special, you must put an end to your ego.

Most of the time, people asked questions, and they would answer. The session was coming to an end, and in the end, they asked the people a question: "What is the hardest thing to do in the path of God?" Answers came in, and most people believed that giving up one's life is the hardest and greatest sacrifice. They remained silent and watched as people reached a consensus on this view. When everyone had spoken, they began to answer their own question.

"Indeed, giving one's life is a great thing. To give one's life for God is a tremendous act, and the reward for it



is immense. But think about this: in human history, there have been thousands of wars, and in those wars, millions of people have knowingly sacrificed their lives for their country, their nation, their king, or various other great causes—and they still do so today." With that, they fell silent. People realised that their view was different from the majority, and they eagerly awaited what it was. Finally, they spoke again, ending our wait.

A human being is composed of two things: an inner personality and an outward body. Sacrificing one's life is the sacrifice of the outward body. Undoubtedly, it is a significant act, but to be moved to the point of sacrificing one's life, a powerful speech from an eloquent orator, a decisive moment that stirs emotions, or an intense feeling of love or hatred is often enough.

However, sacrificing one's inner self, commonly referred to as the sacrifice of the ego, is the most difficult task in this world. Even if a person manages to do this at a particular moment for some reason, in the very next moment, the ego revives. Sometimes, an individual might be able to do this before a specific person, but then the ego stands tall before another. There are many times when we think we have eliminated the ego, but it remains fully intact.

So, how can one know whether the ego has truly been eliminated or not?

I will explain, but first, understand that the ego comes in two forms: one is ordinary, and the other is more subtle or special. The ordinary ego expresses itself openly, making it easy to recognise. This is the same thing we refer to as arrogance—thinking of oneself as superior in any aspect and considering others inferior. Anyone can point this out, and if we are sincere, we can immediately correct ourselves. Hence, when we stop thinking of ourselves as superior and others as inferior, we are freed from this ordinary ego.

However, the special ego is hidden behind seven veils. Even those who claim to be humble and modest can have egos that soar to the heavens, and they may not even be aware of it. How can this special ego be identified? Another person asked.

It's not easy to recognise, but I will give you a few major signs. The first sign is if you do not have the habit of acknowledging the virtues of others. The second is that when someone criticises you, instead of understanding what they are saying, you immediately start thinking about how to respond. The third sign is that when someone tries to point out a mistake you've made, you instinctively try to find fault in them instead. Each of these behaviors indicates that you suffer from an ego problem, but since arrogance is considered a social vice, you keep it hidden. However, once you recognise your ailment, you can surely rid yourself of it!

They used to say something quite beautiful: "Consider the little to be a lot." And to this day, I have not been able to put it into practice. I keep talking, I keep talking. Anyway, that's enough for today... If life continues, we will meet again. The work of the world will carry on. May you all remain happy and prosperous. Stay joyful. Nothing will remain but the name of Allah.

بکھرائے تیرے رنگ ہواؤں نے ہر طرف
کوئی نہیں ہے ترے سوا خشک و تر میں بھی
سیراب ہو گئے ہیں تری اک نظر سے ہم
کیا کیا قیامتیں ہیں تری اک نظر میں بھی

Your colours have been scattered by the winds, everywhere
There is no one but You, in both the barren and the fertile lands
We have been quenched by just one glance from You
What great wonders lie within even a single glance from You

Saturday 1st December 2024

China's Growing Presence in Europe

China and Europe's Shared Vision

In January 2018, the magnificent Bozar Theatre in Brussels served as the backdrop for a video showcasing significant moments from the history of the People's Republic of China. This event marked the celebration of the Chinese New Year. While a singer performed, a video playing behind him highlighted China's achievements, including its first nuclear test, its entry into the World Trade Organization, the production of its first aircraft carrier, and other key developments. Diplomats, military representatives, and other officials in the audience watched with bated breath. The question was not whether they were impressed by China's successes—they might well have been—but rather that they were also struck by a sense of astonishment and apprehension. China's growing military power, expanding economy, and technological advancements have roused many European policymakers from complacency. For a long time, the European Union has viewed China in an informal, almost missionary fashion, making speculative predictions about its future. Now, it seems many of these predictions were wishful thinking.

As China's economic and military power has grown remarkably, strategic shifts have emerged within the Beijing-Washington-Brussels triangle. During Trump's last presidential term, the U.S. increasingly viewed China as a strategic rival. Many European leaders, finding Trump unpredictable, struggled to fully trust him. As a result, several European nations sought a path of greater strategic autonomy. Trump's sudden announcement of a military withdrawal from Afghanistan and Syria marked a sharp reversal in a 17-year-old American military doctrine, forcing James Mattis to resign and heightening Europe's security concerns. Now, as Trump potentially returns to the White House for another four years with a congressional majority, whether he can fulfil his promises of global peace remains to be seen.

In December 2018, Beijing published a white paper on its relations with the European Union, detailing how China has cooperated with European powers in various sectors, especially high-tech. Now, on issues like Taiwan and Tibet, Beijing has certain expectations from Brussels and has worked alongside the EU to curb misinformation threatening free speech. The white paper suggested that Europe should support China in countering unilateral actions by the U.S. Chinese leadership also indicated its willingness to fill any gaps left by American withdrawal. According to Jeremy Rifkin, China has spent two decades attempting to bring the "European Dream" to fruition during the euphoric phase of postmodernism. Some EU officials argue that the Union does not engage in geopolitics and that its actions lack political ramifications. However, this approach has transformed Europe into a playground for global powers. The submissiveness Europe has nurtured has provided China with opportunities to advance its interests freely. Russia's display of power in Ukraine influenced some Eastern European countries but had little lasting negative impact on the broader EU environment.

Although EU officials claim that European actions lack political consequences, in reality, some European nations and the EU as a whole have started to view China as a formidable competitor. China's "Made in 2025" strategy has sounded an alarm for Europe's high-tech industry. Both Europe and India are now taking China seriously. China's rising political, military, and economic power has

served as a “wake-up call” for both. This raises an important question: will India’s “youth power” ideal clash with the European Dream? In December 2018, the European Council accepted proposals for an “EU Strategy on India.” Does this mark a new era in EU-India relations? The prevailing view was that the EU had prioritized China while largely ignoring India. A new strategy towards India could signal the EU’s interest in working collaboratively with India and in supporting a rules-based global order. Moreover, the EU has been working to improve its security setup, but concerns have been raised in EU security circles regarding potential involvement of Indian intelligence agency “RAW” in terrorism, following allegations of RAW’s involvement in countries beyond Canada. Meanwhile, it remains to be seen how Chinese leadership will act upon the suggestions of the white paper.

In February 2017, France, Italy, and Germany asked the EU to establish a commission to propose guidelines for screening foreign direct investment (FDI) within Europe. Although these three powers did not specifically name any country, it was clear they were particularly concerned about Chinese FDI. In some European countries, Chinese investment has grown so significantly that open discussion of the proposals from France, Italy, and Germany was limited. The European Council, European Commission, and European Parliament have not yet reached formal negotiation and discussion on this issue. Critics argue that the existing document on this matter lacks substance and has been significantly diluted.

A proposal for the screening of foreign direct investment in Europe has emerged at a time when many people in European Union (EU) member countries feel that, while foreign direct investment is permitted in European countries, the same opportunity and open market access are not provided in China. Most Chinese businesses operate with the interests of the state in mind. Chinese investments in Europe increased significantly, from \$70 million in 2008 to \$30 billion by 2017. Chinese investments in the Greek port of Piraeus were originally intended to establish a trade corridor stretching from Belgrade to Budapest and the rest of Europe, but these investments are now having pronounced effects in Greece and Hungary. Much of China’s European investments have been concentrated in Germany, France, and the UK, with a focus on acquiring technology not readily accessible from the US.

The bilateral investment issue gained attention when the prominent German robotics company, KUKA, was acquired by the Chinese-owned company Midea, leading analysts to note that German engineers were subsequently developing robotics for the People’s Liberation Army. This acquisition was deemed problematic for Germany, which has now started to scrutinize foreign direct investments closely. It is becoming increasingly evident that Chinese leadership and its entire nation are dedicated to realizing the “Chinese Dream.”

China’s military exercises with Russia in the Black Sea, Mediterranean, and Baltic regions have unsettled multiple European states close to these areas. European Union officials are aware that China, in partnership with Russia, is working to impact the European political climate. In February 2018, two German think tanks also indicated that China is



actively working to influence European matters. These developments are so apparent that EU policymakers can no longer ignore them.

Germany's chancellor expressed concerns over China's expanding influence in the Balkans. During the 2018 Munich Security Conference, German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel voiced apprehensions over Chinese President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative, noting that it reflects a system not founded on the principles of democracy, human rights, and freedom. China's economic power has created divisions within Europe, making it challenging for all European nations to maintain a unified stance on various matters. For instance, in March 2017, Hungary refused to sign a joint letter addressing the mistreatment of detained lawyers in China. In June 2017, Greece blocked a UN statement condemning China's human rights record, and in July 2016, Hungary, Greece, and Croatia vetoed an EU statement criticizing China's claims in the South China Sea. Such instances highlight China's ability to influence EU policies.

Despite these developments, Europe still maintains a clear advantage in certain sectors, particularly in advanced technology. Europe is committed to preserving this edge, viewing it as essential for securing progress and future stability. When it comes to technology transfers, Europe exercises significant caution. While Europe initially retained full control over 5G technology, reports indicate that China has developed an alternative, surpassing European standards.

Political analysts closely observing the EU suggest that while the EU's options may not appear particularly enticing, it is time for the EU to abandon its passive stance and become more proactive. Europe must determine whether the collaborative approach to security and development in the postmodern era was the right path or if it should adopt a new approach. Furthermore, it needs to assess whether the collective strength of European powers can meaningfully contribute to the new global order.

China, however, is firmly committed to achieving superpower status through trade rather than aggression. In 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping introduced a vision for four significant partnerships between China and the EU, aiming to foster mutual cooperation. This vision has since gained relevance and importance. Following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, China quickly filled the economic vacuum by establishing trade corridors in the region, particularly with Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan, securing a firm foothold in these markets.

Meanwhile, the United States, along with some European allies, has launched a new conflict in Ukraine to undermine Russia. However, the objectives the US had hoped to achieve remain elusive, with international financial institutions now recognizing the resilience of the Russian economy and expressing concern over the ground realities. During the early days of the Ukraine conflict, Europe feared a disruption in its gas supplies from Russia, which has led to Europe hesitating to provide full support to the US.

In today's world, increasing uncertainty and instability have highlighted the importance of close cooperation between China and the European Union. This partnership aims to maximise mutual economic benefits while addressing global challenges. Chinese President Xi Jinping's vision from a decade ago has proven that collaborative growth can create new avenues of prosperity for the

people of both countries. This calls for moving forward without undue fear or reservations. As a result, China is now one of the EU's most crucial trade partners. Despite global economic slowdowns, trade between China and the EU reached \$783 billion in 2023, with bilateral investment exceeding \$250 billion. Although the EU currently has a trade deficit with China, importing €515.9 billion and exporting €223.6 billion in 2023, trade volumes are expected to continue rising in the near term.

China has shown itself as a reliable, strategic partner for Europe in business, science, technology, and supply chain cooperation. Both China and the EU have potential for mutual success, particularly in areas like the digital economy, green development, environmental protection, renewable energy, and artificial intelligence. The EU Chamber of Commerce in China (EUCCC) Business Confidence Survey 2023 revealed that over 90% of European companies consider China as a priority investment destination, and over 80% of Chinese companies are prepared to expand operations in Europe.

China, as the largest developing country, and Europe, with its high concentration of advanced economies, are jointly promoting open and fair trade in the face of economic fragmentation and rising protectionism. Both sides are committed to reducing exaggerations around security concerns, pushing back against anti-globalisation trends. China welcomes active participation from the EU and other European nations in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Global Development Initiative (GDI). Additionally, China is ready to align its goals with the EU's Global Gateway strategy, helping developing nations accelerate their development by leveraging these collaborative opportunities. In today's volatile international climate, increased cooperation between China and Europe is crucial. Both sides must jointly uphold multilateralism, openness, and development, fostering intercultural dialogue. Together, they must work toward a fair, orderly multipolar world and an inclusive, beneficial global economy.

Pakistan, with its unique geographical position, has been given another golden opportunity to benefit from these developments. Pakistan must urgently address delays in the completion of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and take immediate steps to attract investment from friendly Arab countries. Such actions could pave the way for European investments to follow suit. To achieve this, a politically stable and peaceful environment is essential. All political parties must reach a consensus on key economic goals to ensure that any incoming government upholds these targets, avoiding political interference in economic objectives.

Allama Iqbal's words come to mind:

شاید کہ اتر جائے ترے دل میں مری بات	انداز بیاں گرچہ بہت شوخ نہیں ہے
یا خاک کے آنغوش میں تسبیح و مناجات	یا وسعت افلاک میں تکبیر مسلسل
یہ مذہب ملا و جمادات و نباتات	وہ مذہب مردان خود آگاہ و خدا مست

Though the style is not very lively,
Perhaps a deadly word will descend into your heart
Or continuous Takbir in the vastness of the sky
Or glorification and chanting in the embrace of the earth
That religion is self-aware and devoted to men
This religion is mixed with inanimate objects and plants

Sunday 2nd December 2024

The Sweetness of Grief in God's Mercy: On the Anniversary of My Father's Passing Memories that Never Fade"

He was a person who shone like a beacon in the darkness.

یوں نہ پھر ہو گا کوئی نغمہ سرا میرے بعد
اور نہ ہی ہو گی گلستاں کی فضا میرے بعد
راہ سنساں مکاں خستہ ملیں افسردہ
کیسا ویراں ہوا شہر وفا میرے بعد

There will be no one like me to sing melodies after I am gone.
The atmosphere of the garden will be entirely different after my departure.
A desolate path, a broken abode, dejected inhabitants—
How desolate the city of loyalty became after me!

Tall and stately, strong and robust, a fair complexion, an elegant physique, a rosy and innocent face, a broad forehead, uniquely handsome—Beautiful almond-shaped eyes sparkling with a brilliance akin to diamonds, with red veins from sleepless nights, observing with a discerning gaze. A straight and prominent nose, delicate thin lips, a wide and graceful mouth, cheeks flushed like a Kandahari (Red) pomegranate. His beard, soft and silky, black merging into white, almost covering his chest. Trimmed moustaches, a shaven head covered by a traditional Karakul cap. His voice carried humility and passion, his tone commanding, his stride exemplary, his disposition fiery, yet his personality was the epitome of steadfastness. His gait exuded authority, and his words carried weight.

He was a living embodiment of the sublime qualities of Kashmir's grandeur gentle as the breeze and fierce as thunder. A living, breathing story, a symbol of the paradise that is Kashmir. A presence whose proximity exuded majesty and whose absence nurtured devotion. His visage was imperial, but his character unparalleled. This was a glimpse of the man whose name was Habibullah Malik.

جن کی یادوں سے رگ جاں میں دکھن ہونے لگے
ذکر چھڑ جائے تو پتھر کا دل بھی رونے لگے

*Whose memories start to hurt in the veins of my soul.
If the memory is forgotten, even a heart of stone starts to cry.*

Memories That Sting the Soul

It has been 63 years today, on Friday, 3rd December 1965, at 3:13 PM, in Room No. 5 of Civil Hospital (Lyalpur) Faisalabad, that a distinguished personality turned away from the fleeting joys of this temporary life, as if knowing that their destination lay in an eternal abode—a garden of everlasting fragrances.

Just as everything has a value, the ticket to enter that celestial garden does not come cheap. The precious wealth of life must be surrendered to receive the gift of death. And death, in itself, is the means to unite with the Beloved and to attain eternal life with Him. What could be a greater blessing than eternal union with the Beloved? How fitting, then, that thousands of hearts' beloved was now in the presence of the Divine Beloved.

اب یادِ رفتگاں کی بھی ہمت نہیں رہی
یاروں نے اتنی دور بسائیں ہیں بستیاں

Now I don't even have the courage to remember the places I left.

My friends have settled so far away.

Reflections on a Remarkable Life

Some lakes in the world are said to have waters that are simultaneously sweet and salty. One part flows with fresh, sweet water, and the other with bitter, saline waves. It is a marvel of nature that these two layers of water remain separate, maintaining their unique flavours. Whenever I think of him, I imagine such a lake—a blend of sweetness and poignancy.

Many years have passed, and countless times I resolved to pen these reflections, to give voice to these beautiful memories, but an unseen fear always held me back. Perhaps I feared that my weak and timid self would fail to encapsulate these memories adequately. But today, that limit has been surpassed. Sometimes, the powder keg of dormant memories is ignited by sparks from current events, causing an explosion of recollection.

On Friday, 3rd December 1965, I sat beside him in Room No. 5 of Civil Hospital, Faisalabad. With half-open eyes, he asked, "What day is it today?" My uncle responded, "It is Friday." He glanced towards his wife, who immediately understood his unspoken desire. While still on his bed, he performed ablution. That day, his health seemed better compared to the past ten days—his face, though frail, radiated a newfound glow. On his special request, his long-time companion, Hafiz Sahib, recited the Qur'an for an extended period. I still remember how, upon reaching the final verses of Surah Al-Hashr, tears streamed down his face. Unable to bear the sight, I turned my gaze towards the window.

He instructed us all to perform the Friday prayer in the mosque. We left for the mosque adjacent to the hospital, but an inexplicable heaviness in my steps made it difficult to walk. My eyes kept turning back to the room, a strange unease gnawing at my heart. My mother, who had not left his side even for a moment during the past ten days, seemed to know that this was their final farewell. After years of companionship, the time for eternal separation had arrived, with their next meeting destined only in paradise.

Final Days

During his hospitalisation, the entire city seemed to gather around him. On several occasions, the hospital staff had to intervene as a full team of doctors remained present at all times. Even the other hospital staff seemed to treat the situation as an emergency. Despite enduring unbearable pain with remarkable resilience, his face never betrayed his suffering.

You had been at the country's forward borders for weeks, tirelessly welcoming displaced refugees from occupied Kashmir. Making your third trip from Faisalabad with a fully loaded truck of warm clothes and essential items, you not only devoted yourself to relief efforts but were also in search of your brother, Asmatullah Malik, and other relatives. Upon reaching Faisalabad with several maternal relatives, you returned disappointed, once again unable to locate your brother. The deep anguish within you was visible on your face.

One evening, you painted such a vivid picture of the helplessness and displacement of the refugees that everyone listening was moved to tears. Despite resettling several families, your heart remained with the refugees of Kashmir, perhaps because your own past struggles as a refugee had been freshly rekindled. Engrossed in aiding their rehabilitation, you were suddenly struck by severe back pain.

That night, you suffered intensely. The following morning, you mentioned the pain to your friend, Hakim Riyasat Ali. Without a proper diagnosis, he administered an expired penicillin injection into your left arm. This ill-advised treatment marked the beginning of your end.

The day passed with great difficulty, as the pain grew unbearable. You were rushed to the hospital, where it was discovered that the expired Penicillin injection had caused a severe infection throughout your body. Doctors were astonished that you had survived the past 24 hours, as such infections are typically fatal within hours. Undoubtedly, you were waiting for your destined time of departure.



In an urgent response, your entire blood supply was replaced. For the first three days, your condition was critical but stabilised briefly on the fourth day. However, your health suddenly deteriorated again, and the doctors recommended amputating your arm to prevent the infection from spreading further. Your uncle, a renowned doctor who had been by your side throughout this ordeal, immediately consented to the operation. Meanwhile, the local newspapers reported the incident, and a wave of public anger swept the city, demanding Hakim Riyasat Ali's arrest. He fled the city with his family, closing his clinic in the process.

One day, Hakim Riyasat Ali unexpectedly returned with his family, falling at your feet in the hospital, begging for forgiveness. Even from your deathbed, you comforted him. Turning to those around you, you said:

"I have forgiven Hakim Sahib for this unintentional mistake. From this moment, anyone who causes him harm will have no connection with me."

Your words carried such weight that no one dared defy your wishes. Hakim Sahib was sent away with dignity. Outside the hospital, Maulvi Ismail sat on his cart, fervently praying for your recovery. It was you who had lovingly forbidden him from begging despite his paralysis. Not only did you provide him with a cart, but you also set up a small stall near your hotel, allowing him to earn an honest living—even though that prime spot had attracted lucrative offers from others. You often remarked that such deeds might serve as your salvation in the hereafter.

For years, it was your practice to arrange breakfast and tea daily for a long line of impoverished and needy individuals outside your hotel, considering it a moral obligation. Your staff were strictly instructed to carry out this duty with care and kindness. Despite this compassion, you maintained a firm bond with them, treating your employees with paternal affection. Many of them, being Kashmiri, had worked with you for years, creating a small "Kashmir" within your establishment.

Your friendships with the city's intellectuals, scholars, and community leaders were remarkable. Daily gatherings at your hotel saw discussions ranging from local issues to national politics. I recall that, despite your immense respect for Fatima Jinnah, you supported Ayub Khan, believing Islam emphasised a woman's role as the ruler of her home. This sparked occasional debates at home, particularly with your wife, who, despite her lack of political knowledge, sympathised with Fatima

Jinnah as a fellow woman. On one occasion, this led to a brief disagreement, but you soon apologised and restored harmony.

You deeply revered Islamic scholars and considered attending their gatherings an honour. This respect was undoubtedly rooted in your close association with the late Hazrat Ataullah Shah Bukhari of the Majlis-e-Ahrar. While maintaining strong ties with Ahl-e-Hadith leaders like Maulana Siddiq and Maulana Abdul Qadir Rupuri, you also cherished friendships with Barelvi figures such as Sahibzada Faiz-ul-Hassan. You held the famous Deobandi scholar Mufti Syed Siyah-ud-Din Kakakhail in high regard, entrusting him to lead your funeral prayer. On the day of your funeral, the entire city gathered, with scholars from every school of thought joining in to bid you farewell.

دیکھ لو آج پھر نہ دیکھو گے

غالب بے مثال کی صورت

Look, you will not see it again today

Such an unprecedented situation will not be seen again

The word has spread, but the memories continue to stand in rows. Who should I take and whose should I leave! I know that the flowers of love are in the pots of the eyes, which are watered under the protection of the eyelids, but the harvest of years has ripened and is now gathered in this flowerpot of the heart and is being poured on these pages. Perhaps this would not have happened even today if this day of December 3 had not demanded and demanded indelible impressions. In fact, when a person carries the lamp of sorrows on his palm, its light makes the scars of happy memories visible on his face and then sometimes a person becomes a spectacle in love, but if this lamp of sorrow is hidden and lit in the heart, its light illuminates and perfumes the soul. Then a person becomes a part of the pain and suffering of others. This is the reason why for almost the last six decades, the lamp of your memories has not been dimmed. The word has spread, but the memories continue to stand in rows. Who should I take and whose should I leave! I know that the flowers of love are in the pots of the eyes, which are watered under the protection of the eyelids, but the harvest of years has ripened and is now gathered in this flowerpot of the heart and is being poured on these pages. Perhaps this would not have happened even today if this day of December 3 had not demanded and demanded indelible impressions. In fact, when a person carries the lamp of sorrows on his palm, its light makes the scars of happy memories visible on his face and then sometimes a person becomes a spectacle in love, but if this lamp of sorrow is hidden and lit in the heart, its light illuminates and perfumes the soul. Then a person becomes a part of the pain and suffering of others. This is the reason why for almost the last six decades, the lamp of your memories has not been dimmed.

اندر بھی زمیں کے روشنی ہو

مٹی میں چراغ رکھ دیا ہے

There is light in the earth too

I have placed a lamp in the soil

I know why and where you have gone, yet more or less every day I see countless such questions swirling in my heart. Now, many have come to your house in the neighbourhood of Aros. On one hand, you have kept your mother's love aside and along with that, you have also invited your life

partner. Where your uncle and uncle are participating in this gathering, your young son Ijaz Malik, whose eyes have not yet been wet, and Ehsan Malik, who is also very young, are also sitting with you in a gathering.

معشوق ریاض اٹھ گئے اس بزم سے کیا کیا
جاتی ہوئی دنیا ہے رہے نام خدا کا

***Beloved Riaz got up, what is being done with this party?
The world is passing away, let the name of God be with you.***

I remember your unsavoury way of telling stories, with what wisdom and wisdom you would instill the desired advice in our hearts. You never hid the suffering of your poor homeland, but always remembered it as a lesson and brought it to our hearts. You advised us to keep Pakistan a miraculous state and dearer than our lives, that there is no greater blessing in the world than the sacrifice and self-sacrifice of millions of lives. Your hard workday and night had blessed us with all the rewards of life, but the memory of Kashmir often drowned us. You left no stone unturned in educating and training all of us. You were an example in family upbringing. When you built a house with the grace of God, you provided all the comforts of living in a part of the house to many homeless members of the family. You tried your whole life to ensure that the legitimate desire of a child did not become "longing" and that he was forced to say, "I wish! It had been like this." You did not like to hear this. I myself was content and practically encouraged him.

Once during the summer vacations, a group of school students were ready to go to Swat and Gilgit for a study tour. I also got my name written down. When I asked for your permission, you gave permission after much insistence, but what do I see that you yourself came to the railway station to see me off and in parting, I had a long conversation with my headmaster, Mr. Zakauallah Sahib, and other teachers. This agreement was later revealed that a certain amount of money was quietly handed over to the headmaster for travel expenses so that none of my wishes would be turned into regret. I also brought several baskets of fruits with me, which all my fellow students enjoyed very much. When I returned from a month-long tour, I learned from my family that you remembered me a lot every night, especially during the mango meal, and that you were so eager that you used to listen to the letters I had written several times a day. During this trip, I bought a "Swati style" cap which you kept on for many days to please me, even though I knew that you always used a Qaraquli cap.

خواب بن کر رہ گئیں ہیں کیسی کیسی محفلیں
خیال بن کر رہ گئے ہیں کیسے کیسے آشنا

***What kind of gatherings have become dreams?
How familiar have thoughts become?***

How much did you care about your mother's pleasure? You stayed with her all your life, even though the houses of other children were also close. Such unparalleled love, once in winter, you bought a warm blanket for her for a hundred rupees, presented it to your mother at home, and she

immediately embraced it with love. What came into her heart that she asked the price of this warm blanket? You kept on being quite evasive, but finally, when you were forced to tell her, you told her the extremely unusual price simply so that her mother would not get angry after hearing the real price, considering it a waste of money.

ہمارے بعد اندھیرا ہے گا محفل میں
بہت چراغ جلاؤ گے روشنی کیلئے

***There will be darkness in the gathering after us
You will light many lamps for light***

You had a great desire that I travel abroad for higher education. For this, you even advised your close friend Muhammad Hanif Sahib from his deathbed. I was also listening. This is the reason why this desire of yours has supported me despite numerous obstacles and now a time has come when I have travelled more than half the world, but still, some foreign trip awaits me every year.

You have left your immense memories in the hearts of everyone who is related to you and have gone to your beloved Lord. I know that death is not a new thing, everyone has tasted its taste, neither a prophet nor a saint is exempt from the law of death, whoever comes leaves this world after fulfilling his appointed time, it is a great blessing for someone to leave this world in a state of faith. Then coming into this world is actually a prelude to leaving, but some who leave experience such grief for their eternal separation that it is very painful and intense, and it takes a lifetime to cope with this shock. After all, you too could not wait for your mother for more than three months and went to sleep by her side forever.

ہے رشک اک جہان کو جو ہر کی موت پر

یہ اس کی دین ہے جسے پروردگار دے

***The whole world is jealous of the death of the essence
This is the religion of the one whom God gives***

Some people's departure is not even known to their neighbours, and even if it happens, there is no one to cry for them except a few eyes. Some people's families are saddened by their departure, but some people are such that their departure causes a world of sorrow and grief. Whoever hears the news, their eyes become moist, and their hearts are filled with sorrow. With their departure, the seat of love and affection becomes golden, the balance of love and compassion is turned upside down, and the entire family is deprived of their prayers, blessings, and attention. Your death is not the death of a person, but the death of an action whose void will remain for years to come. Your death is the death of humility and modesty, the death of nobility and decency, the death of a compassionate father, a loving husband, and a sincere friend. The death of a great man whose footsteps life finds its way to. The death of a high-ranking creative father with whom a chapter of love has been completely closed. Your heartbeat has stopped and badly trampled the heartbeat of hundreds of hearts.

You were a beacon of light for us, in whose light the courage to face difficulties returned. You yourself used to melt like a candle and provide light to a world. In the harsh sun of the world, you were present as a very refreshing shadow on everyone's head, you yourself used to distribute the wealth

of peace to everyone, being restless. When you spoke, such priceless pearls would fall from your mouth that your swing would seem narrow to accommodate everyone. If you had remained silent, you would have been a high example of dignity and tranquility. What virtue should I mention and what deprivation should I point out now, as if now even walking barefoot on these rocky stones in the scorching sun has become a habit.

Grief affects different personalities in different ways. For some people, the news of grief falls like an electric current, for some people, the current of grief runs through them and soaks them, for some people, after hearing the news of grief, their minds become blank, then the grief falls drop by drop. When I saw you too, decorated with flowers, I suddenly became blank. I knew that now the grief would fall drop by drop, it would continue to fall, my greatest benefactor who was gone. The greatest observation of my life, that which was the greatest kindness of Allah upon me, after whose departure I was left completely alone, as if milk is taken out of an earthen bowl and now only an empty vessel remains! You were a gift from Allah from which we all used to benefit and now Allah has called you back. What a day you have found for the journey to the hereafter. After offering Friday prayers, we all returned quickly, and it was found that for an hour straight, he continued to advise his life partner with great satisfaction to face the hot and cold winds of the world, humbly sought clarification of his affairs, and raised his eyes to the sky and prayed with great helplessness.

O Ghafoor-ur-Raheem! With my wrong deeds, I am appearing in your court as a candidate for your mercy. If you forgive me, it is no big deal. I have also completed my worldly journey without any help from you, and it is still the same. He kept repeating these Persian verses of Allama Iqbal

تو غنی از ہر دو عالم من فقیر
روز محشر عذر ہائے من پذیر
گر تو می بینم حسابم ناگزیر
از نگاہ مصطفیٰ پنہاں بگیر

O Allah: You are the Giver of both worlds, while I am Your beggar and poor.

On the Day of Judgment, accept my apology and forgive me.

If the account of my deeds is inescapable, then,

O my Master, keep it hidden from the eyes of my master Muhammad Mustafa (peace be upon him).

He met his Lord while reciting the Kalima Shahadah, making the people present in the room witnesses. Inna Lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un

إِنَّا لِلّٰهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

"Indeed, we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return."

The sadness that is descending like a black cloud in my heart, lower and lower..... .lower and lower, I hold my heart and pray for them:

O Ghafoor-ur-Raheem! You are the Lord, we are the servants, You are the prostrate, we are the prostrate, You are the giver, we are the taker, You are the merciful, we are the seekers, forgive the mistakes and grant the respected father a high place in Paradise. Allahumma Amen

وہ لوگ ہم نے ایک ہی شوخی میں کھودیئے
ڈھونڈا تھا آسماں نے جنہیں خاک چھان کر

*We dug up those people in a single joke
The sky had found them by sifting the dust
(On the occasion of the 59th anniversary of the respected father*

Tuesday 3rd December 2024

ICC and Israel: The Battle for Justice

Netanyahu's Arrest: A Global Challenge

The ongoing conflict between Hamas and Israel, which escalated following Hamas's attacks on Israel and the subsequent Israeli military responses in Gaza, has grown increasingly dire over time. In this context, allegations of war crimes against Israeli officials have been raised not only by Hamas but also by numerous international human rights organizations. These accusations gained significant momentum, culminating in the International Criminal Court (ICC) issuing arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant. Several Western nations have declared their intent to enforce the ICC's decision.

Reliable sources report that over 45,000 Palestinians have been killed and more than 80,000 injured, including 134–146 journalists and media workers, 120 academics, and over 224 humanitarian aid workers. Additionally, 179 United Nations staff members are among the casualties. Violations of international laws designed to protect civilians during armed conflicts constitute war crimes. These laws are codified in various international treaties, such as the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907.

Both parties in a conflict are bound by international humanitarian laws to minimize harm to civilians and mitigate the impact of war. However, merely labeling a country or its leaders as war criminals does not automatically establish their guilt. Irrespective of the degree of adherence to these laws, it is essential to understand what constitutes war crimes, the applicable international laws, the conditions under which they are enforced, and the process of holding perpetrators accountable.

The Role of the International Criminal Court (ICC)

Established in 1998 in The Hague, Netherlands, the ICC is an independent body tasked with prosecuting individuals accused of grave crimes against the global community. Its jurisdiction includes war crimes, genocide, crimes against humanity, and acts of aggression during armed conflict. While any country can prosecute such individuals in its domestic courts, the ICC intervenes only as a last resort when national systems are unwilling or unable to take action.

The ICC operates under the Rome Statute, its foundational treaty, which clearly defines war crimes in Articles 6, 7, and 8. These provisions, along with precedents set by international tribunals such as those for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, have shaped the modern understanding of war crimes. Historical trials like the Nuremberg Trials also played a crucial role in developing these definitions, later incorporated into the Rome Statute.

Defining War Crimes and Genocide

War crimes are broadly defined under international law, taking into account treaties, customary practices, judicial rulings, and the practices of global organizations. For instance, genocide is characterized as the intentional destruction, in whole or in part, of a national, racial, or religious group. The United Nations' 1948 *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* details preventive measures and punitive actions for such crimes.

Examples of genocidal acts include inflicting severe physical or mental harm on members of a group, creating conditions that threaten the group's survival, forcibly transferring children to other groups, or imposing measures to prevent births within the group. The definition of genocide was first used in the Nuremberg Trials against Nazi leaders and has since been applied to atrocities in Rwanda, Cambodia, Bosnia, Iraq (against the Yazidis), and Myanmar (against the Rohingya).

Protections for Civilians in Armed Conflict

Article 7 of the Rome Statute emphasizes the protection of civilians not directly involved in hostilities. Targeting civilians or using weapons that disproportionately harm them, such as landmines or chemical weapons, is prohibited. International law also mandates care for the wounded and sick, including injured combatants. Acts such as taking hostages or forced displacement are classified as war crimes. Special protections are extended to children and cultural heritage under the 1950 Geneva Conventions, with the ICC having jurisdiction to prosecute violations of these provisions.

Although the ICC provides a framework for accountability, it faces challenges due to the refusal of some countries—such as the United States, China, Russia, and Israel—to ratify the Rome Statute. Consequently, while the ICC's jurisdiction is global, its enforcement relies heavily on international cooperation. Cases of war crimes and genocide, such as the Holocaust or the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya, highlight the importance of such mechanisms in delivering justice, despite the complex geopolitical landscape.

According to Article 8, war crimes can only occur during times of war, but crimes against humanity can be committed even during peacetime. These include acts such as violence against civilians, enforced disappearances, murder, displacement, sexual violence, and rape. Legal experts on war crimes highlight a key aspect: these crimes must constitute systematic attacks against civilians. For instance, if police in a country torture an individual, it falls under the Convention Against Torture, as it represents an isolated incident. However, if torture is carried out systematically and on a large scale against a population, it is considered a crime against humanity. Similarly, if an armed group invades civilian areas to loot, kidnap, and commit sexual violence, these acts also qualify as crimes against humanity.

The International Criminal Court (ICC) has the authority to investigate any individual or state, ranging from heads of state to generals who overstep or violate their orders. When it is proven that a war crime has been committed, what is the process for bringing the accused to justice in the ICC? In this regard, "punishment is meted out to individuals (e.g., a battalion commander or general); the state itself is not expected to endorse irresponsible actions, as accountability rests with the state."

If a state allows, acknowledges, or incorporates such actions into its policy, it is in violation of international law. In such a case, states worldwide are compelled to take a stand against the offending state, severing diplomatic ties and imposing sanctions, and, if necessary, using force to convey the message that such actions are unacceptable. If, despite these measures, the state continues to violate international laws, other nations may decide to deploy a joint military intervention to prevent war crimes and protect civilians. In this context, the principle of *Responsibility to Protect (R2P)*, endorsed by the United Nations Secretary-General, comes into effect.

It is noteworthy that on 5 February 2021, the International Criminal Court (ICC) ruled that it has jurisdiction to adjudicate war crimes and atrocities committed in Palestinian territories. This landmark decision has paved the way for the ICC to investigate war crimes in the 'occupied Palestinian territories' by Israel. Furthermore, the court's jurisdiction extends to areas occupied by Israel since 1967, including Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank. The court clarified that this ruling was based on the rules of its founding documents and does not attempt to determine statehood or legal boundaries.



The court's prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, had previously called for an investigation, stating that there were "reasonable grounds to believe" that war crimes had been committed in the Palestinian territories. This decision was issued exactly a year after Bensouda declared that sufficient evidence had been collected during preliminary reviews to meet the criteria for opening an investigation into alleged war crimes in the Palestinian territories.

Following the ICC's announcement of arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, several Western nations stated that they would comply with the court's decision. Among Israel's Western allies, the UK, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy, Ireland, Spain, and Canada have all announced that they will honour their international obligations concerning this matter. The issuance of arrest warrants for Netanyahu and Gallant by the ICC has sparked strong reactions from Israeli politicians. While arrest warrants have also been issued for Hamas' military commander Mohammed Deif, the decision has been welcomed by Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and civilians in Gaza.

When asked if Netanyahu would be detained if he entered the UK, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer's spokesperson declined to comment on "hypotheticals" but clarified that "the government will fulfil its legal obligations." Similarly, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, when questioned about Netanyahu's potential arrest if he visited Canada, affirmed that "we will abide by international law and adhere to all rules and orders of international courts."

Hamas, on the other hand, refrained from commenting on the arrest warrant for its military commander Mohammed Deif but welcomed the overall decision. However, Hamas appears relatively unconcerned about the possibility of Deif's arrest. Israel believes that he was killed last year, although Hamas has yet to confirm his death.

In addition to Deif, the ICC intended to pursue action against two other Hamas leaders, Yahya Sinwar and Ismail Haniyeh, but their deaths have already been confirmed. In a statement, Hamas called upon "all nations worldwide to cooperate with the ICC in bringing Zionist war criminals Netanyahu and Gallant to justice and to work urgently to halt the genocide against civilians in the Gaza Strip." Ordinary Palestinian citizens from Gaza have also welcomed the decision.

Mohammad Ali, a 40-year-old displaced resident originally from Gaza City, now living in the central Deir al-Balah area, said: "We have been targeted by terrorism. We have been starved, our homes have been destroyed, and we have lost our children, sons, and loved ones. We welcome this decision, and of course, we hope that the ICC's ruling will be implemented." Munira al-Shami, whose sister was killed by Israeli forces last month, described the ICC's decision as a step toward justice for "tens of thousands of victims, including my sister Wafa."

While 124 countries, including the UK, are signatories to the ICC, nations such as the United States, Russia, China, and Israel are not. Technically, this means that if Netanyahu or Gallant were to step foot in any ICC member state, they should be arrested and handed over to the court. However, international legal experts have expressed scepticism about the likelihood of either individual being presented at The Hague for trial.

The last time Netanyahu travelled abroad, he visited the United States, where he enjoys full immunity. However, he also visited several ICC member states last year, including the UK. Observers suggest it is highly unlikely that Netanyahu would risk travelling to these countries again under such circumstances. Furthermore, ICC signatory nations may be reluctant to face a situation where they would have to arrest Netanyahu.

Thursday's ruling is undoubtedly a significant blow to Israel's international standing. It challenges not only the individuals named but also Israel's ongoing efforts to portray its military campaigns in Gaza as a battle between good and evil. For Palestinians, particularly those from Gaza, this decision represents a sense of validation, as an international institution has finally acknowledged the weight of accusations of Israeli war crimes.

Theoretically, major interventions, such as sending forces to prevent genocide in another country, fall under the mandate of the United Nations. However, if the UN fails to act and Israel continues its violations with impunity, some nations might begin considering independent action (as evidenced by the recent interception of a Yemeni-fired rocket by a US naval ship). Such measures, however, would pose a threat to global peace.

Prominent individuals previously convicted of war crimes by the ICC or other international tribunals include Serbian President Slobodan Milošević, Liberian President Charles Taylor, Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić, Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori, and figures from World War II such as German Admiral and President Karl Dönitz and Japanese Prime Ministers and generals Hideki Tojo and Kuniaki Koiso.

The question arises: should Netanyahu's alleged war crimes implicate the leaders of nations that openly supplied arms to Israel and endorsed its attacks in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen? If so, who would issue warrants for recently elected members of the US administration, who have openly compared Hamas to animals and advocated for its complete eradication while maintaining their prior positions?

Thursday 5th December 2024

China's Global Military Diplomacy: Challenges, Opportunities, and Progress

China's Naval Power and Its Strategy on the Global Stage

Trump's re-election and his cabinet nominations, contrary to his campaign promises, have sparked new waves of concern not only in the Middle East but across the globe. These nominations signal a clear intent to implement policies, particularly against China, which he couldn't fully execute during his first term. However, many in China view Trump as an amusing figure, with memes of his dances circulating on social media. A Chinese political analyst remarked, *"I find Trump amusing, but he's erratic. Who knows what he might do?"*

Trump has nominated Marco Rubio as Secretary of State, who has already declared Beijing a defining threat for this century. He has also selected Mike Waltz as National Security Advisor, who wrote earlier this month that the U.S. must swiftly resolve conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East to focus on the real threat posed by the Chinese Communist Party.

This has led global analysts to warn that China is already preparing for Trump's second term. Despite widespread apprehensions, Trump's return isn't entirely surprising to China. It is expected that come January, when Trump assumes office, the world should brace for volatility in U.S.-China relations. Even before Trump's re-election, tensions between the two nations had intensified. Under Biden, the imposition of tariffs on Chinese goods, geopolitical disputes over Taiwan, and differences regarding the Ukraine conflict added to the strain.

Amidst all this, dialogue between the two nations has continued. Several senior U.S. officials have visited Beijing, and Chinese President Xi Jinping expressed willingness to collaborate with America's new leadership. In his last meeting with Biden, Xi cautioned Washington against a *"new Cold War,"* emphasizing that such a war would be unwinnable. Xi further declared, *"Blocking China's progress is unwise, unacceptable, and doomed to fail."* Beijing has long accused the U.S. and its allies of attempting to impede China's rise through tariffs, restrictions on advanced AI chip access, and military alliances in the South China Sea.

Lyle Morris of the Asia Society's Centre for China highlights that Trump's choice of Rubio and Waltz for key positions indicates an administration poised to adopt a more confrontational stance toward China. While Trump's personal rapport with Xi could leave room for negotiations, his cabinet selections suggest a firm and aggressive policy approach. Both Rubio and Waltz perceive China as a direct threat to U.S. security and economic stability.

Many industrial groups in China fear Trump's promises to impose heavy taxes on Chinese goods, which could significantly impact China's exports—an essential pillar of its economy. Consequently, Chinese business circles appear to be gearing up for potential risks, though the precise direction of Trump's policies remains uncertain.

In a historical context, the Temple of Heaven in Beijing lies north of the Forbidden City, which housed China's royal family for nearly five centuries. In 2017, President Xi hosted Trump here—a unique honor never extended to any other U.S. president since the establishment of the People's Republic of China. Xi closed the area to the public for the occasion, offering Trump a personal tour. The visit

was broadcast live on television, culminating in a dinner featuring Kung Pao chicken. A video of Trump's granddaughter, Arabella Kushner, singing a Chinese song also went viral, symbolizing a high point in Sino-American relations.

However, this relationship soured in 2019 with the outbreak of COVID-19 from Wuhan, which Trump repeatedly dubbed the "*China virus*." Trade tensions further escalated as Trump

imposed \$300 billion in tariffs on Chinese goods, marking the start of a retaliatory trade war.

As Trump begins his second term, he will face a stronger Xi Jinping, now serving his third term and likely to remain China's leader for life. China already boasts the world's largest land and naval forces, and Washington is increasingly alarmed by its rapid expansion of nuclear weapon stockpiles. While Trump announced his cabinet appointments, China's state media aired a video showcasing its cutting-edge J-35A fighter jet at an air show, maneuvering sharply between skyward ascents and steep descents—a not-so-subtle display of its growing military prowess.

China's Military Developments and Strategic Diplomacy: A Rising Global Power

China is now the second country in the world, after the United States, to possess two cutting-edge stealth fighter jets in its fleet. The world's first two J-20S stealth aircraft were also displayed at an exhibition recently. Last week, researchers from California's Middlebury Institute of International Studies analysed satellite images indicating that China is working on nuclear propulsion for a new aircraft carrier. Tong Zhao, from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, suggests that such advancements raise serious concerns regarding China's evolving "first-use" policy, where nuclear weapons could be employed pre-emptively in a crisis.

According to Zhao, "Unless Trump himself takes an interest in such matters—which seems unlikely—both nations may find themselves on the brink of a fierce nuclear arms race, impacting global stability."

Under President Xi Jinping's leadership, China has adopted an increasingly assertive stance, particularly regarding its claims over the South China Sea and Taiwan. The U.S. is now more alarmed, fearing that China might be preparing for a military attack on Taiwan, which Beijing considers a breakaway province destined for reunification. Will the U.S. defend Taiwan under Trump's leadership? This question is often posed to every American president. Trump, however, offered a different perspective, stating that he would not use military force because President Xi knows that he is "crazy" and that any aggression would lead to severe tariffs on Chinese imports. Despite Trump's statements about avoiding foreign conflicts, most experts anticipate that Washington will continue providing military aid to Taipei.

Firstly, the U.S. is legally bound to sell defensive weapons to Taiwan. Secondly, Trump's administration has sold more arms to Taiwan than any previous administration, with strong bipartisan support to sustain military aid. Thus, it is unlikely that Trump will significantly alter the sale of weapons to Taiwan.

Increased Sino-American Tensions Amid China's Expanding Military Diplomacy

Over the past two years, amidst escalating political tensions with the U.S., Beijing has ramped up its global military diplomacy. This trend is particularly evident in its engagements with Russia, the Asia-Pacific region, and its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) partner countries. Since January 2023, after China abandoned its "Zero-COVID" policy, there has been a surge in high-level meetings, military exchanges, goodwill visits, joint naval exercises, and training sessions. A review of activities from January 2023 to October 2024 highlights significant expansion in China's military outreach.



These engagements include senior Chinese officials meeting foreign counterparts, goodwill visits, and other military events, excluding joint military exercises. Data from official sources, such as the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Daily, Huanqiu Wang, and China's Ministry of Defence website, reveal that between January 2023 and October 31, 2024, China executed a deliberate strategy to amplify its activities for achieving its objectives.

China conducted 148 military diplomatic activities in 2023 and 169 by October 2024, offering crucial insights into its strategy. Over the past two years, China and Russia engaged in 11 meetings, six military exercises, and six goodwill visits. Nearly half of these activities involved high-level meetings between Chinese and Russian forces, complemented by six joint drills and six port calls. This uptick reflects the evolving "no limits" partnership announced in 2022, underscoring shared interests in countering U.S. influence and maintaining regional and global security—particularly in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war.

China's military diplomacy has also intensified with Vietnam and Cambodia, ranking them second and third after Russia in terms of engagements. Military diplomacy with Vietnam included nine meetings, nine military-level exchanges, and three goodwill visits, while Cambodia saw three goodwill visits and two training sessions. With its close ally Pakistan, China prioritised meetings over military events. Similarly, despite U.S. efforts to encircle China through the Quad alliance and its active collaboration with India, senior Chinese officials have maintained meetings with both Indian and American counterparts.

South Africa has been engaged in meetings and goodwill visits with China, while Indonesia has primarily conducted goodwill visits. Before COVID-19 in 2019, China held three high-level military meetings with North Korea, attended by Zhang Youxia, Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission. However, since lifting its COVID-19 restrictions, China has not publicly resumed military diplomacy with North Korea, reflecting a stagnation in their relations. Experts suggest that China is taking this approach to avoid Western sanctions that might arise from indirectly supporting Russia through North Korea.

On 6 October 2024, marking the 75th anniversary of China-North Korea relations, China sent Zhao Leji, a senior Communist Party leader, to Pyongyang. However, no military leaders from either side participated in the event. North Korea's absence from the 2024 Xiangshan Forum, an annual security summit it typically attends, was notable. Similarly, China's last military activity with Iran **occurred in**

April 2022, when then-Chinese Defence Minister Wei Fenghe met with then-President Ebrahim Raisi. Since then, no public bilateral military diplomacy has taken place, although Iran participated in joint naval exercises with China and Russia in March 2023 and March 2024.

China is actively strengthening its military relations with key ASEAN nations to solidify its dominance in the South China Sea. Despite disputes with Vietnam and Indonesia, Beijing maintains military diplomacy with both countries, which are significant Asian trade partners. Laos and Cambodia, considered China's closest political allies, are among the five ASEAN nations with which Beijing has focused its military engagements, alongside Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia.

In 2024, China's military diplomacy activities were predominantly concentrated in Asia and Oceania. Nearly half of its military engagements in Europe were with Russia. However, significant meetings also took place with the United Kingdom, Belarus, Serbia, and France. Following a maritime law enforcement agreement with Russia's Federal Security Service in April 2023, Chinese coast guard patrols increased in 2024. Joint air, naval, and coast guard patrols between China and Russia expanded across the Bering Sea, the North Pacific, the Arctic, the Pacific, and the Northwestern Pacific during this period.

The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has rapidly risen to prominence in Chinese military diplomacy, now ranking second only to the PLA itself. Beyond patrols and training, the PLAN has expanded its goodwill efforts through port calls and medical missions, offering free healthcare via its hospital ships. By October 2024, it had conducted 22 port calls and 12 medical visits, compared to 17 port calls and eight medical visits in 2023. Naval missions in the Gulf of Aden have further enhanced China's goodwill activities, boosting its capabilities and safeguarding its developmental interests. Typically, China deploys three fleets to protect its sea lanes from piracy and ensure the safety of international shipping, but in 2024, only one mission was stationed in the Gulf of Aden. Analysts view this as a strategic shift in Chinese naval operations.

This strategy allows a naval fleet to remain in the region for an extended period, supported logistically by China's base in Djibouti. Globally, China has been hosting conferences, forums, sporting events, air shows, parades, and defence exhibitions to enhance its soft power. These activities have increased in 2024 compared to 2023. Between January 2023 and October 2024, China hosted a total of 16 such events, including nine in 2024 alone. It also sent military representatives to 18 international events, including three defence exhibitions and five air shows, primarily held in Asia, Oceania, the Middle East, and Africa.

While China claims to have eradicated poverty, millions of workers and factory labourers who contributed to its rise are now worried about what lies ahead. China's future, as well as its economic stability, could partially depend on how serious Trump is about tariffs on Chinese goods. According to experts, Beijing is better prepared this time for any eventuality.

"China has already begun diversifying its sources of agricultural imports, particularly from Brazil, Argentina, and Russia, while increasing its export volume to non-US allied countries," analysts note. Additionally, the recent restructuring of local government debt domestically is paving the way to mitigate the negative impacts of a potential trade war with the Trump administration.

The United States has invested billions of dollars in China, including:

2023: \$126.91 billion in direct investments

2022: \$122.21 billion in direct investments, a 9% increase from 2021

2021: \$116 billion in direct investments

2020: \$116.51 billion in direct investments

The United States' direct investments in China are led by manufacturing, wholesale trade, and finance and insurance. China's foreign direct investment (FDI) in the United States was \$28.7 billion in 2022, a 7.2% decrease from 2021.

Notably, billionaire Elon Musk, a close ally of Trump, is among the stakeholders in this investment. His company Tesla heavily relies on China, where nearly half of its electric vehicle components are manufactured. Chinese leaders may consider whether American investors, including Musk, could influence Trump's trade policies.

However, the great power struggle of the 21st century is not limited to trade. President Xi's vision includes making China the world's dominant power. Some experts believe that this is where another Trump presidency could provide Beijing with an opportunity to realise Xi's ambitions. Certainly, China's strategy of advancing incrementally could help it achieve this goal.

Saturday 7 December 2024

Russia, Iran, and Turkey: The Clash of Global Powers in Syria

The Syrian Crisis: Bashar al-Assad flees

The ongoing inhumane bloodshed has barely paused when once again, the sudden eruption of war in Syria has unleashed chaos, akin to an apocalypse. It appears that the recent attacks on Aleppo are part of a calculated plan, taking advantage of a critical moment where Iran and its proxy groups are engaged in battles for their survival. This seems to be the ideal time to exploit their vulnerabilities, exacerbated by the regional turmoil ignited by Hamas' assault on Israel on 7th October last year. That attack and Israel's retaliatory actions shattered the region's fragile equilibrium. The events of the past few days in Syria are clear evidence that the conflicts in the Middle East are far from abating; in fact, they are intensifying.

Despite nearly a decade of war after 2011, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad managed to retain power, primarily by relying on his willingness to sacrifice his nation to preserve the regime inherited from his father. Assad leaned heavily on powerful allies such as Russia, Iran, and Lebanon's Hezbollah, who helped counter groups supported by the US and affluent Middle Eastern nations, including the so-called Islamic State.

However, Iran has faced Israeli strikes, while Hezbollah, which once dispatched its elite fighters to Syria, has suffered heavy losses due to similar attacks. Although Russia has carried out airstrikes against Syrian rebels in recent days, its military resources remain deeply entangled in the war in Ukraine. Consequently, the war in Syria has never truly ended. However, it has faded from international headlines, partly because reporting from within Syria has become nearly impossible. While fighting subsided in some areas, the underlying conflict remained unresolved.

Bashar al-Assad's government has not regained full control as it had prior to 2011, even though its prisons are overflowing with detainees. Until recently, major cities and key highways were under Assad's control. However, following the astonishing defeat of Syrian troops at the hands of the rebel coalition known as **Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)** since 27th November, the region has been left stunned. Emerging from the Idlib province near Turkey's border, HTS fighters managed to capture significant territories in mere days.

Just two days after these swift attacks, images surfaced from Aleppo's ancient city, once considered an "invincible bastion" of the Syrian army between 2012 and 2015. Back then, Aleppo was a major battleground between government forces and rebels. After the city's capture and the Syrian army's defeat, calm seemed to have returned. Social media showed images of armed fighters in uniforms queuing at fast-food outlets for fried chicken—a stark contrast to the bloody battles of the past.

HTS, which severed ties with al-Qaeda in 2016, has a complicated history, including infighting between the two groups. The United Nations Security Council, along with the US, EU, Turkey, and the UK, designates HTS as a terrorist organisation. Its leader, Abu Mohammad al-Julani, has a long-standing presence in Iraq and Syria. In recent years, he has sought to distance the group from its jihadist roots and expand its support base. HTS now avoids using Islamist or jihadist rhetoric in its

communications and declarations. According to defence analyst Muna al-Lami, HTS aims to reframe itself as a resistance force against the Syrian government, shedding its extremist image.

It is worth noting that the Syrian people generally do not favour extremist jihadist ideologies. Following the anti-government protests in 2011, many citizens distanced themselves from the movement once democratic protests were overtaken by jihadist groups. Fear of groups like Islamic State even drove some Syrians to reluctantly align with the government.

The recent offensive led by HTS relates closely to the political landscape of northern Syria. The north-west is dominated by the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), led by Kurds, with 900 American troops stationed in the region. Turkey also plays a significant role, deploying troops along its borders and supporting certain armed groups. Reports from Syria suggest that the rebels have seized significant military equipment, including government helicopters, and are now advancing towards Hama, another key city route to Damascus.

Undoubtedly, the Syrian government and its allies will retaliate with aerial strikes. The rebels lack air power, but reports suggest they recently used drones to assassinate a senior Syrian intelligence officer. This escalating situation has raised international alarm bells.

The resurgence of large-scale rebel offensives in Syria has dispelled the notion that their military strength had diminished. The unexpected attack by HTS led to the capture of Aleppo, Syria's second-largest city, forcing government forces to retreat. As a result, Russia conducted airstrikes in Syria for the first time since 2016, targeting rebels in Aleppo. Fourteen years after the onset of Syria's civil war, this renewed conflict underscores fears that the crisis is far from over.

Since 2018, Syria's civil war has fragmented the country into three parts: areas controlled by President Bashar al-Assad's government, territories held by Islamist rebels, and regions dominated by Kurdish forces. But what are the reasons that make ending Syria's civil war so difficult?

Syria: A Global Chessboard

Syria has become a global chessboard where rival powers pursue their strategic objectives by supporting local allies. On one side is Bashar al-Assad's government, backed by Iran and Russia. On the other are armed opposition groups supported by Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the United States. As the conflict escalated, extremist groups such as the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) and Al-Qaeda entered the fray, further heightening global concerns.

Syrian Kurds, backed by the United States, aspire to establish the own governance, adding to the complexity of the crisis. Russia and Iran have played a pivotal role in sustaining Assad's regime, while Turkey has supported armed groups near its border in the north. In 2020, Russia and Turkey brokered a ceasefire agreement in Idlib, establishing a security corridor for joint patrols. While the agreement reduced large-scale clashes, the Syrian government has not regained full control.

A Resurgence Amid Weakness

Taking advantage of the weakened government, opposition groups have regained momentum, as Assad's key allies, Russia and Iran, are entangled in other conflicts. Assad's regime, which has long

relied on external support, has found itself isolated. Hezbollah suffered losses due to Israeli actions, while Russia's focus shifted to Ukraine. In this vacuum, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) launched a sudden offensive, capturing territories.

The resurgence of fighting is also tied to persistent local instability in the north and a lack of external support, which Assad's regime heavily depended on. Years of civil war have devastated Syria's economy and infrastructure, leaving millions displaced. The road to recovery remains unclear.

Humanitarian Crisis

According to the UN, Syria's pre-war population of 22 million has been halved. Nearly 2 million people live in camps without basic facilities, while over 6 million have sought refuge in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. Turkey alone hosts over 5 million Syrian refugees. The camps, already housing 2 million, are at full capacity, and further conflict could force more people into these overcrowded shelters.

Before this latest conflict, over 15 million Syrians required humanitarian aid, with 12 million facing food insecurity. The February 2023 earthquake worsened the situation, killing nearly 6,000 people in Syria and affecting over 8 million.



Assad's Grip Through Force

The Assad government has relied on violence and repression to maintain power, intensifying public anger and prolonging the conflict. A 2021 UN report documented evidence of chemical weapon use, airstrikes on civilian areas, and sieges of opposition-controlled regions, depriving civilians of food and obstructing humanitarian aid.

Julien Barnes, director of the Middle East and North Africa program at the European Council on Foreign Relations, remarked, *“Authoritarian governance is central to this conflict because the Assad regime has consistently refused to compromise or share power.”* By 2020, UN estimates indicated that over 300,000 civilians had been killed in military operations, with many more succumbing to hunger, disease, and lack of healthcare. The Royal United Services Institute noted that the Syrian government prioritizes its survival over good governance.

Sectarian and Political Divides

In addition to political differences, sectarian divides also fuel the conflict. Kurdish-majority areas have remained outside government control since the early days of the war. Remnants of ISIS continue to pose a threat in Syria's vast deserts, while Idlib province has become a stronghold of militant groups led by HTS.

Tensions between opposition factions complicate matters further. Groups supported by Turkey frequently clash with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a Kurdish-led coalition supported by the US. Recently, the Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army claimed control over parts of Aleppo's outskirts, previously under SDF control, exposing divisions among opposition groups.

Recent Rebel Gains

Rebel forces recently captured large parts of Aleppo, Syria's second-largest city, marking a significant shift. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Russian airstrikes targeted Aleppo last week for the first time since 2016. The Observatory reported that over 300 people, including 20 civilians, have been killed since the fighting began on Wednesday.

In 2016, Assad's forces expelled rebels from Aleppo, and no major offensives had occurred there since. Now, Syrian military sources confirm that rebels have infiltrated much of the city, with dozens of soldiers killed or injured.

A City in Turmoil

Military sources revealed that all routes to Aleppo's airport and city centre have been blocked. The Syrian Observatory stated that rebels entered "the majority of the city's areas" with little resistance, as government forces withdrew. City council offices, police stations, and intelligence centers have been abandoned—an unprecedented development.

The Syrian army claims to have regained control of parts of Aleppo and Idlib from HTS and its allies, but videos shared on HTS-linked social media channels show rebel vehicles in the city. Global media corroborated the footage, filmed in Aleppo's western suburbs.

The latest developments illustrate that Syria's conflict is far from over, and the power vacuum created by years of war continues to fuel instability across the region.

After the civil war that erupted in 2011 following pro-democracy protests, over 500,000 people lost their lives in Syria. During this period, opponents of President Bashar al-Assad, including jihadist groups, exploited the chaos and seized control of significant portions of the country.

However, with the assistance of allies like Russia, Iran, and others, the Syrian government eventually regained almost all territories, except for Idlib, which remains under the control of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). In this province, some areas also house Turkish-backed fighters.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Russia carried out 23 airstrikes in Aleppo on Friday. Russian news agencies report that Moscow claims to have targeted "extremist forces" in Syria. Dmitry Peskov, the Kremlin's spokesperson, reaffirmed that Russia will continue supporting the Syrian government to maintain peace in the region.

Who Are the Attackers in Aleppo?

The recent attacks on Aleppo were led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, a group with a longstanding role in the Syrian conflict. HTS originated in 2011 as Jabhat al-Nusra, an al-Qaeda affiliate. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the former leader of ISIS, also played a role in its formation. At the time, it was considered one of Assad's most formidable adversaries. In 2016, the group's leader, Abu Mohammad al-Julani, severed ties with al-Qaeda, dissolved the organisation, and founded HTS by uniting with other factions. Since then, HTS has shifted its focus from establishing a global caliphate to creating a fundamentalist Islamic state within Syria. HTS's recent operations have also dealt significant blows to Iran and its proxies.

The Situation After Years of Stability

For the past four years, it seemed as though the war in Syria had largely concluded, with Bashar al-Assad's government regaining control over most of the country. Assad's success was largely attributed to Russian air support and the military capabilities of his key ally, Iran. However, Iran has resisted acknowledging that Aleppo is no longer under the Syrian government's control. Iranian news agency IRNA quoted Iran's ambassador to Lebanon, Mojtaba Amani, as dismissing reports of Aleppo's fall to "terrorists" as false rumours spread by a "cyber army." Amani reiterated Iran's continued support for the Syrian government and its people.

On the other hand, Arab media is calling the advance of rebel fighters in Aleppo a "blow for Iran." According to *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, the rebels' progress in Syria is a "setback" not only for Russia and the Syrian government but also for Iran. The ongoing fresh battles in Aleppo and other areas are the result of foreign interference by Iran and other foreign powers in Syria. Just as this article was being written, news came in that the Mujahideen had entered Damascus, and it was announced on state TV and radio that the regime of Bashar al-Assad had been overthrown and political prisoners were being released.

On the surface, it appears that the government of Bashar al-Assad in Syria has collapsed within just a few days, but the situation is not that simple, and several factors are involved. The years-long war against his own people had severely weakened Bashar al-Assad's military. However, despite that, the swiftness of these events is truly surprising.

Shortly after the rebels captured Syria's third-largest city, Homs, it was reported that the Mujahideen had entered Damascus. Upon hearing this news, Bashar al-Assad left Damascus in a plane heading to an unknown destination. The head of the Syrian National Coalition, Hadi al-Bahra, stated that with the fall of Bashar al-Assad's government, "the dark era of Syria" had come to an end. He assured the public that the situation in Damascus was secure, and all citizens, irrespective of sectarian or religious differences, were safe in their homes, with no reprisals against anyone.

All Mujahideen present in Damascus were instructed not to enter public institutions, and air firing was banned. Until the formal transfer of power, public institutions will continue to function under the leadership of Prime Minister Mohammad al-Jalali. Mohammad al-Jalali announced that whatever the people choose, he is ready for any method of power transfer. It is noteworthy that the most organized and powerful group, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, is leading the revolution. Compared to other groups, its influence from foreign powers is minimal. Other groups, however, are under the influence of Turkey. It remains to be seen how these groups will maintain coordination with the ones already in place.

In 2015, a resolution was passed by the United Nations Security Council proposing a peace plan. According to this, it was agreed that the Syrian people would decide the future of their country. Free elections would be held, and a new charter would be introduced. However, for this resolution to be implemented, Bashar al-Assad and his family would have to relinquish power. But Bashar al-Assad was unwilling to sacrifice his power. Yet today, time has proven that, in the end, the cries of thousands of innocent people have found their destination.

Monday 9 December 2024

The Kurram Conflict: Sectarian Tension or Global Political Game?

The Story of Zainabiyoun: From Syria to Kurram

Although I have been attempting for quite some time to share my views with readers on global politics, particularly the issues facing the Muslim Ummah, with a specific focus on Pakistan, which is deeply affected by these matters, I have been fortunate enough to receive considerable attention. However, this time, the dangerous trend in Pakistan's politics, which is becoming a source of embarrassment for Pakistanis living abroad, does not seem to concern the country's politicians. Just a few days ago, the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa stormed Islamabad using provincial resources and armed militias. This was such a dangerous step, leading towards civil war, that it shook everyone. Prior to this attack on Islamabad, a terrifying sectarian incident had occurred in the Chief Minister's own province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Kurram district, resulting in the deaths of 32 individuals. Yet, even after the violent protests in Islamabad, he declared civil disobedience and bizarrely stated that they would continue attacking like Mahmud of Ghazni.

It is important to note that Kurram district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is one of the oldest tribal areas in Pakistan, which was formally settled during the British colonial period in the 1890s. The British government, through a deliberate strategy, divided the lands here between two different sects to prevent any organized resistance against them. Local tribal conflicts began around this time, and so the history of tribal disputes in Kurram is over a century old. However, since July of this year, this region has been consistently in the news due to intermittent violent clashes and sectarian attacks.

In 2024 alone, more than 200 people have been killed in various violent incidents in Kurram district, including women and children. After attacks on passenger convoys in Kurram and subsequent militia raids and arson attacks at several locations, it is now widely known that this sectarian conflict is spilling out of Parachinar, with Afghanistan providing direct support, and Taliban fighters crossing the border. Videos have also surfaced on social media showing the flag of the banned Zainabiyon group replacing Pakistan's flag at a check post. It is worth mentioning that on November 21, an attack on a convoy of vehicles in Kurram killed over 50 people, most of whom were from the Shia sect. Earlier in October, a convoy of Sunni tribal passengers was also attacked, resulting in the deaths of 16 people, including women and children.

The next day after the November 21 attack, an armed militia launched an assault on the Sunni-majority area of Bagan in Kurram, killing 32 people and setting hundreds of shops and houses on fire. When security officials were asked about the role of extremist elements in the Kurram conflict, they claimed that the ranks of both sides included militants from banned organizations involved in terrorism at the behest of their foreign masters. Officials also claim that the banned organizations, such as Zainabiyon, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), ISIS, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Sipah-e-Sahaba, and Sipah-e-Mohammad, are involved in the ongoing dispute in Kurram.

Reliable sources indicate that the violence in Kurram is being fuelled by the regional conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Fighters involved in these foreign conflicts have demonstrated their expertise in Kurram, and the use of modern American weaponry in these attacks has also been reported, weapons that were left behind by US forces upon their withdrawal. People from Kurram confirm the

presence of militants affiliated with banned groups in the region, but they also accuse each other of being responsible for the violent events.

A well-informed source from the Bagzai area of Kurram said that while the TTP's presence in Central Kurram is limited, thousands of people from Shia areas are marching in militias. "Who will stop them?" he asked. A teacher from a village near Bagan also confirmed the presence of supporters of banned organizations in their areas, stating, "People who identify with Zainabiyon and the Taliban use disrespectful language against Islam's sacred personalities and abuse each other. This provokes the local people, and they believe that this is why attacks on passenger buses in Kunj Alizai in October and on Lower Kurram in November occurred." According to him, military operations have been carried out in Lower and Central Kurram, and similar operations are needed in Upper Kurram as well.

A senior officer stationed in Kurram pointed towards the border areas with Afghanistan and mentioned, "People from the Sunni tribes here go to fight, and fighters from there come here as well. The influx of people from across the border does affect the balance of power, but it is also important to note that every person in this area can shoot and handle all kinds of weapons."

However, the Afghan Taliban's direct involvement in the war against the Shia sect in Kurram is difficult, as sectarian violence in Pakistan, especially in border areas like Kurram, could have direct repercussions on both Shia and Sunni communities in Afghanistan. If such an action were to occur, it would negatively affect Afghanistan's relations with Iran, which is unacceptable to the Afghan Taliban. However, there are also Sunni tribes in Kurram, such as the Mangal, Maqbal, and Zadran, and many of them reside in Afghanistan as well.

When reports emerge from Kurram of Shia militias burning the homes of Sunni tribes, killing some individuals, and taking their women, it is not improbable that tribes across the border may get involved in the conflict to avenge their relatives. The tribes across the Afghan border include Afghan Taliban fighters and commanders with close ties to the Sunni tribes in Kurram, further complicating the ongoing Shia-Sunni conflict in the region.

According to a senior government official, the presence of heavy weapons in the region has become a major issue, and they blame Afghanistan for this. "You know who is across the border and what has been happening there, and there will be consequences. A large quantity of dangerous weapons left by US forces has fallen into the hands of both sides, and they are being used recklessly," he said. "If you remember, in 2007 when Sunni militant groups and the TTP attempted to establish a foothold in Kurram, armed Shia militias led by local leader Haji Haider defeated them. Haji Haider was one of the closest associates of Qassem Soleimani, the former head of Iran's Quds Force."

The Zainabiyoun Brigade: A Complex Conflict in Pakistan's Kurram District

The **Zainabiyoun Brigade** is commonly perceived as a militia comprising Pakistani Shia fighters who were active during the Syrian civil war. Aligned with Iran, they supported Bashar al-Assad's regime and were tasked with safeguarding sacred sites in Iraq and Syria. Iran has openly acknowledged its association with the Zainabiyoun Brigade, with state media outlets like the Tasnim News Agency, affiliated with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, regularly reporting on the deaths of Pakistani fighters in these conflicts.

Despite being a **proscribed organization**, Zainabiyoun has not faced the same level of state action as groups like the Taliban. Locals in Kurram District report that fighters in the area possess weapons superior to those available to the police. Historically, young men from this region travelled to Syria to fight against ISIS, with most recruits being local Shia individuals. However, locals deny the presence of any Arabic or Persian nationals and reject claims of a highly organized Zainabiyoun presence in Kurram.



Instead, they attribute attacks on Shia tribes in the region to ISIS and other Afghan factions. Similarly, attacks on Sunni tribes are often seen as retaliatory actions stemming from tribal culture, where locals blame nearby communities for incidents of violence.

Recruitment and Scale

According to analyst Philip Smyth, formerly associated with the Washington Institute and the University of Maryland, Zainabiyoun remains active in the Middle East. However, they have shifted recruitment strategies, moving away from overt social media campaigns. Instead, Pakistani Shia individuals residing or studying in Iran continue to be recruited. Smyth estimates that Zainabiyoun never exceeded **5,000 members** and that its numbers have now dwindled to **2,500-4,000 fighters**.

Historical Context and Current Challenges

Kurram District, particularly Parachinar, is situated about **100 kilometers from Kabul**, Afghanistan. Following the 9/11 attacks and subsequent U.S.-led intervention in Afghanistan, many displaced individuals sought refuge in Kurram. During the mid-2000s, the rise of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) exacerbated sectarian tensions in the area.

Security officials stationed in Kurram have confirmed that some combatants in local skirmishes have received foreign military training, making them highly skilled. Although their numbers are limited, these fighters are heavily armed and aligned with their respective sectarian affiliations.

The region's geography compounds the problem. Kurram's mountainous terrain limits law enforcement access, leaving the police ill-equipped to confront these groups. Deploying forces in the area requires navigating treacherous terrain, often exposing personnel to attacks from entrenched militants.

A Broader Conflict

Initially formed to combat ISIS, Zainabiyoun fighters who returned to Pakistan have largely avoided law enforcement scrutiny, especially in Kurram. Unlike Punjab and Karachi, where some members were apprehended, Kurram's locals have escaped similar attention. This is partly due to the region's deep-rooted religious inclinations and the high level of organization among its Shia community.

In the past, ISIS's Khorasan branch claimed responsibility for attacks on Pakistan's Shia community, framing these as retaliation for Zainabiyoun's actions in Syria and Iraq. Since August 2021, both ISIS and Pakistani Sunni militant groups have ramped up operations in Pakistan, prompting Zainabiyoun to establish a foothold in Kurram.

The Path to Stability

Security officials and analysts familiar with Kurram assert that local disputes over land are the primary drivers of violence. However, the involvement of external actors cannot be ignored. To restore peace in the region, disarming all factions is crucial. Additionally, foreign-trained fighters returning to Pakistan must be closely monitored and prosecuted under the **Anti-Terrorism Act**.

Failure to act decisively could allow the sectarian conflict in Kurram to spill over into urban centers, further destabilizing Pakistan. External adversaries remain eager to exploit these tensions, making it imperative for Pakistan to prioritize national security over political rivalries and decisively counter these threats.

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Trump's Peace Plan and Saudi Response

The Palestinian Issue: The Future of the Two-State Solution

Donald Trump's Return to the White House: Challenges and the Middle East Peace Plan

On 20th January 2025, Donald Trump is set to begin his second presidential term, making a return to the White House. His anticipated cabinet nominations have already sparked discussions about his ability to fulfil his campaign promises. Trump's remarks during the recent Israeli Palestinian conflict hinted at his forthcoming policy priorities, particularly a renewed focus on peace in the Middle East—an initiative largely sidelined during his first term.

This second term begins amidst a prolonged conflict in Gaza that has spanned over a year and at a time when the global political landscape, including that of the United States, has shifted significantly compared to four years ago. These circumstances have heightened concerns that Trump's ambitious Middle East plan, famously dubbed the "Deal of the Century", may be aggressively pursued with unwavering support for Israel and even the use of force. This plan was once described by Trump as the Palestinians' "last opportunity."

Palestinians have expressed increasing unease, viewing the plan as a stark violation of international law and their rights—particularly regarding borders, refugees, and Jerusalem. The plan, according to critics, aims to erase Palestinian identity in the region and replace it with constructions such as the Third Temple on the Al-Aqsa site, posing a severe challenge to the Islamic world.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described the plan as "the opportunity of the century," vowing not to let it slip away. Analysts widely expect Trump to reintroduce the Middle East peace initiative during his next term, albeit in a potentially modified form.

The "Deal of the Century": A Controversial Blueprint

Unveiled on 28th January 2020, Trump's Middle East peace plan outlined several contentious elements. It proposed the creation of a demilitarized Palestinian state, while sanctioning the annexation of West Bank settlements and the Jordan Valley by Israel. The plan also dismissed the right of return for Palestinian refugees.

Under the proposal, Palestinians would only be granted a fragmented state, far from the pre-1967 borders and without territorial continuity. Furthermore, the plan declared Jerusalem as Israel's "undivided capital," leaving Palestinians with potential administrative claims in areas like Abu Dis or Kufr Aqab, rather than in East Jerusalem itself.

Other provisions included maintaining the status quo of Al-Aqsa Mosque while assigning Israel security control over the Jordan Valley and the proposed Palestinian territories. Refugees were offered limited options: resettlement in the new Palestinian state, integration into host countries, or distribution across willing members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

A Potential Return of the Plan

Experts argue that Trump's new term might see a reintroduction of the plan in a revised form. Israeli affairs researcher Nazeer Majali suggests that the plan could be reshaped to reflect the current geopolitical realities. The Middle East Institute in Washington anticipates the revival of a "Deal of the Century 2.0," likely focused on diminishing Palestinian political rights while offering economic incentives as compensation.

British analysts highlight that the original plan is now "unfeasible," requiring substantial updates to align with today's ground realities. They predict that any new proposal might pressure the Palestinians into accepting a

diluted two-state solution, shaped more by Israel's interests and U.S. backing than by international law.

Challenges Ahead

Trump's approach, heavily influenced by his belief in deal-making and his pro-Israel advisors, suggests that any new initiative may continue to marginalize Palestinian interests. The deal's acceptance by Palestinian, Arab, and Islamic stakeholders remains highly unlikely, given its implications for regional and global peace.

The fragile state of the Middle East, exacerbated by recent conflicts, will serve as the foundation for any new proposal. While Trump might present a fresh peace plan that ostensibly aims for a two-state solution, its practicality remains uncertain. Israel's continued actions, supported by the U.S. and its allies, raise significant doubts about the feasibility of any equitable resolution.

In conclusion, Trump's second term may reignite debates about Middle East peace, but the road ahead is fraught with deep-seated tensions, entrenched political positions, and an evolving international landscape that complicates the pursuit of lasting peace.

The Two-State Solution: A Pragmatic Approach to the Palestine-Israel Conflict

Expert analyst on Israeli affairs, Nazir Majali, believes that the two-state solution remains the most ideal resolution for the Palestine-Israel conflict. He states, "The two-state solution is still a realistic and viable approach, even though the current Israeli government is not peace-oriented. This solution has global acceptance and should not be abandoned, as doing so would serve those who advocate for the complete Israeli annexation of the land and deny any rights to the Palestinian people."

Certainly, Saudi Arabia and other regional nations also endorse the notion that "the two-state solution is still on the table, as it considers everyone's interests while explicitly upholding the principle of establishing a Palestinian state, which is the most crucial factor for Arab stakeholders." This framework could form the foundation for renewed Saudi-American negotiations aimed at normalising relations with Israel and granting it recognition.

Given the current circumstances in the region, the two-state solution remains the only option acceptable to Arab nations, particularly Saudi Arabia and other neighbouring countries. This solution is supported politically by most Islamic nations. However, on the ground, the concept lacks tangible implementation and seems increasingly unlikely to materialise in the future. As such, it appears to be moving towards dissolution in its proposed form.

During his presidency, Donald Trump might propose a new plan that disregards the internationally accepted two-state solution, aligning instead with the region's evolving geopolitical realities. Such a plan could aim to reinforce American dominance by further empowering Israel as the regional hegemon. Israel has already used the Gaza conflict as a pretext to redefine its security boundaries, extending from Gaza to the occupied West Bank, Lebanon, the Golan Heights, and even the Jordanian border.

Israel's Strategic Agenda

Israel seeks to reshape its geography based on a security-driven ideology, thereby diminishing the prospect of a Palestinian state or any concept of peaceful coexistence between two

states. This approach could increase pressure on the Trump administration to propose a practical resolution to territorial disputes.

There is a strong likelihood that Trump's plan might include annexation of large parts of the West Bank under Israeli control. Israel could leverage this annexation to redefine its borders, consolidate territories, expand its boundaries, and create new buffer zones under the guise of security.

Evidence of such intentions can be seen in Trump's choice of Mike Huckabee, former Governor of Arkansas, as the next U.S. Ambassador to Israel. Huckabee, in 2017, stated:



"There is no such thing as the West Bank; it is Judea and Samaria. There is no concept of Israeli settlements; these are communities, neighbourhoods, and towns. There is no occupation."

Israel may also advocate for continued annexation of the West Bank while maintaining control over the areas with significant Palestinian populations, where full sovereignty cannot be declared. This intention is supported by recent developments, such as Israeli Minister Bezalel Smotrich instructing his ministry to prepare for imposing full Israeli sovereignty over settlements in the West Bank.

Saudi Arabia's Role and Perspective

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia views the restoration of diplomatic and political relations with Israel as more than just a bilateral issue. It perceives this normalisation as a bridge between the Islamic world and Judaism, carrying not just political but also religious significance. For this reason, Saudi Arabia remains firmly committed to the two-state solution. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman reinforced this position during his address at the Islamic Conference in Riyadh, sending a clear message to the U.S. and its Western allies.

The Crown Prince acknowledges that normalising Saudi Israeli relations would benefit the U.S. and Israel more than Riyadh itself, as it would legitimise Israel not only in the Arab world but also within the Islamic community—a substantial concession for Saudi Arabia. Consequently, Israel must fulfil its responsibility for peace by recognising a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Speaking on this issue, Nazir Majali highlights:

"Despite the possibility that Palestinians may never accept Arab countries normalising ties with Israel, the perspective on this issue must evolve. Nations with relations with Israel are independent states with their own interests, and Palestinians should refrain from interfering. If these nations perceive relations with Israel to be in their interests, it is their internal matter. If Palestinians believe these ties undermine their national rights, they should diplomatically engage with these nations to draw attention to their concerns."

Leveraging Diplomatic Relations

Majali suggests that Islamic nations could leverage their diplomatic ties with Israel to advance Palestinian interests. By advocating for the liberation of Palestine from Israeli occupation and establishing a Palestinian state, these nations could use their influence to support the Palestinian cause.

The proposed plan under discussion envisions a comprehensive peace agreement between Israel and Arab states, facilitating the establishment of a Palestinian state as part of this broader arrangement. Majali emphasises the need to focus on such initiatives, which balance regional aspirations with global diplomatic realities.

It is worth noting that earlier this month, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan reiterated that the establishment of a Palestinian state remains a condition for normalizing diplomatic relations with Israel. Saudi Arabia had previously stated, even before the U.S. elections, that the two-state solution is the starting point for any restoration of ties, rather than making diplomatic relations contingent upon the establishment of a Palestinian state. Saudi Arabia recognizes that the balance of power is not in its favour, which is why, like other Arab and Islamic nations, it has adopted a principled stance. However, in reality, it is not currently willing to use these cards during the ongoing war in Gaza.

Regarding Trump's potential future peace plan, concerns persist from Jordan and Egypt about the possible implications or roles they might have to play, particularly regarding the prospect of relocating Palestinians to these countries. The official U.S. position still reflects Cairo and Amman's insistence on avoiding solutions that would effectively push Palestinians towards these nations. The policy of maintaining the "status quo" is evident, as all parties oppose the Gaza conflict, the closure of the Rafah border, and Israel's control over the northern areas of the West Bank.

In the coming years, leaders will consider practical solutions to the Palestinian issue, taking into account the realities on the ground and evolving geopolitical circumstances, with Israel likely presenting its own proposals. When the "Deal of the Century" was first introduced, Jordan's Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi warned of the dangerous consequences of any unilateral Israeli actions and stressed adherence to a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders. Similarly, Egypt's Foreign Ministry emphasized the importance of resolving the Palestinian issue in line with international law and the decisions of the international community.

Meanwhile, there is a growing perspective among pro-Israel think tanks in the U.S. urging Arab nations to fulfill their humanitarian responsibilities toward Palestinians. However, regional countries are increasingly aware of the pressures they may face during this phase. In response to such pressures, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman delivered a clear message to the U.S., its allies, and Israel during the Islamic Conference in Riyadh. The message underscored not just Saudi concerns over Iranian influence but also sought to highlight the threat posed by Israel to the region. This was a strategic declaration of Saudi Arabia's future course of action.

The U.S. and Western Europe also interpret Saudi Arabia's unexpected announcements as a success of China's quiet diplomacy. This approach appears to be aimed at diminishing U.S. influence in the region, marking a shift that some describe as burying the legacy of American dominance. The question remains: will the U.S. continue using Israel as a sacrificial pawn to safeguard its own interests, or will Israel appeal to its allies within the U.S. for assistance? If the latter happens, Trump's return to the White House could prove to be a short-lived affair.

Thursday 12 December 2024

The Future of the Yuan and Dollar in the Global Financial System

The Risks of the Dollar's Decline and the Rising Status of the Yuan

In several of my recent columns, I have elaborated on the challenges the United States might face following the appointment of Donald Trump's new cabinet after his election as President. I have discussed how the likelihood of a new Cold War may escalate to the extent that America's claim of being the "sole superpower" could come under serious threat. Ironically, the same Afghanistan that inflicted a crushing defeat on the Soviet Union, leading to its eventual collapse and establishing America as the sole superpower, has now left the U.S. in disgrace. Post its withdrawal from Afghanistan, the U.S. is now fighting its final battle to defend its global dominance in Ukraine.

Before taking his oath on 20 January, Trump issued threats on social media to the nine BRICS nations, warning them of a 100% tariff if they opted for a new currency to conduct trade instead of the U.S. dollar. He stated, "The notion that BRICS countries will move away from the dollar, and we will simply stand by is over." It's worth noting that major global powers like China and Russia are part of BRICS, alongside Brazil, India, South Africa, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the UAE. During his presidential campaign, Trump indicated his intent to impose widespread tariffs, and his recent statements have increased in intensity. Leaders from Brazil and Russia have previously proposed creating a common BRICS currency to reduce dependence on the U.S. dollar in global trade. However, internal disagreements within the organisation have stalled progress on this proposal.

On his social media platform, Truth Social, Trump posted, "We will require guarantees from these countries that they will neither create a new BRICS currency nor support any other currency to replace the dollar. Otherwise, they will face 100% tariffs and should expect to say goodbye to trade with the U.S., finding alternative partners instead." Some of Trump's supporters believe these statements are a negotiating tactic designed to create leverage rather than firm policy intentions. When Republican Senator Ted Cruz was questioned on CBS about Trump's recent declaration, he said, "Look, threats of tariffs against Mexico and Canada previously yielded immediate results."

What are tariffs, and what could be their implications?

A tariff is an internal tax imposed by a country on imported goods. For example, if a \$50,000 car is imported into the U.S. and subjected to a 25% tariff, an additional cost of \$12,500 is incurred. Tariffs are a central aspect of Trump's economic philosophy, which views them as a means to bolster the American economy, protect domestic jobs, and increase tax revenue. He has claimed in the past, "These taxes will hit the other country's pocket, not ours." However, economists consider this claim misleading, as the additional cost is borne by local companies importing the goods, not foreign ones. Essentially, tariffs function as a tax that domestic companies pay to the U.S. government. During his first term, Trump imposed several tariffs that were later upheld by the Biden administration.

Is an alternative to the U.S. dollar possible?

Before addressing this question, let's understand how the dollar became the world's dominant currency. At the end of the Second World War, the Allied nations recognised that their economies were in ruins and began deliberating on which currency would facilitate international trade during the recovery phase. Representatives from 44 nations convened for 22 days at the Mount Washington

Hotel in Bretton Woods, USA, to negotiate the future of the global economy and trade. European economies were devastated by the war, while the U.S. held the largest gold reserves in the world.

Ed Conway, in his book *The Summit*, describes intense political debates and clashes during these 22 days, including a confrontation between Britain's John Maynard Keynes, who advocated for a global currency, and the U.S. Treasury's Harry Dexter White. The conference concluded with the decision to use the U.S. dollar for international trade. Institutions created during the conference, such as the IMF and World Bank, would provide loans to post-war economies exclusively in dollars.

Could the dollar be replaced?

Among Western currencies, the only viable alternative as a reserve currency could be the Chinese yuan. However, this would require significant changes from China, including reforms for transparency, encouraging savings, and lifting controls on capital flows. Liquidity is a major challenge, as China imposes restrictions on foreign investment in its financial markets and the export of its capital. Economists argue that if these restrictions were lifted, private capital would flow under its jurisdiction. While the yuan could gradually emerge as a reserve currency, substantial structural changes are required.

Recent research by American and European economists suggests that China is actively promoting trade settlements in its currency, resulting in yuan accumulation in the central banks of its trading partners.

According to experts, "China's efforts to internationalise its currency will not ensure Yuan's dominance. Instead, it might lead to a multipolar currency world where the Dollar, Euro, and Yuan coexist." While this is plausible, it remains a distant reality. Having the ability to hold money in Yuan is one thing; desiring to do so is another. On the other hand, the Dollar's liquidity and universal acceptance remain unmatched globally, while Yuan trading outside China is limited to Hong Kong and a few dozen smaller centres. This is why historian Niall Ferguson refers to the competition between the Dollar, Euro, and Yuan as a "tortoise race."

Another crucial aspect is that the search for an alternative to the Dollar is being driven primarily by America's adversaries. In contrast, developed democracies and America's allies exhibit no "allergy" to the Dollar.

Since the mid-20th century, the US Dollar has dominated the global financial system, and over the decades, numerous predictions have been made about its decline, collapse, or weakening. After the Euro's introduction on 1 January 1999 and during the global financial crisis originating in the US in 2008, concerns regarding the Dollar were raised. Similarly, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year, talk of the Dollar's demise resurfaced. Yet, the Dollar continues to maintain its status as the primary global currency.

But let us examine the developments of the past decade and assess whether the current predictions about the Dollar's decline merit attention. Three key points have been highlighted in discussions about the Dollar's future: China, the US's major rival, has surpassed the European Union in terms of economic and trade volume and is now setting its sights on the American market.

Political disputes within the US undermine its reputation as a highly reliable borrower and lender, as evidenced by the risk of default seen last month.

The US is increasingly using Dollars to penalise nations it perceives as threats to itself or its allies. Instead of engaging directly in warfare, the US relies heavily on financial leverage to achieve its goals.

However, these factors, which are often cited as reasons for the Dollar's declining dominance, are not particularly compelling. Last month, the US averted a potential default, reaffirming its position as the world's primary and most dependable creditor. So, why are there lingering doubts about the Dollar losing its global appeal?

The Dollar serves two critical functions that establish its supremacy as the world's principal currency:

Reserve Currency: Those with surplus funds prefer to hold them in Dollars.

Settlement Currency: Not only in the US but globally, goods and services are predominantly transacted in Dollars.

Despite attempts by China, Russia, Brazil, India, and other emerging economies to trade in Yuan or other local currencies, the Dollar's position as the preferred settlement currency remains strong. Before delving into these reasons further, let us explore the Dollar's role as a reserve currency in more depth.

By the end of last year, approximately \$12 trillion in global currency reserves had accumulated. About 60% of these reserves were in US Dollars, roughly 20% in Euros, 3% in Yuan, and the rest in other currencies. However, according to the latest IMF data, the Dollar's share in reserves has been declining and is currently at its lowest point since 1995.



A heated debate surrounds the extent and pace of this decline. Some experts attribute it to unprecedented financial sanctions against Russia, claiming these actions have heightened tensions in global currency dynamics.

Currency experts at Morgan Stanley and the IMF argue that the Dollar is losing its status as a reserve currency faster than previously anticipated. They estimate that since 2016, the Dollar's share in reserve markets has dropped by 11%, a decline that has accelerated since 2008.

However, many other currency experts disagree, asserting that little has changed in the reserve currency landscape since Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Analysts at the Council on Foreign Relations challenge the notion of a significant decline in Dollar reserves. They argue that the recent shift in Dollar reserves, as reported by the IMF, is not due to countries abandoning the US currency in response to sanctions against Russia. Instead, it reflects a reassessment of the value of US government bonds, where Dollar reserves are predominantly held.

The value of these bonds has declined due to rising interest rates on US debt, a trend that accelerated in 2022 compared to other major currencies. This has reduced the Dollar's share in reserves. However, when viewed alongside the IMF's data, this does not indicate a mass exodus from the Dollar. Furthermore, in 2022, no other major currency saw as much global demand as the Dollar.

The historian of the financial system, Neil Ferguson, states that the end of the dollar's dominance has been discussed for more than half a century. During his recent visit to China, the Brazilian president was asked multiple times, "Why does everyone trade in dollars? Who decided this?" The reality is that during the 20 years of the euro's circulation, the dollar has only lost 10% of its share in global reserves. In other words, at the beginning of the 21st century, the dollar made up about 70% of reserves, and now it is around 60%. This relates to the stock, and as far as calculations go, nothing has changed, and the dollar is still the dominant currency.

According to the Bank for International Settlements, over the last three decades, the dollar's share has remained between 80% and 90%. It has remained popular over the last decade, and in 2010, the dollar accounted for 85% of all international payments, rising to 88% in 2022. The reality is that the dollar is the central currency for accounts, which strengthens its position as the central reserve currency, because the world believes that it is prudent to save this currency for hard times.

Moreover, all payments in dollars are made through the largest American banks, and U.S. authorities have the ability to monitor the movement of this currency.

The question is, if there is a risk of the dollar's demise, why is the world still trading in dollars? Stephen Lejeune argues that the dollar will eventually lose its role as a settlement currency, but this is not a near-term issue. He emphasizes that, because there is no alternative to U.S. financial markets in terms of size, stability, or openness, competing with the dollar is difficult. A clear example of this is oil.

India can make payments for Russian crude oil in rupees, and China can make payments to Saudi Arabia for oil in yuan, but despite all this, the global oil market's dominant currency is still the dollar, because the volume of financial agreements for oil is much higher than direct trade between a few countries. Among developing nations, only China can challenge the U.S. as the financial centre of the world. However, for this, it needs to create an open and liquid market for trade financing agreements.

Even if Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil exporter, were to agree to sell all its oil to China, the world's largest oil buyer, in yuan, the share of the Shanghai Energy Exchange in the global oil market would only rise from its current 5% to 7%. If this is the case, then is the U.S. itself afraid because of the dollar?

Former U.S. Treasury Secretary Larry Summers says it is important to remember how the dollar replaced the pound as a reserve currency. He states, "History is clear: the dollar can lose its status as a reserve currency, but when that happens, the world will face many other serious issues. The only way the dollar will lose its global standing is if the U.S. loses its influence in the world. It's not enough that the U.S. either wants to or doesn't want to support the dollar's dominance. The dollar has

tremendous advantages as an international currency, mainly due to large, liquid, and well-functioning financial markets.”

“If the U.S. continues to make new mistakes and stops learning from history, there will come a time when the world moves away from the dollar. Many countries are already trying to move away from it, but they are not succeeding.” Countries like China or Saudi Arabia, with large trade surpluses, have nothing else to store their savings. There is no easy or liquid alternative to storing trillions of dollars in assets. Some well-known experts even argue that the dollar’s dominance is detrimental to the U.S. because being the issuer of the world’s most important reserve currency is not a privilege, but rather a burden.

The demand for dollar-denominated assets allows the U.S. to cover its large trade and budget deficits. Michael Pettis, an American economist at the Carnegie Centre in Beijing, says, “This is not good. The foreign capital entering the U.S. doesn’t lead to more investment. It is just stored as savings and adds to national debt. Financial markets only help the economy up to a certain point, after which they end up benefiting banks rather than the country.” According to him, “A weakened dollar would benefit the global economy, but it would be extremely painful for countries with trade surpluses.”

Now, the question is: Is there any alternative to the dollar in these circumstances?

Historian Ferguson has a great quote on this. In fact, this is the same quote advocated by former U.S. Treasury Secretary Larry Summers, whose signature appears on dollar bills. According to them, “What you have, you cannot exchange for what you do not have.” There is no alternative to the dollar because “Europe is a museum, Japan is a nursing home, China is a prison, and Bitcoin is an experiment.”

The only alternative to Western currencies for holding reserves could be the yuan, but for this, China would need to make significant changes. Reforms and transparency, incentives for savings, and the removal of controls on the movement of capital are necessary. Liquidity is a major issue because China imposes restrictions on foreign investment in both its financial markets and capital exports.

If these restrictions were lifted, private capital would flow within their jurisdiction. However, economists acknowledge that the yuan could gradually become a reserve currency. According to a recent study by American and European economists, China is actively promoting the use of its currency in trade settlements, causing yuan to accumulate in the central banks of its trading partners.

However, experts also say that China’s attempt to internationalise its currency will not ensure the dominance of the yuan, but rather create a multipolar currency world where the dollar, euro, and yuan coexist. This is true, but such a scenario is still a long way off. Holding money in yuan is one thing; desiring it is another. The ability to buy and sell dollars worldwide is unlimited, while yuan trade outside China takes place only in Hong Kong and a few dozen small centres.

Nevertheless, for these reasons, historian Ferguson's statement is closest to the truth that the race for dominance between the dollar, euro, and yuan could be described as a "tortoise race," and it is also true that while America's rivals are seeking an alternative to the dollar, developed democracies

and America's allies have no allergy to the dollar. However, it is also a fact that for the dollar's decline, world peace must be established, and the American war establishment will not allow that to happen.

Saturday 14 December 2024

The Middle East: Israel, Palestine, and Global Politics

The New Middle East: Global Implications

If readers recall, on October 1, 2024, I wrote an article titled "*The Greater Israel Project*". Viewing the current ongoing events, particularly the escape of Bashar al-Assad this evening, through the same lens, one can observe that the scenario I predicted in my arguments and apprehensions has started to unfold. Since the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, the tensions and shifting dynamics in the region have brought Israel's vision closer to reality than ever before. The rebalancing of power and reconfiguration of the regional landscape is not a new aspiration for Israel. Time and circumstances have once again placed my critics in the dock of bitter truths.

On various international platforms, Israeli officials have been seen presenting maps of their country. Notably, none of these maps include any mention of a Palestinian state or territory. During his speech at the United Nations General Assembly, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu presented two maps. One map depicted in green all the countries that are part of peace agreements with Israel or wish to maintain relations with it. These countries included Egypt, Sudan, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Jordan. In the second map, Netanyahu highlighted Iran and its allied countries in the region—Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanon—in black, labelling these areas as "abhorrent."

Taking advantage of the current circumstances, Israel has initiated airstrikes on Syria. International media reports confirm that Israel is targeting alleged chemical weapons facilities and missile production sites in Syria. Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar has cunningly justified these strikes by stating concerns that such weapons might fall into the hands of extremists following the potential fall of Bashar al-Assad's government, and Israel seeks to prevent this. Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz stated that the Israeli military aims to destroy Syria's "heavy strategic weapons," including missiles and air defense systems.

Media reports reveal that over the past two days, Israel has conducted dozens of airstrikes in Syria, including one near Damascus at a location claimed by Israel to be used by Iranian scientists for rocket development. After an Israeli airstrike near Damascus, Syrian media reported that a "research centre for chemical weapons development" was also targeted. These airstrikes occurred as the United Nations' chemical weapons watchdog had warned Syrian authorities to ensure the safety of suspected chemical weapons stockpiles.

The UK-based monitoring group, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), reported on Monday that Israeli forces carried out overnight strikes at multiple locations in coastal and southern Syria. Hours after the announcement of the fall of the previous government, Israel began intense airstrikes, deliberately destroying weapons and ammunition depots. The day before, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham issued a statement regarding chemical weapons in Syria, pledging "complete assurance of cooperation with the international community in monitoring weapons and sensitive sites." They declared, "We have no intention or desire to use chemical or any other weapons of mass destruction under any circumstances. We are working to ensure their security and prevent them from falling into irresponsible hands."

This announcement came amidst fears that chemical weapons stockpiles near southern Aleppo had allegedly fallen into the hands of Syrian rebel groups. According to the United Nations' Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), chemical weapons are defined as those used to kill or harm through their toxic properties. This definition extends to munitions, devices, and other materials specifically designed for the use of toxic chemicals as weapons. The use of chemical weapons is prohibited under international humanitarian law, regardless of the presence of a legitimate military target.

Chemical weapons, commonly perceived as relying on toxic chemicals, are deployed via delivery systems like bombs or artillery shells. While technically accurate, this perception limits the scope of items classified as chemical weapons under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

Under the CWC, the definition of chemical weapons includes all toxic chemicals and their precursors unless used for permitted purposes as outlined in the convention, and only in quantities strictly regulated by it.

Types of Chemical Weapons

Chemical weapons are classified into various categories:

Nerve Agents: Affect the nervous system (e.g., Sarin, VX).

Blister Agents: Cause severe irritation and pain to the skin, eyes, and mucous membranes (e.g., Mustard Gas).

Choking Agents: Damage the respiratory system (e.g., Phosgene, Chlorine).

Blood Agents: Impair the body's ability to utilise oxygen (e.g., Cyanide Compounds).

Riot Control Agents: Non-lethal irritants causing temporary discomfort (e.g., Tear Gas).

Choking agents like Phosgene attack the lungs and respiratory system. The deadliest are nerve agents, which interfere with the brain's signals to muscles. Even a tiny amount can be lethal—for instance, less than 0.5 milligrams of some agents is enough to kill an adult.

Sarin: A Deadlier Weapon than Cyanide

Sarin is considered up to 20 times more lethal than cyanide. Just a few minutes of exposure can lead to suffocation and death. These chemical agents can be deployed through artillery shells, bombs, and missiles.

How Did Bashar al-Assad Use Alleged Chemical Weapons to Consolidate Power?

Bashar al-Assad's regime and its Russian allies have been accused of repeatedly using chemical weapons against opposition forces during the Syrian civil war, which began in March 2011. However, both Assad's government and Russia have consistently denied these allegations. Presently, the exact quantity and location of Syria's chemical weapons remain uncertain. It is believed that former President Bashar al-Assad retained chemical stockpiles despite declaring their destruction in 2013.

In August 2013, a suspected chemical attack in Ghouta, a rebel-held area near Damascus, allegedly involving the nerve agent sarin, killed over 1,400 people. Western nations and anti-government groups attributed the attack to Assad's regime, which denied involvement, instead blaming the opposition. This incident led to threats of military intervention by the United States. However, a

diplomatic agreement brokered by Assad's key ally, Russia, averted military action. Subsequently, Assad agreed to dismantle Syria's chemical weapons under international supervision.

Under international pressure, Assad signed the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), overseen by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), leading to the destruction of 1,300 tonnes of chemical agents. Despite this, reports of chemical attacks persisted, and subsequent inspections uncovered violations of the 1997 CWC.



Ongoing Use of Chemical Weapons in Syria

Since 2014, OPCW's Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) has investigated allegations of toxic chemical use as weapons in Syria. Between September 2013 and April 2018, it verified the use of chemical weapons in 37 incidents. Additionally, the United Nations' Independent International Commission of Inquiry reported 18 other instances of chemical weapon use.

An analysis of global media reports in 2018 examined 164 cases and confirmed at least 106 uses of chemical weapons during the Syrian civil war from 2014 to 2018. The highest frequency of attacks was in Idlib province, followed by Hama, Aleppo, and Eastern Ghouta near Damascus. These areas were opposition strongholds at various times during the conflict.

The deadliest incidents occurred in Kafr Zita (Hama province) and Douma (Eastern Ghouta), where rebel forces clashed with government troops. The most lethal attack took place on April 4, 2017, in Khan Shaykhun, Idlib province, killing approximately 100 people. OPCW and UN investigations concluded that sarin nerve agent affected numerous residents, although chlorine gas was the most frequently used chemical.

The Role of Chlorine and Other Agents

Chlorine, which has both industrial and peaceful applications, was extensively weaponized in Syria. OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) reported that on February 4, 2018, the Syrian Arab Air Force, under the elite Tiger Forces unit, dropped at least one chlorine cylinder in Saraqib, exposing 12 individuals to the toxic gas. This attack demonstrated the continued use of banned chemicals despite international monitoring.

While the perpetrators of 105 other incidents remain unidentified, investigations suggest that ISIS employed sulphur mustard in at least two cases and was potentially involved in three additional attacks.

Geopolitical Implications

In a recent speech, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan condemned Israel's ambitions, stating, "They dream of seizing the lands between the Tigris and Euphrates. Since they cannot accept Gaza, they reveal their intentions through their maps."

Experts at the Carnegie Middle East Centre argue that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's vision of a "New Middle East" seeks to colonize Palestinian territories. Despite international criticism, Israel continues to expand settlements, particularly in the West Bank, solidifying its plans to integrate these areas.

According to the Washington Institute for Near East Policy:

The current right-wing Israeli government includes several ministers who do not support a two-state solution, moving further away from the 1993 Oslo Accords' vision of a Palestinian state. The United States appears unlikely to endorse Israeli plans that exclude Palestinian territories, as the Israeli vision for a "New Middle East" aims to create a region free from Iranian threats. However, retired Israeli intelligence officer Mary Eisin has dismissed claims that Israel seeks to impose a "New Middle East." She asserts that Israel's focus is on ensuring that Iran's hardline government does not influence the region's political landscape.

Prime Minister Netanyahu's rhetoric emphasises dismantling Iran's nuclear programme. Additionally, Netanyahu seeks to restore Israel's standing after the October 7, 2023, Hamas attacks, which significantly dented its global image. A large-scale Israeli assault in southern Beirut targeting Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah has been described as a critical geopolitical turning point in the ongoing conflict.

Escalating Tensions with Iran:

Iran launched multiple ballistic missiles at Israel on October 1, claiming it was retaliating for the killing of Hamas's political leader, Ismail Haniyeh, on Iranian soil. Israel has pledged to respond "at a time and place of its choosing." Meanwhile, the United States, committed to maintaining its strategic dominance, has bolstered military deployments in the region, while conditioning its support for Israel on adherence to "red lines." These include refraining from targeting Iranian nuclear sites and moving towards a two-state solution.

Abraham Accords and Regional Dynamics:

Under former President Trump, efforts to normalise relations in the region offered economic and military incentives to Arab states. These efforts highlighted Israel as a strategic partner against Iran rather than a regional threat, leading to the signing of the Abraham Accords with Morocco, the UAE, and Bahrain. However, the situation has grown tense following the October 7, 2023, Hamas attacks and the subsequent Gaza war.

Israel is actively pursuing normalisation with Saudi Arabia, a nation wary of Iran's growing regional influence. Despite this, Saudi Arabia recently declared via the *Financial Times* that it would not establish formal relations with Israel until a Palestinian state is created. The geopolitical and economic changes triggered by the events of October 7 have also influenced countries like Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, which had historically refused to recognise Israel following the 1948 partition of Palestine.

Regional Economic Cooperation:

Israel's official data reveals increased trade with five Arab countries during the first half of the current fiscal year, including the UAE, Egypt, Bahrain, and Morocco. Israeli media has highlighted a trade

route agreement involving the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt. This agreement positions Israel's natural gas as a vital resource for Egypt's power grid.

Regional and Global Implications:

A regional expert suggests that Israel must combine diplomacy, economic partnerships, and robust defence strategies to shape a new regional order. Professor Yezid Sayegh of the Carnegie Middle East Centre warns of the rising geopolitical tensions, suggesting they are linked to broader international shifts involving the U.S., Russia, China, and Europe. He fears these changes may fuel global conflicts and cautions against the risk of an escalating war plunging the world into chaos.

Monday 16 December 202

Pure Leadership: The Need for Leaders Free from Greed and Desire

The Lust for Power and Wealth: The Decline of Nations

And the advance of the Islamic revolution came to a halt. On October 10, 732 AD, the historic Battle of "Balat al-Shuhada" was fought on French soil. The battlefield lay on the Roman road between Tours and Poitiers. This location was a thousand miles north of Gibraltar, where Tariq ibn Ziyad had landed on April 30, 711 AD. Renowned historians Gibbon and O'Leary believe that had the Muslims won this battle, mosques would have replaced churches in Paris and London, and the great universities of those cities would be teaching the interpretation of the Quran instead of the Bible.

Syed Amir writes, "On the fields of Tours, the Arabs lost a global empire that was within their grasp. Disobedience and internal discord, which have forever been the eternal curse and affliction of Muslim society, caused this downfall. Greed for wealth and internal strife played their role. These very flaws have obstructed the progress of the Islamic nation at various times and inflicted countless wounds. Wherever we faced defeat, upon reflection, we found some of our own hidden in ambush."

"Greed is such a plague that it doesn't even allow one the time to think—what use will endless wealth be, especially when it is stashed away in foreign banks in secret accounts? And internal discord was no less severe. Who didn't stab whom in the back? Both friends and foes—whoever had the chance, attacked those who had once been their benefactors. Power, indeed, is a more dangerous obsession than wealth."

"As power—whether in the form of a caliphate or kingship—began to weaken, discord and disunity started to rise. Invasions erupted from every side. Small kingdoms began to emerge, resources scattered, and the scope of central governance continued to shrink. The last Abbasid caliph, Al-Musta'sim, and the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, both were swept away like straw in the wind. One was trampled under the hooves of the Tartar horses in a state of helplessness, while the other was shackled and exiled to Rangoon, hundreds of miles away from his homeland. Bahadur Shah Zafar was a poet and expressed his sense of defeat and deprivation, lamenting that he could not even find two yards of land in his beloved country to be buried.

The caliph Al-Musta'sim, however, met an even more humiliating end. It is said that after surrendering to the Tartars, he was presented before Halaku Khan. Halaku placed some gold ingots before him and said, 'Eat this.' The perplexed caliph replied, 'Gold cannot be eaten.' To this, Halaku retorted, 'Then why did you hoard so much of it? If you had sent it to us, you would be living in comfort today. And if not that, you should have spent it on your defense.'"

"The lust for wealth has wrought many disasters. Greed has no bounds or limits—it is a flame that never stops raging. Man is a bundle of contradictions. While it is natural to be attracted to desirable things, generosity is also a seed that God has implanted in his heart. Which path one chooses is a decision in one's own hands. As the Almighty has said..."

رُبِنَ لِلنَّاسِ حُبُّ الشَّهَوَاتِ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ وَالْبَنِينَ وَالْقَنَاطِيرِ الْمُقَنْطَرِ مِنَ الذَّهَبِ وَالْفِضَّةِ وَالْخَيْلِ الْمُسَوَّمَةِ وَالْأَنْعَامِ وَالْحَرْثِ ذَلِكَ مَتَاعُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ حُسْنُ الْمَأْبَ:

Beautiful for people is the love of that which they desire - of women and sons, heaped-up sums of gold and silver, fine branded horses, and cattle and tilled land. That is the enjoyment of worldly life,

Beautiful for people is the love of that which they desire - of women and sons, heaped-up sums of gold and silver, fine branded horses, and cattle and tilled land. That is the enjoyment of worldly life, but Allah has with Him the best return.

The real wealth is Allah's pleasure and "Ridhwan." Whoever is fortunate enough to attain this treasure has succeeded in both worlds, but whoever is deprived of it has lost everything. The veil will soon be lifted, and then the very gold and silver that they tirelessly hoarded will be used to brand their foreheads. At that moment, they will remember that it would have been far better to spend it in the path of Allah. Perhaps, some Halaku Khan in this very world may ask them to "consume this gold."

The fundamental difference between a small person and a great one is that the small person is trapped in the "love of desires," while the great person is striving to achieve higher objectives. The former is utterly devoted to wealth and status, yearning to gather all the world's riches and attain the highest positions. If he achieves this, he lives in constant fear of losing it. He seeks permanence in his power and wealth and will stop at nothing to ensure it. Law, ethics, religion, humanity—whatever stands in the way must be crushed. Every possible tactic is considered fair game to prolong his rule and increase his wealth. Unfortunately, in today's world, power and wealth have become inseparable.

Many politicians now see it as an undeniable fact that without the treasures of Qarun, gaining power is impossible. This assumption leads to a highly dangerous game. It sparks an endless, ruthless race where everything is justified to achieve the goal. Corruption, bribery, black-market dealings, theft—these evils rise like a flood. The country, and even society, becomes unstable. In their anxiety, people begin to scatter, searching for places to hide their illegitimate wealth. The money earned through illegal means can no longer be kept where it was acquired; it must be moved. Like migratory birds, this wealth flies off in search of safer, more pleasant environments. When shadows begin to fall over the "owners" of this wealth, they too flee to foreign lands. Meanwhile, the homeland grows poorer and poorer, turning into a land of looters, with many seeking to become billionaires overnight. Those in power stop at nothing to seize every opportunity, day or night.



Some of those who come to power are so eager to outperform one another in this act of plunder that they openly discuss in private gatherings who has "won" and who has "lagged behind." Ministries and portfolios are auctioned off, and those who are favored receive lucrative positions—like cows that yield milk. Those who do not have the art of pleasing the "Shah of the time" are deprived of royal favour. And if circumstances force them to offer something, it is often a meaningless position that makes no significant difference whether it exists or not.

Politics was once like a flowing river, so pure that the trees standing on its banks would bend to see their reflections in its clear waters. Back then, honest and dignified individuals who cared about their honour would enter politics to serve the country and its people. Integrity, dignity, public welfare, and

a desire for reward from God were their guiding principles. They spent from their own pockets. Even if they were not wealthy, they were rich at heart. Their self-respect wouldn't allow them to accept any financial compensation or benefit in exchange for their service to the people. They were highly honourable and pure-hearted individuals. May Allah have mercy on those great personalities who blessed the nation with the gift of freedom. If they had not broken the chains of greed, they would have been sold long before they reached their destination. Even back then, there was no shortage of buyers, just as there is no shortage of them today. When something is for sale, there are always many customers. And there were plenty of those who sought to intimidate, just as there are today. Even though the American empire is still in its infancy, the world trembles before it in submission.

However, Quaid-e-Azam and his companions faced the British Empire, where the sun never set. Despite their civility, the British had their prisons too. The rulers did not show love and affection toward the freedom-seeking politicians. Those who demanded Pakistan were like thorns in the side of many. Had our benefactors been afraid or, God forbid, sold out, Pakistan would never have come into existence. The protection of this sacred land requires the same spirit. This land can only remain prosperous and thriving if leadership at every level breaks the chains of greed and fear so decisively that their sound echoes throughout the world. May Allah grant us the ability to do so! Hear how my Allah SWT is leading:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تُؤَدُّوا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا وَإِذَا حَكَمْتُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَنْ تَحْكُمُوا بِالْعَدْلِ - إِنَّ اللَّهَ نِعِمَّا يَعِظُكُمْ بِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ سَمِيعًا
بَصِيرًا (النساء: 58)

Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people to judge with justice. Excellent is that which Allah instructs you. Indeed, Allah is ever Hearing and Seeing.

وَمَا هَذِهِ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا لَهْوٌ وَلَعِبٌ - وَإِنَّ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ لَهِيَ الْحَيَوَانُ - لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ (العنكبوت: 64)
*And this worldly life is not but diversion and amusement. And indeed, the home of the Hereafter - that is the [eternal] life, if only they knew.
Glory be to my Lord, who knows the state of hearts.*

Thursday 19 December 2024

Syria's Changing Landscape and Its Impact on the Region

The Risk of Division in Syria and Israel's Role

As soon as the Assad regime's over five-decade-long era of oppression and tyranny came to an end, Israel immediately seized the opportunity to advance its military objectives. Israeli forces have captured key positions within Syria's border regions, including a non-militarised buffer zone on the Golan Heights. Israel has conducted hundreds of strikes against 'military targets' in Syria. Furthermore, the Israeli army has occupied the buffer zone in the Golan Heights, which was under United Nations supervision.

Israel claims its military operations in Syria aim to ensure the safety of Israeli citizens. However, some analysts assert that Israel is exploiting the situation to weaken one of its long-standing adversaries. Israel has also confirmed a major attack on Syria's naval fleet. According to a statement from the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF), their warplanes targeted the ports of Al-Bayda and Latakia on Monday night, where 15 Syrian naval ships were docked. This raises the critical question: why is Israel relentlessly attacking Syria?

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in his usual aggressive tone, announced that he had ordered the IDF to enter the buffer zone and other "strategically commanding positions" in the Golan Heights. Israel has described this as a temporary measure to safeguard itself against attacks from Syrian rebels following the collapse of the Assad regime. However, many Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, have condemned Israel's actions.

Since the militant group Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham seized control of Damascus, Israeli warplanes have carried out 350 airstrikes on Syrian military installations and targets linked to the group in Aleppo, Hama, Damascus, Latakia, Tartus, and other areas. The aim of these strikes, according to Israel, is to degrade the combat capabilities of the Syrian army. Israel also claims its attacks are meant to prevent chemical weapons in Syria from falling into the hands of extremists. Yet, the continuous violations of Syrian borders and airspace suggest broader objectives.

Israel's narrative about safeguarding against chemical weapons is questionable. Following the fall of the Assad regime, the fate of Syria's alleged stockpile of chemical weapons remains uncertain. While there are no confirmed details about their locations, Israel's possession of its own arsenal of lethal weapons raises the question: should similar military actions be justified against Israel? Recently, the UN arms watchdog warned Syrian authorities to secure any remaining chemical weapons stockpiles.

Syrian forces have been accused of using chemical weapons such as sarin gas and chlorine gas in several regions. In 2013, the Syrian army reportedly deployed sarin gas in an attack on the Ghouta suburbs of Damascus, killing over a thousand people. The Assad regime reportedly maintained chemical weapons as a deterrent to balance power with Israel, though it allegedly never intended to use them proactively. With the regime now replaced, the dynamics have changed entirely. Israel also alleges that Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham possesses chemical weapons, having used them against its adversaries. However, the question remains: if no chemical weapons are stored in the buffer zone, what is the purpose of occupying it?

The Golan Heights is a region in Syria that has been under Israeli occupation since 1967. Spanning 1,200 square kilometres, it is located about 60 kilometres southwest of Damascus. During the 1967 war, Syria launched an attack on Israel from the Golan Heights, but Israel repelled the offensive and subsequently occupied the region. Syria attempted to regain control of the Golan Heights during the 1973 Yom Kippur War but failed.

In 1974, a ceasefire agreement was signed between Syria and Israel, mandating the withdrawal of military forces from an 80-kilometre-long demilitarised border strip known as the “Area of Separation.” Since then, the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) has monitored the ceasefire agreement in the region. Despite this, Israel unilaterally annexed the Golan Heights in 1981, a move condemned globally and never recognised internationally. However, in 2019, the Trump administration reversed the longstanding US policy and recognised Israeli sovereignty over the region.

Syria has repeatedly stated that it will not engage in any peace agreement with Israel until the complete withdrawal from the Golan Heights. In November 2024, Syria lodged complaints with the United Nations, accusing Israel of digging trenches near and even within the buffer zone.

The Strategic Significance of the Golan Heights

When the Golan Heights were under Syrian control, from 1948 to 1967, they were frequently used for artillery shelling across northern Israel. The Syrian capital, Damascus, is located approximately 60 kilometres north of these heights, and the elevated terrain provides a clear vantage point over Damascus and much of southern Syria. This geography offers Israel a strategic advantage in monitoring Syrian military movements. Controlling these heights also provides Israel with a natural buffer against potential Syrian military offensives, such as the one that occurred during the 1973 war.

On the other hand, the Golan Heights are a critical source of water in a predominantly arid region. Rainwater flowing from the heights feeds into the Jordan River, enabling fertile lands around the river to sustain vineyards and orchards while also serving as grazing grounds for livestock. In the past, one of the major obstacles to a peace agreement between Syria and Israel has been Syria’s insistence on a return to the pre-1967 borders and the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from the area.

If such a withdrawal were to occur, Syria would gain control of the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, depriving Israel of a vital source of fresh water. Israel argues that the border should remain further east to prevent the loss of critical resources. Public opinion in Israel largely supports retaining control of the Golan Heights, with many believing that the region is too strategically important to relinquish.

The Golan Heights: Settlements and Occupation

Most of the Syrian Arab residents of the Golan Heights were displaced during the 1967 war. Today, over 30 Israeli settlements exist in the area, with an estimated population of 20,000 settlers. The settlements were established shortly after the 1967 conflict, but they are considered illegal under international law. These Israeli settlers now live alongside roughly 20,000 Syrians, predominantly from the Druze community, who remained in the area during Israel's occupation.

Syria maintains that the Golan Heights have always been its sovereign territory and has repeatedly vowed to reclaim the region. Meanwhile, Israel asserts that the Golan Heights are critical for its defence and must remain under its control.

Israel's Recent Actions in the Golan Heights

Syrian forces withdrew from the Golan Heights when rebel groups advanced towards Damascus, threatening the Assad regime's grip on power. Taking advantage of this situation, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) seized control of the demilitarised buffer zone in the Golan Heights. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has tried to frame this move as a step towards ensuring peaceful relations with any future Syrian government. However, he has also stated that Israel will take all necessary measures to protect its borders if peaceful relations cannot be established.



Israel claims its incursion into Syrian territory is meant to prevent groups like Hayat Tahrir al-Sham from entering Israeli territory through the Golan Heights. The IDF has admitted to moving beyond the demilitarised zone but insists that their presence is limited. According to the Israeli military, this is a "temporary defensive measure" until a more permanent arrangement can be made. Netanyahu has further claimed that Israel seeks peaceful relations with any emerging forces in Syria but will take any action necessary to defend its borders.

Reports from Syria suggest that Israeli forces have advanced within 25 kilometres of Damascus. However, Israeli military sources have denied this claim, stating that while their forces have moved beyond the buffer zone, the extent of their advance has been exaggerated. Several Arab nations have strongly condemned Israel's recent actions in Syria. Egypt's Foreign Ministry described it as "an occupation of Syrian land and a blatant violation of the 1974 agreement."

Netanyahu has justified these actions as necessary for securing Israel's borders, claiming that the 1974 agreement is no longer effective due to rebel control in Syria. Many analysts, however, remain skeptical of this justification and dismiss Netanyahu's argument that Israel is acting pre-emptively to prevent attacks similar to Hamas' assault on 7 October.

The International Response

Syria has consistently maintained that it has not violated the 1974 agreement. Israel's actions in the buffer zone, framed as pre-emptive measures for security, are widely regarded as unjustified and amount to blatant aggression. The situation has further complicated efforts to establish peace in a region already fraught with conflict.

The likelihood of Syrian rebel groups reclaiming the Golan Heights from Israeli control in the near future appears slim. Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) is so deeply engrossed in internal matters that it has little time to consider creating a new conflict with Israel. However, Israel's presence in Syrian territories will likely sour its relations with future Syrian governments.

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar has stated that Israeli airstrikes on Syrian military bases are solely for the defense of Israeli citizens. According to him, Israel targets strategic weapon systems, such as remnants of chemical weapons or long-range missiles and rockets, to prevent them from

falling into the hands of extremists. However, Middle East analysts believe that Syria does not possess significant quantities of chemical weapons. They suggest that only two or three such sites remain, and the claim of hundreds of airstrikes appears to be more about significantly weakening Syria.

This approach reminds many of the baseless accusations levelled against Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, which led to the devastation of Iraq's ancient civilization, the deaths of millions of Iraqis, and ongoing foreign control over its oil resources.

Israel claims to be taking precautionary measures to handle worst-case scenarios, but such efforts could backfire. This is not a constructive way to establish friendly relations with a new Syrian government. Since the fall of the Assad regime, often labelled as brutal and spanning decades, under the leadership of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, significant questions have arisen about Syria's future. HTS leader Abu Muhammad al-Jolani has vowed to unify Syria, but it remains uncertain whether he can achieve this goal. The United Nations has emphasized the importance of fostering cooperation among all groups in Syria.

Given the rapidly evolving situation, predicting Syria's future is challenging. However, experts highlight three potential scenarios for the country's future. The most favourable outcome for Syria would be for HTS to collaborate with other political forces in the country and govern responsibly. Post-conflict Syria offers an opportunity to foster an environment of national reconciliation. This moment can break the cycle of vengeance and looting that has plagued neighboring states. Failure to seize this opportunity could give rise to new conflicts.

In his initial statements, Jolani stressed the importance of unity and mutual respect among Syria's diverse sects. However, it is equally crucial to acknowledge that the agendas of various groups in Syria do not always align. There is a significant risk that Syria, like Libya, could be fragmented into warring factions, with no single faction emerging that harbours hostility toward Israel.

Israel and its allies are likely to exploit divisions among these groups, potentially triggering a civil war to advance their agenda of a "Greater Israel." In such a scenario, other regional nations—those highlighted in green during Netanyahu's recent UN speech—must awaken from their complacency.

Friday 20 December 2024

US Sanctions and Pakistan's Domestic Missile Program

The Arms Race and America's Double Standards

In a statement issued by the US State Department, it was announced that sanctions have been imposed on four Pakistani entities under an executive order, citing concerns over the development and proliferation risks associated with Pakistan's long-range missile programme. The United States' series of sanctions on entities and suppliers related to Pakistan's ballistic missile programme shows no signs of abating. This year, for the third time, further sanctions have been placed on four entities accused of aiding the development of ballistic missiles.

On Wednesday, the US imposed sanctions on four entities allegedly connected to Pakistan's nuclear-capable long-range ballistic missile programme, including a state-run organisation overseeing the programme. The US has accused the National Development Complex (NDC), based in Islamabad, of acquiring various equipment for Pakistan's long-range ballistic missile programme. This includes specialised vehicle chassis used for missile launching equipment and testing purposes. The NDC is involved in the development of Pakistan's ballistic missiles, including the Shaheen series.

The statement further disclosed that Akhtar & Sons Private Limited, based in Karachi, supplied equipment to the NDC for Pakistan's long-range ballistic missile programme. Additionally, Filiates International, also based in Karachi, has been accused of facilitating the procurement of missile-related materials for the NDC and other entities to support the ballistic missile programme.

Addressing the Allegations: Technical, Strategic, and Economic Perspectives

These recent allegations by U.S. officials are not aligned with technical realities. The issue can be examined through three lenses: technical, strategic, and economic.

Technical Perspective

It is technically implausible that Pakistan's advancements in ballistic missiles are aimed beyond India. The primary objective of these developments is to counter India's rapidly advancing missile defence systems, not to target distant nations. Modern missile capabilities aim to neutralise even the most sophisticated defence systems. Israel's five-layer defence system, including the Arrow, Iron Dome, David's Sling, interceptors, and anti-aircraft guns, is a pertinent example.

For a missile to penetrate such defences, it requires technologies like Multiple Independently Targetable Reentry Vehicles (MIRVs), as found in Pakistan's Ababeel missile. MIRVs allow a single missile to carry multiple warheads, each independently programmed to strike different targets. This capability ensures that a single launch can overcome complex defence systems. The United States possesses similar technology in its Minuteman III missile, while India has recently begun developing MIRV capabilities. Pakistan's focus on such advancements is clearly aimed at neutralising India's defence systems, such as the S-400. Unlike India, which has developed and tested Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) with ranges exceeding 5,000 kilometres, Pakistan has not conducted any tests of such missiles.

Strategic Perspective

Allegations against Pakistan also ignore the strategic reality that missile capabilities cannot be attributed without testing. Pakistan has never tested a missile with a range beyond India. Meanwhile,

India is developing nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) like the Arihant and Arighat, which enable underwater missile launches. These submarines bypass the range limitation of land-based missiles, allowing India to target any country, including the United States, from nearby waters.

Economic and Political Perspective

Economically and politically, it is implausible for Pakistan to pursue missile capabilities aimed at the United States. The United States is Pakistan's largest export market, accounting for approximately \$6 billion annually. Moreover, the Pakistani diaspora in the United States sends significant remittances back home. Pakistan also relies on maintaining goodwill with the United States for economic assistance, including through institutions like the IMF. Strengthening relations with the U.S. is a core tenet of Pakistan's foreign policy and national security strategy.

While it is possible that Pakistan's National Defence Complex (NDC) is developing an advanced version of the Ababeel missile system, designed to defeat Indian ballistic missile defence shields and carry multiple warheads, this remains a regionally focused initiative. The development of more powerful rockets for this purpose does not equate to the creation of ICBMs. Converting these systems into true intercontinental missiles would require an entirely new infrastructure and technology.

Criticism of Pakistan's defensive capabilities and the expression of doubts about its intentions indicate how New Delhi is using its influence to shape Washington's narrative. The goal is to weaken Pakistan's defensive posture in the face of India's growing military and strategic capabilities.

The US State Department stated that sanctions are being imposed on the National Development Complex (NDC) and three firms involved in the production and supply of equipment for weapons of mass destruction. The four sanctioned entities include the NDC, Akhtar & Sons Private Limited, Filiates International, and Rockside Enterprises. Earlier this year, in September, the US imposed sanctions on a Chinese research institute and several companies accused of supplying equipment and technology to Pakistan's ballistic missile programme.

Similarly, in April this year, the US imposed sanctions on three Chinese companies and one Belarusian company. In October 2023, three more Chinese companies were sanctioned for allegedly providing components and equipment to Pakistan's ballistic missile programme. In December 2021, the US administration-imposed sanctions on 13 Pakistani companies for allegedly aiding Pakistan's nuclear and missile programmes. Pakistan, however, termed these measures as "disappointing," arguing that the recent sanctions are intended to exacerbate military imbalances in the region.

My columns published on 6 October 2024, titled "Impact of US Sanctions: China's and Pakistan's Response," and 14 November 2024, "Nuclear Pakistan: The Real Challenge to US and Israeli Interests," provide further insights into this matter.

The recent US sanctions are not unprecedented; this pattern dates back to the 1970s when Pakistan initiated its missile programme in response to India's missile development efforts, which were supported by Russia and other sources. Pakistan has consistently maintained close ties with China. These sanctions on Chinese and Pakistani entities are unlikely to have any significant impact, as Pakistani organisations like the NDC do not rely on the West for missile technologies.

North Korea, despite numerous sanctions, has remained unaffected. Similarly, Pakistan's missile programme, which is entirely indigenous and relies on local resources and expertise, will remain unaffected by these sanctions. However, such measures are regrettable and fail to account for regional strategic realities, such as the need to safeguard Pakistan's security against India's growing intercontinental missile capabilities, which pose increasing threats to regional and global peace, security, and stability. Meanwhile, those seeking refuge under the US umbrella, particularly certain elements in Israel and India, remain immune to such sanctions.

The US's unilateral actions, driven by prejudice and bias, are unfortunate for global peace. Pakistan's strategic capabilities aim to defend the nation's sovereignty and maintain peace in South Asia. The recent sanctions are intended to destabilise military cooperation in the region, undermining efforts towards peace and security. Furthermore, targeting private businesses with such sanctions is disheartening. Despite claims of promoting non-proliferation, licences for advanced military technology acquisitions have been waived for other nations. Such double standards and discriminatory practices not only undermine the non-proliferation agenda but also risk jeopardising regional and global peace and security.

It is noteworthy that in September this year, under the Arms Export Control Act (AECA) and the Export Control Reform Act (ECRA), the US imposed sanctions on three Chinese entities, a Chinese individual, and a Pakistani organisation for alleged involvement in activities related to the proliferation of ballistic missiles. The US accused the Beijing Research Institute of Automation for Machinery Building Industry (RIAMB) of aiding the development and delivery of weapons of mass destruction. It was also claimed that RIAMB collaborated with Pakistan's National Development Complex (NDC) to procure equipment for testing rocket motors for the Shaheen-III and Ababeel missile systems, and potentially larger systems.

The United States also alleged in its statement that the entity was involved in procuring equipment for large systems. Among the companies subjected to sanctions at that time were China's Hubei Huachangda Intelligent Equipment, Universal Enterprise, Xi'an Longde Technology Development, and the Pakistani company Innovative Equipment. Additionally, a Chinese individual named Luo Dongmei was also sanctioned.

At the time, the U.S. State Department noted that its concerns about Pakistan's long-range ballistic missile programme had been "clear and consistent for many years" and that opposing Pakistan's ballistic missile programme had been a longstanding component of U.S. policy. It is worth recalling that earlier this year, in April, the U.S. sanctioned three Chinese and one Belarusian company, and in October 2023, imposed similar sanctions on three more Chinese companies for allegedly supplying components and equipment for Pakistan's ballistic missile programme. Additionally, in December 2021, the U.S. administration sanctioned 13 Pakistani companies for allegedly assisting Pakistan's nuclear and missile programmes.

Let us explore Pakistan's missile programme, which has been targeted by recent U.S. sanctions. What does it include, and what are the U.S. concerns? How might these sanctions impact Pakistan's missile capabilities?

The Pakistani missile programme referred to in the U.S. State Department's September 2024 announcement includes medium-range ballistic missiles such as the Shaheen-III and Ababeel. These are classified as Multiple Reentry Vehicle (MRV) missiles. Experts believe these are among the most advanced weapons in Pakistan's missile arsenal. According to Pakistan's Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), Pakistan first tested the Ababeel missile in 2017 and conducted another test of a

new variant on 18 October 2023. The missile was showcased for the first time during the Pakistan Day Parade on 23 March 2024.

Experts in strategic and defence studies note that this is South Asia's first missile capable of carrying multiple warheads, including nuclear weapons, over a range of 2,200 kilometres, targeting multiple objectives. Analysts estimate that the Ababeel missile can carry three or more nuclear warheads. It is designed as an MRV missile system to counter and neutralise enemy ballistic missile defence shields.



Each warhead on the Ababeel missile can independently target multiple objectives. A key feature of this missile is its ability to carry out a first or second strike against high-value targets protected by ballistic missile defence (BMD) shields. Defence experts explain that MRV missiles are capable of confusing missile defence shields or ballistic missile systems in their vicinity by using evasive maneuvers, akin to how a fast bowler in cricket uses swing and seam to break through a batsman's defences.

The Ababeel's design enables it to launch several independently programmed warheads, each following its unique flight path. This capability is particularly valuable against protected targets. India has been working on its ballistic missile system for more than a decade, conducting tests and publicly discussing its advancements. Recently, India tested its first MRV missile, the Agni-V, which can carry multiple warheads. It is an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) with a range of 5,000–8,000 kilometres, far exceeding the Ababeel's range of 2,200 kilometres, which makes the Ababeel one of the shortest-range MRVs globally. There are unverified reports that India's Agni-P missile, with a range of 2,000 kilometres, also has MRV capabilities.

The Ababeel is explicitly designed to counter India's capabilities, but the U.S. has expressed concerns about the Shaheen-III missile since 2021. The Shaheen-III has a range of 2,740 kilometres and is considered the predecessor to the Ababeel. At the time of the Shaheen-III's test, Lieutenant General (Retd) Khalid Ahmed Kidwai, advisor to Pakistan's National Command Authority, stated, "This missile has been developed solely to counter India, targeting strategic locations in India—particularly the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and the eastern regions where India is constructing nuclear submarine bases. This ensures that India has no safe havens to hide its systems for a counterstrike or first strike."

It is important to note that Indian officials, including Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, have made statements suggesting that India has acquired capabilities enabling it to conduct preemptive strikes against Pakistan. Examples include the supersonic BrahMos missile, which is equipped with both conventional and nuclear capabilities, and India's ongoing development of systems capable of launching first strikes from land, air, and sea.

BrahMos Incident and Concerns About Pakistan's Missile Programme

In 2022, a BrahMos missile inadvertently landed in Pakistan. The Indian Ministry of Defence attributed the incident to an accidental firing from Indian territory. India could potentially use the

BrahMos missile for a conventional counterforce (first) strike against Pakistan's strategic forces and command-and-control systems. Subsequently, India might claim it was a conventional attack. However, such a strike would be perceived by Pakistan as the first nuclear attack.

This scenario underscores the necessity for Pakistan to remain prepared to deter any aggression. For this reason, Pakistan developed and showcased nuclear-capable missiles like Shaheen-III and Ababeel. These capabilities serve to demonstrate Pakistan's readiness and serve as a deterrent. Pakistan's missile advancements are a defensive response to Indian developments, but why does the United States find these missiles concerning?

US Concerns About Pakistan's Missiles

The US Department of State accused RIA MB of collaborating with Pakistan in testing and procuring equipment for diameter rocket motors for Shaheen-III and Ababeel missile systems and potentially even larger systems. The reference to "potentially larger systems" suggests work on the next generation of these missiles.

The first test of the Ababeel missile occurred in January 2017, with a subsequent test taking place six years later, in October 2023. During these six years, continuous work was carried out on this technology within Pakistan's National Defence Complex (NDC). While Shaheen-III was already operational, the second test of Ababeel and its public display in March 2024 indicated Pakistan's advancement to the operational stage.

This progression heightened US concerns, as it suggests Pakistan is potentially working on more advanced versions of these systems. Additionally, the Ababeel's three-stage missile system and mobile launcher capability allow it to be camouflaged and deployed in locations where they are difficult for adversaries to detect.

Missile Technology Developments and US Reactions

US concerns extend to the development of more powerful rocket motors, which could enhance Ababeel's range and capabilities. There are fears that Pakistan's space programme might support military objectives, enabling the development of intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capabilities.

In April, the US imposed restrictions on systems related to mobile launchers and large rocket motors. A US fact sheet accused Belarus-based Minsk Wheeled Tractor Plant of supplying specialised vehicle chassis for Pakistan's ballistic missile programme. Moreover, China's Granpact Company was alleged to have provided equipment aiding Pakistan's rocket motor testing.

Double Standards in Missile Proliferation

While the US imposes restrictions on Pakistan's missile programme, it overlooks India's developments, which benefit from collaborations with Russia and the West. For instance, India's BrahMos missile programme initially had a range of 290 kilometres, but it has since been extended to 800 kilometres, with work underway on a hypersonic version. Similarly, India's Agni-V missile has a range of 5,000–8,000 kilometres and can carry multiple warheads.

Despite India's aggressive advancements, the US has embraced India as a key ally within the QUAD

framework. This strategic partnership, along with India's economic strength and influence in global think tanks, shapes Western perceptions and policies.

Geostrategic Factors and China's Influence

US restrictions on Pakistan's missile programme are largely aimed at China. Pakistan's collaboration with Chinese firms is a focal point of American scrutiny. However, China and Pakistan's cooperative efforts comply with international norms, even though neither is a signatory to the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR).

The US also aims to counter China's growing influence in South Asia, as part of its broader geostrategic objectives involving Ukraine, the Middle East, and Taiwan. Imposing restrictions on Pakistan's missile capabilities is part of this strategy to pressure Beijing economically and geopolitically.

The Role of U.S.-India Relations

The Biden administration appears heavily influenced by India, with growing Indian influence in U.S. policymaking circles evident. India seems to be leveraging Washington's pressure to curtail Pakistan's defensive capabilities. These concerns align with efforts by the Indian lobby in Washington to exploit the perceived weakness of the Biden administration during its final years.

Conclusion: Pakistan's Defence Program Is India-Specific

It remains unlikely that Pakistan would develop the capability to target the United States, either now or in the future. Pakistan's missile and nuclear programmes are tailored specifically to counter Indian threats. Pakistan is not participating in an arms race and maintains its focus on regional stability. By highlighting technical, strategic, and economic realities, it becomes clear that the allegations against Pakistan lack merit and are influenced by regional and political biases. Any advancements in Pakistan's defence capabilities are a response to India's evolving systems and not a threat to the United States or the broader international community.

Sunday 22 December 2024

The Impact of the Arab Spring and the Current Political Situation in Syria

The Division of Syria and the Current Political Game in the Region

In line with the saying, "*Destiny leads one to their inevitable fate,*" Bashar al-Assad appears to have been metaphorically adopted by Russian President Vladimir Putin. For the first time, instead of issuing a statement from the Syrian presidential palace, a message attributed to Assad was published via a Telegram account. The message claimed that he had no intention of leaving Syria but was forced to do so after his army retreated. However, it remains unclear who controls this account or whether Assad himself authored the statement.

The message attributed to Assad was shared in both English and Arabic, detailing events on December 8, when he was reportedly stranded at a Russian military base. Notably, on December 9, rebel factions took control of the capital Damascus, ending Bashar al-Assad's 24-year-long rule.

The statement claims that, as Damascus fell to the rebels, Assad was present at a Russian military base in Latakia to "oversee military operations." By that point, however, the Syrian army had already withdrawn from its positions. The Russian airbase in Hmeimim was also reportedly under "intense drone attacks," which led Russia to decide to evacuate him to Moscow.

"When there was no longer any way to exit the airport," the statement reads, "Russia requested that the base be evacuated immediately on Sunday evening, December 8, and that everyone present be transported to Russia. This occurred a day after Damascus fell to rebel control, leaving all state institutions paralysed as the Syrian army abandoned its positions."

The statement further notes, "During these events, I never once considered resigning from the presidency or seeking asylum, nor was such an offer made to me. However, once the state fell into the hands of terrorists and my capacity to play a meaningful role was diminished, my presence there became pointless."

The question remains: if Bashar al-Assad fled to Russia with his family, was his claim of "overseeing military operations" credible? Would any rational person accept the excuse that he took his family along for military supervision? It appears more likely that Assad, well aware of the consequences of his tyranny, was looting Syria's treasury in preparation for his escape.

When rebel forces, led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, captured Syrian cities and provinces within just 12 days, Assad was nowhere to be seen. Speculations about his departure had already begun circulating. Even as rebels entered Damascus, Assad's own prime minister was reportedly unable to contact him.

Early Sunday morning, as opposition forces entered Damascus without encountering resistance, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham and its allies declared, "The tyrant Bashar al-Assad has fled Syria." During this time, two senior Syrian military officers confirmed that Assad had boarded a Syrian Air flight and departed from Damascus Airport on Sunday morning.

The simplest answer to this development lies in Russia's role. Since the civil war began in 2011, Russia emerged as Assad's primary ally, maintaining two military bases in Syria. In 2015, Russian airstrikes in support of Assad decisively turned the tide of the war in his favour, leading to a series of defeats

for opposition groups. Following this, Assad's regime broke all records of brutality in its campaign to eliminate dissent.

According to a UK-based group, Russian operations over nine years resulted in the deaths of over 21,000 people, including 8,700 civilians. However, Russia's focus on Ukraine had divided its attention, leaving it either unwilling or incapable of countering rebel advances against Assad in late November.

Assad's deep ties with Russia, particularly Moscow, are no secret. A 2019 Financial Times investigation revealed that during the Syrian civil war, Assad's family purchased 18 luxurious apartments in Moscow to siphon millions of dollars out of the country.

Last week, a Russian newspaper reported that Assad's 22-year-old son, Hafez al-Assad, is currently pursuing a PhD in Moscow. Amid the chaos in Damascus, Russian state television reported that Russian officials were in talks with Syria's armed opposition to ensure the safety of the two Russian military bases and diplomatic staff in the country.

Meanwhile, Syrian rebel factions are in the process of forming an interim government. The most powerful group, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, initially emerged in 2011 under the name Jabhat al-Nusra, announcing its affiliation with al-Qaeda the same year. However, the organisation severed ties with al-Qaeda in 2016, joining forces with other groups to form Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham.

Despite this rebranding, the United Nations, the United States, the United Kingdom, and several other nations continue to classify the group as a terrorist organisation.

The group's leader, Ahmed al-Sharaa (Abu Muhammad al-Julani), has declared that they intend to show tolerance towards other religious groups and communities in Syria. However, the group's jihadi past has led some to view these promises with suspicion.

On Sunday, UN Special Envoy Geir Pedersen met with Ahmed al-Sharaa, emphasising that "genuine" political change is essential for Syria's future.

Qatar Resumes Diplomatic Activities in Syria After 13 Years

Thirteen years after closing its embassy in Syria, Qatar has sent a delegation to Damascus to restart diplomatic activities in the country. While Western nations have not announced plans to reopen embassies in Syria, the United States and the United Kingdom have confirmed contact with Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in the past two days. However, the British government clarified that despite these "diplomatic contacts," HTS remains classified as a terrorist organisation.

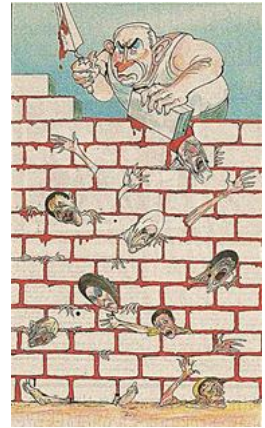
On the other hand, the European Union's foreign policy chief, Kaja Kallas, stated on Monday that Russia and Iran should have "no role in Syria's future."

Direct Contact with Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has confirmed direct contact with HTS, the group now controlling Syria after the fall of former President Bashar al-Assad's regime. This marks the first such

interaction between the US and HTS. Notably, HTS remains designated as a terrorist organisation by the US, and its removal from this list has not yet been discussed. Blinken stated during a briefing that the contact primarily concerned missing American journalist Austin Tice.

Blinken's confirmation came after a meeting in Jordan involving representatives from several Arab nations, Turkey, and Europe to discuss Syria's future. The officials present agreed to support a peaceful transition of power in Syria. Jordan's foreign minister remarked that regional countries do not want to see Syria descend further into chaos.



Following the meeting, a joint statement was issued, supporting the establishment of an inclusive government in Syria that respects minority rights and prevents terrorist groups from using Syrian territory for their activities.

The Push for a New Syrian Government

Recent dramatic changes in Syria have shifted the focus of both internal and external discussions to the importance of establishing a new government representing the Syrian people. It is worth noting that Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham was not represented at the Jordan meeting. Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein voiced concerns about Syria's future, emphasising that regional powers do not want Syria to face a situation similar to Libya's post-revolution chaos.

Libya's experience serves as a cautionary tale. Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, the Arab world's longest-serving leader, was overthrown during the wave of popular uprisings that began in Tunisia in 2011. The so-called "Arab Spring," while touted as a movement for freedom, brought destruction to several nations. Libya, once a stable and prosperous state, was thrown into turmoil by foreign interventions seeking to install a compliant regime. Today, years after Gaddafi's fall, Libya remains in a state of chaos—a testament to the devastation inflicted by these powers.

Reforming Syrian Institutions

At the Jordan meeting, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan emphasised the importance of preserving and reforming Syria's institutions. "During the transition of power in Syria, we must prevent terrorists from exploiting the situation. We need to learn from past mistakes and coordinate our actions," he said.

While no Syrian representative attended the meeting, it is notable that traditional allies of Bashar al-Assad, Iran and Russia, were also absent. Foreign ministers from eight Arab countries stated their commitment to ensuring Syria remains united and not divided along sectarian lines.

Israeli Actions in the Golan Heights

In the wake of Assad's fall, Israel has announced plans to expand Jewish settlements in the Golan Heights. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that this step is necessary to protect Israel from rebel attacks amid the opening of a new front on the Syrian border. It is worth recalling that the Golan Heights were occupied by Israel during the 1967 war, and international law considers this occupation illegal. Netanyahu has expressed his desire to double the Jewish population in the region.

Days ago, the Israeli military seized key positions in Syria's border areas, including a demilitarised buffer zone in the Golan Heights.

Netanyahu also claimed that Israel has no interest in a conflict with Syria but will shape its policies based on the realities on the ground. However, former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert criticised Netanyahu's plans, questioning their rationale. "If we don't want a conflict with Syria and hope to avoid clashes with the rebels taking control, then why are we doing the exact opposite?" Olmert remarked.

This development comes at a time when Syria's new leader, Abu Muhammad al-Jolani, condemned "Israeli attacks on Syria" during an interview with Syrian TV, stating that "such attacks could escalate tensions in the region. Syria does not seek conflict with its neighbours. After prolonged war, the situation does not permit any new disputes." According to the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, nearly 450 airstrikes have been conducted in the country since December 8. It is worth noting that the Golan Heights hosts 30 Israeli settlements with a population of around 20,000, which are deemed illegal under international law. Additionally, the region is home to about 20,000 Syrians who continue to reside there despite Israeli occupation.

Meanwhile, Israel has carried out dozens more airstrikes on Syria, drawing condemnation from regional countries. These attacks have been confirmed by war monitors. Israel has previously claimed that such operations aim to eliminate "strategic threats" that could pose a danger to its security. The United Nations Secretary-General has also expressed deep concern over the hundreds of Israeli airstrikes in Syria.

The fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime marks the end of a 13-year-long civil war. The conflict began over a decade ago when Assad responded with force to pro-democracy protests. The war has resulted in the deaths of over 500,000 people and displaced millions. Throughout this period, Syria became a battleground for international powers and their proxy groups. Now, those nations that were involved in Syria's civil war will inevitably have a significant role in shaping its future.

For the Syrian people to sustain the freedom they have recently achieved, the new leadership must foster complete unity within the country and internationally. Additionally, other Muslim countries in the region must take tangible steps to counteract Israel and its allies' possible strategies. Otherwise, the "Arab Spring's Specter" is advancing at full speed to engulf them. It is imperative for the Muslim Ummah to rise above individual interests, deploy all resources, demonstrate solidarity, and prevent Syria's division. Recognizing the current realities on the ground, Muslim nations must actively contribute to establishing peace and stability in Syria.

Wednesday 24 December 24

Iran's Internal and External Challenges: A Complex Situation

Analysis of Iran's Internal Anger and Its Losses in Syria

When Kufa was once again conquered, he was presented before the famous cultural leader, Saab ibn Zubair, who issued a decree: Celebrate, the enemy of Islam has been killed. An old man sitting in the court smiled, and Saab asked with great anger: Why are you laughing, old man? The old man said: The past is remembered, the present is in front of you, the future is half visible. Musab ordered him to explain his case in detail. The elder said: Can you hear? Then when the old man began to speak, the door and the wall shook:

This was the court. Ubaidullah Ibn Ziyad was sitting on the throne. The head of Husayn Ibn Ali was brought. Ibn Ziyad said: Celebrate, the enemy of Islam has been killed. We celebrated. Once again, this was the court. The head of Mukhtar Saqfi, whose head is lying at your feet, was sitting on the same throne where you are sitting at this time. When Ibn Ziyad's head was brought, Mukhtar Saqfi issued an order: Celebrate, the enemy of Islam has been killed. We celebrated. Today, this is the same court, and you are sitting on the same throne. The head of Mukhtar Saqafi has been brought. Your order is: Celebrate, the enemy of Islam has been killed. We will celebrate today too. Tomorrow the same court will be there too, it is not known who will be sitting on the throne, but we know that your head will be there and the decree will be issued, celebrate, the enemy of Islam has been killed and we will celebrate.

Exactly as the old man had predicted, the head of Mus'ab bin Zubair was presented to Abdul Malik bin Marwan in the court of Kufa and he ordered a celebration. When someone mentioned the old man's words to Abdul Malik bin Marwan, Abdul Malik bin Marwan immediately ordered the court building to be demolished and the court to be built in a remote area of Kufa, but incidents are still happening.

After Bashar al-Assad's Removal from Power in Syria

History is repeating itself once again, but this time Damascus has been chosen instead of Kufa. After Bashar al-Assad was ousted from power, the distorted photos of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, Qassem Soleimani, and former Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah in the Iranian embassy in Damascus are a reminder of how Iran has suffered one loss after another and how a revolution is truly taking place in Syria. On the floor of the Iranian embassy in Damascus, among the broken glass and pieces of the Iranian flag, torn posters with pictures of Iran's Supreme Leader and other leaders are also scattered, and everyone is trampling them underfoot. Dozens of similar photos that were considered worthy of determination, courage, and respect until yesterday, are now presenting scenes that are instructive.

The turquoise tiles of the Iranian Embassy remain intact, but the large, defaced image of Qasem Soleimani, a highly influential former military commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards who was assassinated under orders from US President Donald Trump, dominates the scene. These defaced images are a stark reminder of Iran's successive setbacks in Syria.

At a time when Iran is licking its wounds and facing the potential of another Trump presidency, the

question arises: Will the country adopt an even more hardline policy, or will it initiate new negotiations with Western powers? Moreover, how strong is the Iranian government at present?

Following Bashar al-Assad's ousting, the Supreme Leader, despite facing a clear defeat, adopted a defiant tone in his address. The 85-year-old Ayatollah Khamenei, who has held Iran's reins since 1989, now faces the additional challenge of appointing a successor. In his speech, he declared, *"Iran is strong and powerful, and it will only grow stronger."* He emphasised that Iran's support for the "Axis of Resistance" – an alliance comprising Hamas, Hezbollah, Yemen's Houthis, and Iraqi Shia groups – would emerge even more resolutely against Israel. *"The more pressure you apply, the more this resistance will grow. The more crimes you commit, the stronger this resistance will become. The more you fight us, the wider this battle will spread."*

However, the events following Hamas's 7th October 2023 attack on Israel – whether or not directly supported by Iran but certainly praised by Tehran – have shaken the Iranian regime. Israel's retaliatory actions against its adversaries have reshaped the Middle Eastern landscape, leaving Iran conspicuously absent. According to James Jeffrey, a former US diplomat and expert at the Wilson Centre, *"All members of the Axis of Resistance are now losing. Iran's axis has been crushed by Israel, and following regime change in Syria, it is fragmenting further. Aside from Yemen's Houthis, Iran has no clear path forward in the region."*

While Iran still backs powerful armed Shia groups in neighbouring Iraq, Jeffrey asserts that *"the recent events have significantly eroded Iranian dominance in the region."*

Bashar al-Assad was last seen in public on 1st December alongside Iran's Foreign Minister, pledging to confront the rebels advancing toward the Syrian capital. However, after the collapse of his government, Assad is now reportedly taking refuge in Russia. Iran's ambassador to Syria, Hossein Akbari, once presented Assad as a leading figure of the Axis of Resistance. Yet, as Assad's rule came to an end, Iran found itself unable to intervene effectively. Within days, one of the most prominent names of the Axis of Resistance was wiped from the list.

Iran spent decades establishing a network of armed groups across the region to maintain its influence and challenge Israel. This strategy dates back to 1979. After the Iran-Iraq war, Bashar al-Assad's father, Hafez al-Assad, also extended support to Iran. The alliance between Syria's Assad family (from the Alawite sect) and Iran's Shia clerics strengthened Tehran's power in a predominantly Sunni Middle East. Syria served as a vital supply route for Iran to support its allies in Lebanon, particularly Hezbollah, and other armed groups in the region.

Iran had previously come to Bashar al-Assad's aid. When an uprising began against Assad in 2011, Iran provided fighters, fuel, and weapons. Over 2,000 Iranian soldiers and generals were killed while serving as military advisers. According to credible sources, Iran has spent \$30 to \$50 billion since 2011. However, Iran's supply line to Lebanon's Hezbollah and other groups has now been severed.

The Axis of Resistance was designed as a network that would serve as a strategic asset for Iran, ensuring Tehran's safety from any direct attack. Yet, this strategy has now clearly failed.

Iran's Limited Prospects Following the Fall of Bashar al-Assad's Government in Syria

The fall of Bashar al-Assad's government in Syria has significantly restricted Iran's ability to advance its regional agenda. Over recent years, Tehran's military capabilities have appeared increasingly vulnerable, especially in direct confrontations with Israel. In October, when Iran launched ballistic missiles at Israel, most were intercepted and rendered ineffective, although some caused damage to Israeli airbases. Israel's retaliatory strikes inflicted severe damage on Iran's air defence systems and missile production infrastructure. James Jeffrey noted, "The missile threat turned out to be nothing but a paper tiger." Similarly, the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran in July further humiliated Iran.

Iran's foremost priority remains ensuring its survival. In response to these setbacks, Tehran is expected to focus on repositioning itself, reinforcing what remains of the Axis of Resistance, and rebuilding its regional alliances to counter the pressure anticipated from the newly elected US President, Donald Trump.

Dennis Horak, who spent three years as Canada's chargé d'affaires in Iran, describes the Iranian regime as "a government of strong nerves with powerful centres of influence, capable of taking risks." He further noted that Iran retains substantial combat capabilities, which it could use against Gulf Arab states in the event of a conflict with Israel. However, Horak cautioned that it would be a mistake to dismiss Iran as merely a "paper tiger."

Globally, Iran's position has weakened significantly. It now faces the unpredictable leadership of Donald Trump, who is soon to assume office as the US President, and must reckon with Israel's proven ability to strategically target its adversaries.



Iran is likely to revise its Defence Doctrine, which has historically relied heavily on the Axis of Resistance. Furthermore, Tehran will reassess its nuclear programme, determining the necessary investments to bolster its broader security. While Iran insists that its nuclear programme serves peaceful purposes, the Trump administration unilaterally withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal during its first term. That agreement saw Iran limit its nuclear activities in exchange for relief from economic sanctions.

Under the 2015 deal, Iran was permitted to enrich uranium up to 3.67%, a level suitable for nuclear energy production. However, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) now reports that Iran has escalated enrichment to 60% in retaliation to US sanctions. Although 90% enrichment is required for a nuclear weapon, IAEA Director-General Rafael Grossi suggests that Iran's current actions may be a response to its recent regional setbacks.

Darya Dolzиков, a nuclear proliferation expert at the Royal United Services Institute, describes the situation as "deeply concerning," stating that "Iran's nuclear programme is now in an entirely different place compared to 2015."

Experts estimate that Iran could produce weapons-grade uranium within a week, but it would still need several months—possibly up to a year—to develop a deliverable nuclear warhead. Dolzиков remarked, “We do not know precisely how close Iran is to acquiring nuclear weapons. However, the knowledge they now possess will be extremely difficult to roll back.”

Western nations remain deeply alarmed. Dr Raz Zimmt, a senior researcher at Tel Aviv University’s Institute for National Security Studies, noted, “It is clear that Trump will maintain maximum pressure on Iran.” However, she added, “I believe he will also open channels for negotiations to persuade Iran to scale back its nuclear programme.”

Israel’s Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has long advocated for regime change in Iran. However, Dr Zimmt believes that Israel will wait to see Trump’s approach and Iran’s response. A full-scale war appears unlikely. Nasser Hadian, a political science professor at Tehran University, stated, “I believe Trump, as a businessman, will seek dialogue with Iran and attempt to negotiate a deal.”

If negotiations fail, Trump is likely to intensify pressure to bring Iran to the table. Hadian warned, “While a deal is more probable than war, increasing pressure could lead to instability and unintended conflict, a scenario no one desires.”

Domestically, Iran faces significant challenges. Tehran must navigate the selection of a new Supreme Leader. Ayatollah Khamenei, now focused on his legacy, will aim to ensure a smooth transition of power that maintains stability. The government was severely shaken by the nationwide protests in 2022, which were sparked by the death of Mahsa Amini—a young woman allegedly killed for not adhering to Iran’s strict dress code. These demonstrations directly challenged the legitimacy of Iran’s clerical establishment and were ultimately suppressed through brute force.

As Iran grapples with regional setbacks, economic challenges, and internal unrest, its leadership faces the daunting task of maintaining stability while preparing to confront the Trump administration’s anticipated pressure.

There is widespread anger within the country that while Iran is spending heavily abroad, no significant steps are being taken to address the unemployment and inflation that Iranian citizens are facing. Particularly, Iran’s younger generation is increasingly detached from the Islamic Revolution. The majority of them question government restrictions. Despite the risk of arrest, women continue to go out without veils every day, defying government actions. Observers of Iran say that despite all of this, there is no immediate prospect of a change in government in Iran, similar to what happened in Syria.

James Jeffrey states, “I don’t think the Iranian people will rise again because Iran has lost its empire, which was very unpopular.” According to Dennis Horak, tolerance for dissenting voices in Iran will further diminish as the government now focuses on internal security. Legislation to impose stricter punishments for women who do not wear the veil is also expected soon. However, in his view, the Iranian government is not currently in danger. “Even if millions of Iranians do not support this government, there are millions who do. I don’t believe this government will fall anytime soon.”

If we consider the anger within the country and also look at the damage Iran has suffered in Syria, it can be said that Iran's rulers are certainly facing a complex situation. In these difficult circumstances, will Iran stop supporting elements in its neighboring countries, which has led to significant complaints from those countries against Iran? Certainly, Iran's need for the support of its neighbours is greater now than it has ever been before.

پڑوسی کے مکاں میں چھت نہیں ہے
مکاں اپنے بہت اونچے نہ رکھنا

In the neighbour's house, there is no roof,
Do not keep your house too high.

Saturday 28 December 2024

Naval Power of Pakistan and India: A Comparative Analysis

Pakistan's Defensive Position in the Arabian Sea

The echoes of American sanctions still resonate in the air, and now Pakistan Navy's growing capabilities are causing sleepless nights for adversaries. As we all know, Pakistan and India are two neighbouring countries in South Asia that have fought three full-scale wars in the past. In addition, there have been numerous occasions when they narrowly avoided a fourth.

For the past 77 years, the persistent tension has compelled both nations to keep a close eye on each other's military strength. Pakistan, while reserving its right to defence, continues its preparations accordingly. Recently, Indian Navy Chief Admiral R. Hari Kumar stated during an event that India is fully aware of the "remarkable progress" made by the Pakistan Navy, which aims to expand its current fleet to 50 warships in the coming years.

At present, China is assisting the Pakistan Navy in building ships and submarines. "We are fully aware of their (Pakistan's) increasing capabilities. Hence, we are adjusting our strategies and operational plans to neutralise any potential negative impact on our interests. We are fully prepared to face any challenge." Expressing concern over the Pakistan Navy's growing strength and its collaboration with China, India has attempted to mislead global powers.

It should be noted that China's naval power has rapidly increased in recent years, and it is now said to possess more ships than the United States. China has also deployed several research and reconnaissance vessels in the Indian Ocean on a permanent basis. The Indian Navy Chief's remarks come at a time when both India and Pakistan have been focusing on expanding their navies for several years. According to defence experts, in the context of the evolving global security landscape, naval strategies have gained increasing significance.

The Indian Navy currently operates 150 ships of varying sizes, including two aircraft carriers. Additionally, India possesses 16 conventional submarines and two nuclear-powered ones. The Indian Navy also has 275 aircraft, helicopters, and drones, with another 50 ships and submarines under various stages of construction. Recently, India built its indigenous aircraft carrier, INS Vikrant, while the government has approved another aircraft carrier, which will take several years to construct. Currently, India operates the Russian-made aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya alongside its own INS Vikrant.

In recent years, India has developed two nuclear submarines domestically with Russian assistance, with two more expected to become operational in the coming years. Over the past 30-40 years, the Indian Navy has quietly focused on its expansion. It was the first navy in the region to induct an aircraft carrier into its fleet. In 1964, the Indian Navy purchased an old British aircraft carrier, HMS Hercules, which was renamed INS Vikrant. However, many of India's submarines have become outdated. Of its 16 conventional submarines, half are no longer combat-ready, leading the navy to focus on acquiring nuclear-powered submarines.

Navies are generally classified into three categories: a "brown water" navy operates in inland

waterways and rivers; a "green-water" navy patrols coastal areas, typically within a radius of 12 to 16 nautical miles, primarily to safeguard its coastline and territorial waters; and a "blue-water" navy can patrol thousands of miles beyond its territorial waters and assert its presence. Currently, the Indian Navy qualifies as a blue-water navy, and it is widely known that India's naval capabilities surpass Pakistan's. Nevertheless, India seems driven by a militaristic ambition to become a regional superpower.

According to Pakistani military sources, the Pakistan Navy has 45 ships of various types, including six oil tankers. The fleet includes five submarines, while eight additional submarines and several warships are under construction. The Pakistan Navy also operates three fixed-wing aircraft, three rotary-wing aircraft, and a squadron of drones. It should be noted that a squadron typically consists of multiple aircraft, but exact figures regarding the fleet size remain undisclosed.

Pakistan has a coastline exceeding 1,000 kilometres in length. However, defence analysts from both countries agree that comparing their naval forces based solely on their inventory of warships and submarines is not entirely appropriate, as the objectives of each navy differ. The mission of the Pakistan Navy is fundamentally defensive, focused on safeguarding its maritime borders. Since over 90% of Pakistan's trade occurs via sea routes, the Navy's primary responsibility is to ensure the protection of these routes during both peace and war. The resources required for this are acquired as needed.

Defence experts from Pakistan believe that the Pakistan Navy has made remarkable progress in recent years and that the leadership is well aware of India's interest in its development. The echoes of American sanctions still resonate in the air, and now Pakistan Navy's growing capabilities are causing sleepless nights for adversaries. As we all know, Pakistan and India are two neighbouring countries in South Asia that have fought three full-scale wars in the past. In addition, there have been numerous occasions when they narrowly avoided a fourth.

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The Evolving Strength of the Pakistan Navy

The Pakistan Navy conducts biennial exercises to prepare for complex operations in case of war. In February this year, similar exercises took place along the coastal areas of Sindh and Baluchistan, named *Sea Spark 2024*. During these exercises, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) stated that "while conducting operations at sea, Pakistan Navy's warships and aircraft detected the presence of Indian Navy ships, submarines, and aircraft attempting to secretly observe Pakistan Navy's war drills."



In recent years, the Pakistan Navy has added numerous new ships to its fleet, with several more ships and submarines currently under construction. Last year, the Pakistan Navy inducted the Turkish-built warship *PNS Babar* and the Romanian-built *PNS Hanan* into its fleet. Additionally, an agreement between Pakistan and China to construct four naval warships, signed in 2018, was completed last year when China delivered two Type 054A warships to Pakistan. Previously, China had handed over two similar warships.

Reports suggest that Pakistan has also placed an order with China for eight *Hangor*-class submarines, expected to be delivered by 2028. Retired Vice Admiral Ahmed Tasneem, a former commander of the Pakistan Navy who led the *PNS Hangor* in 1971 to destroy the Indian warship *INS Khukri*, believes that the Pakistan Navy has advanced rapidly over the past 15 years. He attributes this progress to effective leadership within the navy.

Pakistan's decision-makers came to realise the importance of maritime strength relatively late. "When the government stopped ignoring this sector," the pace of development in the Pakistan Navy accelerated. "We quietly secured funding, acquired new platforms, purchased advanced weapons and sensors, and successfully implemented a policy of technology transfer with other nations," Admiral Tasneem noted.

Recently, Turkish and Romanian-built ships have been added to the Pakistan Navy, and in the near future, its fleet is expected to reach 50 warships. Pakistan and China are currently co-producing four submarines, with half being constructed in China and the other half at Karachi Shipyard. The Pakistan Navy is also working on building additional warships, with components being produced both locally and internationally.

On the other hand, India claims that "Pakistan has increased its capacity to build ships, missiles, and submarines through China's assistance. Most notably, China has provided Pakistan with two *Area Denial* missiles, which have a range of 200 to 400 kilometres and can easily target aircraft carriers." According to Indian experts, "China is deeply interested in enhancing Pakistan's naval capabilities because the Chinese Navy operates extensively in the Indian Ocean. If Pakistan secures the Arabian Sea, it reduces the burden on China in this region."

Pakistan's conventional submarines reportedly have capabilities not possessed by India, further fuelling Indian concerns. Experts within the Pakistan Navy argue that the ongoing rivalry between the United States and China in the region also impacts the strategic environment, often benefiting

India. To counter China's growing influence, the United States has developed the *Indo-Pacific Strategy*, which it describes as a multinational policy but primarily involves alliances with like-minded nations. In this context, the US has established the QUAD alliance, comprising the US, India, Japan, and Australia, focusing on economic, military, and technological cooperation. This collaboration benefits India, which poses challenges for Pakistan.

Defence analysts suggest that Pakistan has adopted a *sea denial* strategy instead of *sea control*, primarily due to budgetary constraints. A sea denial strategy relies heavily on submarines, which can attack targets while remaining submerged. Pakistan's mini-submarines can dive up to 100 metres and operate near maritime borders. If an enemy vessel approaches Pakistan's waters, its chances of retreat are significantly reduced.

Experts acknowledge that the Pakistan Navy is now a formidable force. Some speculate that, with Chinese assistance, Pakistan may even be developing underwater drones for future naval deployment. Indian concerns over the Pakistan Navy stem from its strategic significance, as a large proportion of India's oil imports and trade with Europe pass through the Gulf of Oman and the Red Sea. With China's naval base in Djibouti and Pakistan's active presence in Karachi, Gwadar, and the Makran coast, the combined strength of Pakistan and China in the region has grown substantially.

India's Overextended Maritime Aspirations

India has assumed maritime responsibilities far beyond its existing capabilities. In contrast, Pakistan's maritime zones are relatively smaller, meaning Pakistan's responsibilities are also limited to overseeing the Arabian Sea, where any potential conflict would also take place. On the other hand, India, under the aegis of the United States, projects an impression of having extended its naval reach from the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea and the Pacific Ocean. However, India's military or naval forces lack the capability to protect interests at such distant locations effectively.

While India has theoretically expanded its reach akin to global powers, its practical ability to safeguard its interests over such distances remains insufficient. Over the past two decades, the Indian Navy has invested heavily in itself, aspiring to act as the region's "policeman." At present, however, India does not possess the capabilities required to justify its self-proclaimed label of a "net security provider." This status demands oversight of regional developments and adequate resources and capabilities to address them, which India currently lacks. However, achieving this goal remains India's long-term ambition.

A Regional Comparison

Indian defence experts acknowledge significant disparities between the military strengths of India, China, and Pakistan. The gap between Indian and Chinese capabilities is vast. Regarding India and Pakistan, China's assistance has significantly bolstered Pakistan's Navy and Air Force in recent years.

Pakistan's three armed forces, including the Navy, are primarily focused on defending the country's territory. While they possess offensive capabilities, Pakistan harbours no aggressive ambitions or intentions of territorial expansion. Instead, it remains committed to safeguarding every inch of its land with a strong and resilient defence posture.

Pakistan Navy's Growing Strength

On 25 November 2022, at the invitation of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, a high-level delegation participated in the inauguration of PNS Khyber, the third of four MILGEM corvette warships for the Pakistan Navy, at the Istanbul Shipyard. The MILGEM project is Turkey's national naval shipbuilding programme, managed by the Turkish Navy. These warships are designed for military surveillance, intelligence missions, early warnings, anti-submarine warfare, and other operations.

The contract for constructing the MILGEM warships for Pakistan's Navy was awarded to a Turkish firm in 2018. The first warship, PNS Babur, was inaugurated in Istanbul in August 2021, while the second, PNS Badr, was launched in Karachi in May 2022. These technologically advanced warships represent the most modern additions to the Pakistan Navy fleet, equipped with cutting-edge weaponry. They are instrumental in enhancing Pakistan's maritime security capabilities, particularly along the Sindh and Baluchistan coasts.

This project symbolises the historical friendship and fraternal ties between two Muslim nations, Pakistan and Turkey. The relationship between the two countries is rooted in a shared Islamic heritage, traditions, and camaraderie.

Strengthening Pakistan-Turkey Ties

Pakistan and Turkey have long supported each other in natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods. Historically, the two nations have stood together on issues like Kashmir and Cyprus. However, their economic cooperation remains relatively limited.

The deepening defence collaboration between Pakistan and Turkey is causing unease in India. A 2021 report from the Economic Times highlighted that Turkey's decision to work with Pakistan in Afghanistan sparked speculation that India could face increased challenges in the Mediterranean and South Asia. Turkey has emphasised its focus on economic development in war-torn Afghanistan, and both nations are jointly extending a railway line through Iran.

Defence Collaboration

Turkey and Pakistan's strategic alliance is evident in their defence agreements. For instance, Pakistan is acquiring four MILGEM warships from Turkey's state defence contractor ASFAT. Additionally, Pakistan has ordered 30 T-129 ATAK helicopters from Turkey, with defence procurement between the two nations exceeding \$3 billion.

Pakistan also supported Turkey's gas exploration efforts in the Eastern Mediterranean and has received Turkey's unequivocal backing on the Kashmir issue. In February 2020, President Erdoğan stated that the Kashmir issue holds as much importance for Pakistan as it does for Turkey. Pakistan, in turn, supported Turkey during the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict.

Geopolitical Implications

The strengthening Pakistan-Turkey alliance, alongside Pakistan-China relations, poses challenges for India. The increasing dominance of the Pakistan Navy in strategic maritime routes could undermine the Quad alliance's objectives. Pakistan's enhanced naval capabilities, including its presence in the

Karachi, Gwadar, and Makran maritime regions, threaten to disrupt India's oil supplies from the Persian Gulf and trade with Europe via the Red Sea.

With growing regional influence and a strengthened navy, Pakistan has become a formidable maritime power, better equipped to safeguard its national interests and play a pivotal role in regional security.

Sunday 29 December 2024

Syria's Political Complexities and Future Predictions

Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Global Politics: An Analysis

After October 7 last year, the ongoing Israeli aggression in the region, coupled with the collusion of the United States and its allies, has shaped the current situation, leaving profound effects not only on regional countries but also on the international landscape. This sequence of events seems to be heading towards its logical conclusion, where attempts to transform the idea of Greater Israel into a reality are underway.

The pressing question arises: will this sinister triangle now turn its focus towards Iran and Turkey, eventually tightening its grip on Pakistan to target its nuclear capabilities? If these critical questions are not addressed with prudence, the dark clouds of compromise may drag us into a catastrophic storm, erasing us like straw in the wind. Undoubtedly, history would categorize us alongside those Muslim rulers who became lessons of humiliation, similar to our predecessors who were obliterated by Halaku Khan's forces. This fate befell them because they expended their energies on self-destruction for the sake of retaining power. (God forbid!)

It is noteworthy that the decline of two international powers, Iran and Russia, who supported Bashar al-Assad for years in suppressing the rebellion in his country, is also evident in this context. Even after Assad fled the country and a transitional government was established in Syria, analysts continue to scrutinize the causes behind the Assad regime's downfall and its implications for the region. Some experts use the 'Butterfly Effect' theory to understand these events.

This theory illustrates how interconnected global events are, using the example of a butterfly flapping its wings, potentially triggering a storm in a distant location.

Political analysts, including former Israeli diplomat Meir Cohen, have linked the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's government in Syria to Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel using the 'Butterfly Effect' theory. Cohen argues that the attack led by Yahya Sinwar with Iranian backing aimed to encircle Israel in collaboration with Hezbollah in Lebanon. However, Iran itself fell victim to this strategy. The decline of Iran's 'Axis of Resistance,' which includes Hezbollah and Hamas, resembles a rolling snowball destroying everything in its path, with Assad's downfall in Syria being a direct consequence. Cohen further asserts that this sequence will ultimately result in the downfall of the Iranian regime.

Another theory posits that Israel and its strong allies, including the United States, were not only aware of this entire plan but also actively exacerbated its vulnerabilities. By utilizing their pawns, they encouraged Hamas and its supporters to launch the October 7 attack. This served as a pretext for initiating subsequent actions to advance their sinister objectives, paving the way for the establishment of Greater Israel—a process we are witnessing now. In this context, Netanyahu's ominous statement immediately after the Hamas attack should be recalled, where he warned that "even future generations of those responsible for these actions will bear the consequences, and Israel will achieve its ultimate goal."

Meir Cohen believes it is now imperative for Israel, the United States, and Arab nations to develop a joint vision for the region's future. Recent events have significantly impacted Iran, with large-scale protests within the country indicating this trend.

Meanwhile, in Palestine's West Bank, protests have begun to remove Mahmoud Abbas's government. There is also a risk that the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt might exploit these developments, while Jordan's government faces its own challenges.

On the other hand, Alia Ebrahimi, a researcher at Washington's Atlantic Council, analysing Middle Eastern politics, agrees with Cohen's assertion that the October 7 attacks are among the factors leading to Assad's downfall. However, she emphasizes the psychological and military repercussions that bolstered the rise of Syrian opposition.

"We can observe a clear connection between the October 7 attacks on Israel and the collapse of Assad's regime," she states. Alia Ebrahimi also highlights other decisive factors in Assad's fall, including Syria's economic devastation, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Turkey's growing impatience with Assad, and Iran's diminishing power post-October 7.

According to her, "At a time when Assad's opponents appeared more united, organized, and determined than ever, Israeli actions against Hezbollah and Iranian Revolutionary Guards in Syria further weakened the Syrian president."

Alia Ebrahimi concludes that the 'Butterfly Effect' initiated on October 7 triggered a chain of unintended events. However, she cautions against ignoring psychological impacts. " Hamas demonstrated that even dominant powers have vulnerabilities, and the balance of power can shift at any moment. Syrian rebels were perhaps inspired by this, and similar phenomena could occur in other parts of the region."

Political Analyst Yuval Stern on the Assad Regime's Fall and the October 7th Attacks

Political analyst Yuval Stern also acknowledges the link between the fall of the Assad regime and the October 7th attacks. However, he disagrees with using the "Butterfly Effect" theory to explain this connection. According to Stern, the theory does not present the events in Syria and the region in the correct context. Any incident in one part of the region inevitably influences other areas. "Events in Syria cannot be isolated from occurrences in Israel, Lebanon, Palestine, and other areas."

Stern believes that all forces involved in the region—including Iran, Turkey, the United States, Israel, Russia, and Arab nations—share certain common factors. Each of these countries plays a role throughout the region, making it highly complex. The "Butterfly Effect" is generally used where there is no clear connection between events. In contrast, there is a direct relationship between developments in the Middle East, which affect neighbouring Arab countries as well.

Abu Diab, a Lebanese researcher and an expert in international relations and geopolitics, does not ignore the impact of the October 7th events and the resultant fall of the Assad regime.

However, he contends that the regime's fall was not sudden but rather the outcome of a growing public rebellion that began in 2011, later escalating into a complex civil war. Forces stationed in Idlib

since 2020 had been preparing for this moment. These forces, combined with internal, regional, and international changes, further weakened the Syrian government. Rather than improving the situation, Assad chose to consolidate his rule. His regime's involvement in the narcotics trade made Syria a major producer of Captagon. Although the salaries of Syrian soldiers were reduced, the plight of the missing and imprisoned individuals worsened, contributing further to the regime's downfall.



The United States indirectly supported Assad's regime in 2013 when he used chemical weapons. Prioritising discussions with Iran about its nuclear programme, the U.S. overlooked Assad's actions. Israel also perceived the Assad regime as a lesser threat compared to others due to its adherence to the 1974 disengagement agreement concerning the Golan Heights. Israel preferred alliances with minorities in the region over a Sunni majority. However, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and reduced Iranian support created a security vacuum in Syria.

For its survival, the Assad regime continued to play a role in various disputes on both regional and international levels. While Bashar al-Assad tried to balance his relationships with Israel and Iran, he faced immense difficulties and failed to make decisive choices.

The rapid developments in the Middle East also brought significant changes to regional and international power balances, as well as among Assad's allies. Despite close cooperation between Assad's regime and Russia and Iran, differences persisted. With the arrival of a new U.S. administration keen on resolving the Ukraine crisis, Iran's relevance to Russia in the region diminished, reshaping alliances. This situation placed Assad's regime in a precarious position.

Now that the Assad family's 55-year rule has ended, Ahmad al-Shara has emerged as a new figure. Al-Shara's current role differs from his past as the leader of a jihadist movement linked to Al-Qaeda. As Commander-in-Chief, he has assumed responsibilities in the new Syrian administration. He is now prominent on the political stage, issuing reassurances at both domestic and international levels. With the declaration of an interim government in Damascus, diplomatic activities and visits from neighbouring countries have increased. Familiar figures are also reappearing, notably former Vice President Farouk, who had been absent from the political scene for years.

Looking forward, questions about Syria's future are becoming more serious and challenging to predict. What will the potential scenarios be? Will external influence in Syria, supported by Turkey and the West, remain confined to Israel, or will a strong Arab alliance emerge in the future? What position will Iran and its allies hold in this context? Or are we witnessing the dawn of a new Middle East?

Mehdi Taeb, former deputy commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps in 2013, aptly described Iran's relationship with Syria and the repercussions of Assad's fall. He stated, "If we lose Syria, we cannot save Tehran."

According to Israeli analyst Yuval Stern, the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime will have significant negative effects on Iran's "Axis of Resistance" in the region. Syria's supply routes, crucial for maintaining this axis, have now been disrupted, making it difficult for Iran to send weapons to Hezbollah. Thus, Assad's fall has eliminated a significant strategic threat to Israel. With the destruction of Syria's military capabilities, including its navy, Israel has achieved a major objective.

Israel's Strategic Efforts and Regional Dynamics: A Complex Political Landscape

Israel's achievement of its strategic goals has been the result of years of dedicated efforts and a carefully planned approach to maintain dominance in the region. The unfolding situation was no sudden occurrence. Since 7 October of last year, Israel has concentrated its efforts on devastating Gaza and surrounding areas, playing a bloody game that turned the region into ruins. While engaging in occasional border skirmishes with Hezbollah in Lebanon, Israel avoided a full-scale conflict. Its defeat in a previous war against Hezbollah led Israel to meticulously prepare for future confrontations.

In its bid to weaken Hezbollah, Israel exploited Lebanon's internal discord, using its agents to disrupt the Christian-Hezbollah alliance. It also tampered with Hezbollah's advanced wireless communication systems by planting specialised chips in hundreds of walkie-talkie devices.

These allowed Israel to pre-empt Hezbollah's strategies. When Hezbollah launched retaliatory rocket and drone attacks, Israel turned these very devices into tools of destruction, executing an inhumane operation. Subsequently, Israel escalated its airstrikes on Lebanon, pressuring the Lebanese government into an agreement. This accord resulted in the deployment of a weakened Lebanese military near Hezbollah's positions, effectively safeguarding Israel's borders.

Simultaneously, Israel continued its assaults on Syria. Following the escape of Bashar al-Assad, it seized control of the Golan Heights buffer zone and is now within 26 miles of Damascus.

Syria's Uncertain Future

Political and defence analysts fear that Syria may face a situation akin to Iraq's fragmentation. The challenges of forming a stable government in regions with ethnic and sectarian diversity, such as Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, are significant. International interventions have further complicated Syria's internal dynamics. While it is challenging to predict Syria's exact trajectory, ground realities suggest the involvement of a southern force rather than Ahmed Al-Shar'a's faction entering Damascus.

Though Ahmed Al-Shar'a initiated significant momentum from Idlib, it is improbable that Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham can govern Syria independently. The country's diversity—whether political, sectarian, religious, or ethnic—makes singular dominance unlikely. Observers anticipate the establishment of a new government, potentially by March, followed by constitutional announcements and elections. However, the country is entering a complex and fragile transitional phase with uncertain outcomes. Despite these uncertainties, experts familiar with the region believe Syria will not follow Afghanistan's model.

International Implications: Pakistan and Global Pressures

Meanwhile, Pakistan has come under renewed scrutiny due to US missile-related sanctions. The

Biden administration's measures against Pakistan, enacted following its own setbacks, are poised to create hurdles for the incoming Trump administration. These sanctions aim to exploit Pakistan's ongoing political instability.

The "Triaca" (the US, Israel, and India) appears determined to escalate Pakistan's domestic political tensions into a broader conflict. Proxies from Afghanistan are actively engaged in terrorist activities within Pakistan. Recently, Pakistan launched airstrikes on internal terrorist sanctuaries in response to escalating threats, prompting an unwarranted protest from the Afghan government. Despite repeated evidence-based appeals by Pakistan to Afghanistan for action against these terrorists, the Taliban government's dismissive stance suggests an anti-Pakistan agenda.

The adversaries' ultimate objective is to foment discord between two Muslim nations, mirroring the devastating Iran-Iraq war. The aftermath of that conflict serves as a stark reminder of the perils of internal strife. It is imperative for Pakistan and Afghanistan to exercise restraint and address these challenges wisely.

The Taliban, too, must remember the divine principle of reciprocity: Allah SWT Says, "Is the reward for good anything but good?" Mutual understanding and cooperation are essential for fostering harmony between the two nations.

Tuesday 31 December 2024

Political Fate of Hasina and Imran: Trump's Influence and Global Politics

The Interim Government of Bangladesh and Corruption

Donald Trump of the Republican Party is set to take the oath as the 47th President of the United States on 20th January 2025. While Trump has received congratulatory messages from around the world, countries in South Asia have pinned significant hopes on him. In nations like Pakistan and Bangladesh, there is an amplified narrative suggesting that the policies of the next occupant of the White House will exert such pressure on these countries that their leaders will not only be released from incarceration but also reinstated to power. The assumption is that Trump might appoint viceroys of his choice in these nations, turning them into de facto colonies of the United States.

However, while Trump's re-election has sparked anxiety in some countries, others seem optimistic. Certain leaders of Pakistan's PTI party believe that Trump will secure the release of their "good friend," Imran Khan. They assert that Khan's public declarations of independence—such as his rallying cries of "We are not slaves" and "Absolutely not!"—will be forgotten in favour of US interests under Trump's leadership.

A similar sentiment prevails in Bangladesh, where speculations abound that the former Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, might regain her lost political footing with Trump's return. Notably, in August this year, Sheikh Hasina had to flee the country amidst a student-led movement, seeking refuge under Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's protection. In her absence, an interim government was established, with Nobel laureate economist Dr. Muhammad Yunus appointed as its chief adviser.

The pressing question remains: Are these expectations of Trump's priorities grounded in reality, or are they merely statements designed to recover his party's lost popularity and deflect attention from corruption? How will the political landscapes of Pakistan and Bangladesh be impacted by the change in leadership in Washington? Can these countries expect the same level of support under Trump's administration as before?

On social media platform X, Sheikh Hasina shared a photograph of herself with Donald Trump, congratulating him on his victory as the 47th President of the United States. She described Trump's electoral triumph as a testament to his leadership and the American people's trust in him. Expressing hope for stronger bilateral relations during Trump's second term, she emphasised collaboration to advance mutual and multilateral interests, while wishing the newly elected President and his family good health and longevity.

In 2016, Donald Trump defeated Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton to win the US presidency. At the time, Muhammad Yunus, now heading Bangladesh's interim government, likened Trump's victory to a solar eclipse and a dark day. Yunus criticised the 2016 elections as an example of flawed politics, advising Trump to build bridges instead of walls and adopt a more liberal approach. Many analysts perceived Yunus as being closer to the Democrats, which was evident when the Biden administration and Hillary Clinton worked closely with him during Bangladesh's political transition.

Yunus's recent visit to the US, particularly his participation in the Clinton Global Initiative programme alongside former US President Bill Clinton, drew considerable attention. As power shifts from Democrats to Republicans in the US, the key question is whether Trump will continue Biden-era policies in South Asia or chart a new course.

Political analysts note that the Biden administration treated Bangladesh as an independent entity, contrasting with the previous view of South Asia as a singular bloc through an Indian lens. This shift resulted in significant changes in Bangladesh, including stricter scrutiny of human rights and election-related issues under Biden's tenure, which strained relations with Sheikh Hasina.

Kadul Kolol, political editor of Bangladesh's Bengali-language daily Prothom Alo, highlighted that while US-Bangladesh relations were not strained during Trump's first term, the electoral process in Bangladesh faced criticism. However, apart from calls for free and fair elections, the Trump administration refrained from taking significant action. Trade and dialogue between the two nations continued. Kolol remarked that Muhammad Yunus's recent meeting with Joe Biden has left many speculating about what lies ahead.

NTV Bangladesh senior journalist Barshon Kabir observed that Trump's perspective on the subcontinent is influenced by his close ties with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. While Trump's return to power has elicited mixed feelings in Bangladesh, Yunus maintains strong relations with the US. Despite this, Kabir anticipates significant changes in India's relations with Bangladesh under Trump's leadership.

Meanwhile, India, which once treated Bangladesh as a colony, has officially been asked to hand over the deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to Bangladesh for judicial proceedings. Bangladesh's advisor on foreign affairs, Touhid Hussain, informed the media that the country seeks Hasina's extradition to face charges, including the deaths of hundreds of students during the protests that led to her ouster.

India's Ministry of External Affairs Confirms Sheikh Hasina Extradition Request

India's Ministry of External Affairs has confirmed receiving an official diplomatic letter from Bangladesh regarding the extradition of Sheikh Hasina. However, spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal stated that, at this stage, no further comments could be made on the matter.

It should be noted that former Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina arrived in Delhi on August 5, via a flight from Dhaka, following widespread protests and violent demonstrations against her government in Bangladesh. Since then, she has been residing in Delhi. Initially, reports suggested that she would leave Delhi for the United Kingdom, but for unspecified reasons, this did not happen. Sheikh Hasina and the Awami League are considered to have close ties with Delhi. Her asylum in India has incited strong resentment among the Bangladeshi public against India.

There is an extradition treaty between India and Bangladesh for criminals and wanted individuals. The Indian government anticipated that at some point, Bangladesh's interim government would formally request Sheikh Hasina's extradition. However, it is highly unlikely that India will hand her

over to Dhaka. Bangladesh is also aware that such a request would lead to prolonged legal proceedings, potentially lasting years.

After the establishment of an interim government in Dhaka, led by Muhammad Yunus, the Indian media has portrayed this administration as a radical Islamist, anti-India, and anti-Hindu regime. Indian media outlets have frequently aired reports showing attacks on the Hindu minority community and their temples in Bangladesh. Over recent months, the Ministry of External Affairs in India has repeatedly expressed concerns over attacks on Bangladeshi Hindus and their places of worship.

Recently, tensions between the two nations seemed to escalate further when a controversial Facebook post by Muhammad Yunus's adviser, Mahfuz Alam, depicted Indian territories such as Tripura, West Bengal, and Assam as part of Bangladesh.

Indian strategic affairs expert Brahma Chellaney shared a screenshot of Mahfuz Alam's Facebook post, commenting:

“During an event attended by former US President Bill Clinton, Muhammad Yunus introduced Mahfuz Alam as the mastermind behind the fall of Sheikh Hasina's government. Now, this Islamic student leader envisions an ‘Akhand Bangladesh’ (Unified Bangladesh), which includes parts of India. Mahfuz Alam has been given a ministerial rank in Muhammad Yunus's administration.”



Foreign affairs analyst Nainima Basu emphasises that while attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh have occurred, it is crucial to note that most Hindus in the country are Awami League supporters. Many of these attacks were targeted at pro-Awami League Hindus who had participated in violent actions against protestors during Hasina's tenure. These incidents have also affected Muslims on a significant scale, making them political rather than religious in nature. However, the way these events were exaggerated in Indian media has undeniably strained bilateral relations.

Having recently visited Bangladesh, Nainima Basu notes that the Hindu community in the country is focused on safeguarding its democratic rights in the evolving political landscape. She argues that Bangladeshi Hindus, if given the choice, would prefer migration to the US or Europe over India, indicating no special affinity towards India.

The Extradition Debate

The question arises: have relations between India and Bangladesh deteriorated substantially following the establishment of the interim government, and will Sheikh Hasina's extradition request further strain ties?

Analyst Nirupama Subramanian suggests the relationship between the two nations will not be significantly impacted by these developments. She explains:

“India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri recently visited Dhaka, indicating Delhi's acknowledgement that Sheikh Hasina will not return to power in the near future. The Awami League will require

significant time to regain its position as a functional and popular political entity. Therefore, India's only pragmatic approach is to strengthen relations with the interim government."

This is necessary not only due to the presence of a sizeable Hindu minority in Bangladesh but also because bilateral relations directly influence the security of India's northeastern states and the increasing influence of China in the region. Misri's visit to Dhaka represents a critical step in this direction.

Meanwhile, Indian disinformation campaigns have claimed that democracy in Bangladesh will weaken under the interim government, allowing hardline religious factions to seize power. While the interim government includes progressive members, it also comprises individuals with strong religious ideologies.

Democratic Aspirations and Future Prospects

Criticism of Sheikh Hasina's governance has centered on allegations that elections under her regime were unfree and unfair, with opposition parties barred from participating. Nainima Basu underscores the need for early elections in Bangladesh, ensuring inclusive participation by all political groups to uphold democratic values.

Michael Kugelman, head of the South Asia Institute at the Wilson Center in Washington, commented on Bangladesh's current political scenario in an op-ed:

"It is noteworthy that Dhaka currently lacks an elected government. However, the emergence of a new, powerful political group, committed to restoring democracy, offers hope for the future. This group includes student leaders who led protests resulting in Sheikh Hasina's ousting and some of whom are part of the interim government. The administration features human rights advocates and reformists committed to democratic improvements."

Bangladesh's Interim Government and Corruption Allegations

The interim government of Bangladesh is being led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, who is considered one of the country's foremost democracy advocates. He is held in high esteem, especially among the youth of Bangladesh. Historically, there have been several examples of resistance leaders strengthening democracy in their respective nations. Notable examples include Václav Havel of Czechoslovakia and Kim Dae-jung of South Korea. In these countries, resistance movements took power and subsequently reinforced democratic institutions. It cannot be ruled out that Yunus and the student leaders rallying around him may form their own political party to challenge the entrenched dynastic and undemocratic political leadership of Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, the name of British Minister Tulip Siddiq has surfaced in connection with ongoing corruption investigations in Bangladesh. She has been accused of her family's alleged involvement in embezzling £3.9 billion. Tulip Siddiq, aged 42, serves as the UK's Minister for Anti-Corruption and is the niece of former Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed. She has been accused of facilitating an agreement in 2013 between Bangladesh and Russia, which allegedly inflated the cost of a nuclear power plant in Bangladesh. The new government in Bangladesh is actively investigating allegations of corruption against Sheikh Hasina and her family, and Tulip Siddiq's name has been

implicated as part of these probes. However, Siddiq has dismissed the allegations as politically motivated and aimed at undermining her aunt, Sheikh Hasina.

The UK's Conservative Party's Shadow Home Secretary, Matt Vickers, remarked on the matter: *"The revelation that the Labour Party's Anti-Corruption Minister herself faces corruption allegations is yet another stain on Keir Starmer's leadership. The British public deserves a government focused on their concerns, not one entangled in yet another corruption scandal. It is time for Tulip Siddiq to come clean."*

In Bangladesh, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) is currently investigating Sheikh Hasina's sister, Tulip Siddiq, as well as other members of the former government. Additionally, the Bangladesh International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) has issued arrest warrants against Sheikh Hasina and 45 other individuals on charges of crimes against humanity.

Interestingly, parallels can be drawn between the political trajectories of Sheikh Hasina and Pakistan's Imran Khan. Supporters of both leaders are looking towards Donald Trump, not only for their release but also for their potential return to power. Both leaders face extensive corruption cases. The pressing question is whether their optimism regarding Trump will yield results, given America's stance that there are no "free lunches" in global politics.

Could these leaders be leveraged as part of the Quad alliance aimed at countering China? Only time will tell whether these "optimistic hopes" will transform into bitter realities. History shows that once the United States achieves its objectives, it does not hesitate to abandon its allies. Pakistan, more than any other nation, has experienced this harsh truth.

Thursday 2nd January 2025

The seat of enlightenment is in the hands of clowns.

Kashmir: Memories of the Past and the Current Situation

Currently, the Muslim Ummah is the most afflicted community in the world, besieged by a deluge of trials and tribulations from all directions. Our enemies are not only united in their practical conspiracies to annihilate Muslims but have also left no stone unturned in making us enemies of one another. Consequently, we remain engrossed in cutting each other's throats.

Although the Muslim Ummah is grappling with numerous issues, Kashmir and Palestine have become two major killing fields where humanity has been wailing incessantly for the past seven decades. Yet, the nations that pride themselves on being civilised are not only playing the role of deaf and mute devils but are also complicit in these atrocities.

The Kashmiris and Palestinians are enduring catastrophic suffering, but it is profoundly regrettable that the gatherings of our Muslim rulers are flourishing in apathy. What has become of us? Such callousness was never seen in the community before. True, we are weak today and incapable of providing practical assistance, but the least we can do is to preserve this pain as a trust, safeguarding it for future generations. Perhaps our progeny will not be as helpless as we are. Times can change, after all. At the very least, we can keep our wounds fresh until the tides turn, ensuring the blood from these injuries does not clot.

There was a time when the seat of enlightenment had not fallen into the hands of jesters. Our literary figures, unconcerned with the divides of left and right, were passing this trust on to future generations.

Names such as Iqbal, Qudrat Ullah Shahab, Faiz, Shorish Kashmiri, Intizar Hussain, Habib Jalib, Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi, Ibn-e-Insha, Ahmad Faraz, Rais Amrohi, N.M. Rashid, Mustansar Hussain Tarar, Qurratulain Hyder, Mazhar-ul-Islam, Ada Jafri, Yusuf Zafar, Manzoor Arif, Zameer Jafri, Khateer Ghaznavi, Mahmood Shaam, Nazir Qaiser, Shorish Malik, Sultan Rashk, Tahir Hanfi, and Balqis Mahmood are but a few of the many figures from my country who immortalised this pain in their stories and poems as a legacy for future generations. But that was a different time.

Now, when smoke rises from Palestine, my pen instinctively writes elegies, but I wonder—where are the other writers? Have their pens broken? Has the ink dried up? Or has the sense of empathy itself perished? Years ago, I read Intizar Hussain's story *Sharm-ul-Haram*; certain sentences from it still resonate in my heart:

“Who resides in Bayt al-Maqdis? It is I, it is all of us, and it is no one. Children have been shattered like clay pots crafted by a potter. Virgins tremble like the rope of a falling bucket into a well. Their garments are torn, their hair disheveled. Even the sun had never seen them uncovered. The brave sons of Arabia lie in the fields like tall palm trees, while the desert winds mourn over them.”

I have read Intizar Hussain's story *Kane Dajjal* countless times. This paragraph always brings tears to my eyes:

“Seated on the bed, Amma Ji began chopping betel nuts and started weeping. She placed the cutter on the tray and wiped her tears with her scarf. Abba Jan’s voice choked but he maintained his composure and began in his dignified tone: ‘The Prophet (peace be upon him) passed through rivers, mountains, and deserts. He stopped at Masjid al-Aqsa. Angel Jibreel (peace be upon him) said, ‘O Prophet (peace be upon him), please proceed.’ The Prophet (peace be upon him) asked, ‘To where?’ Jibreel (peace be upon him) replied, ‘O Prophet (peace be upon him), the journey across the earth is complete. This is the final destination; now begins the journey to the celestial realms.’ The Prophet (peace be upon him) ascended and continued to ascend...” And raised high for you your repute... *ذِكْرُ وَرَفَعْنَاكَ* Abba Jan lowered his head, took a deep breath, and said, *“Where our Prophet ﷺ ascended, we descended.”*

Childhood turned into youth, and youth has begun to fade. The hair at my temples is now turning grey, and Aisha chirps, “Baba, you’ve grown old.” Yet, this sentence remains embedded in my being like the sharp tip of a spear: *“Where our Prophet ﷺ ascended, we descended.”*

Decades ago, when I first read this sentence, I couldn’t continue reading. Even today, when I reach this point, a haze descends over my eyes. The radiant and resolute face of Syed Ali Geelani appears before me, and in shame, I set the story aside. It feels like the predicament described by Munir Niazi: *“Afterwards, a long silence, and the roar of a fierce wind.”*

The entire vigour of contemporary enlightenment seems to be in growling and raging against Muslims. Yet I speak of better times, when the seat of enlightenment had not yet fallen into the hands of jesters. Back then, when Faiz Ahmed Faiz wrote an anthem for Palestinian freedom fighters, he chose a verse from the Quran as its title:

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Unquestionably, [for] the allies of Allah there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve.

Reflection

Read Ibn-e-Insha’s *Deewar-e-Girya*, look at Faiz’s *Sar-e-Wadi-e-Seena*, cast an eye on Ada Jafri’s work about Masjid Al-Aqsa, observe the stains in Manzoor Arif’s *Aaina*, consider Ahmad Faraz’s portrayal of Beirut, Rais Amrohi’s *Fidya*, and Mahmood Sham’s *Bint-e-Aqsa*. In every line, you will find this pain afresh. They passed on this anguish as a trust to future generations. But why is there such a dearth

of capable individuals today? This is not just my question but also that of my Mujahid sister Syeda Asiya Andrabi, enduring hardships in India's infamous prison, along with her companions Faheema and Nasreen. And I, ashamed, have no answer for them. From where can I find an answer?

For years, we appointed to the Kashmir Committee a religious scholar who openly stated, "*We had no role in the mistake of creating Pakistan,*" yet he and his relatives comfortably availed every privilege from Pakistan's national treasury.

خود بدلتے نہیں، قرآن کو بدل دیتے ہیں
ہوئے کس درجہ فقہیان حرم بے توقیر!

*"They do not change themselves but attempt to alter the Quran,
How unfortunate the jurists of the Haram have become!"*

We, with our hands on our hearts, once declared before thousands that we were advocates for Kashmir, announcing symbolic protests every Friday afternoon for Kashmir's freedom. But what happened? A few minutes of a photo session, and the advocates disappeared. We even forbade raising the slogan of Jihad for Kashmir. Did those claiming to turn Pakistan into a state like Medina not consider that to establish Medina as an Islamic welfare state, the Holy Prophet ﷺ himself had to engage in practical jihad at Badr, Uhud, and many other battles?

I find no words to express my pain and grief. Is he now, in Adiala Jail, reflecting on how betrayal of the Kashmiri martyrs during his tenure in power has led to such a fate? This world is a place of lessons; others too will not escape this reckoning.

This trust does not only carry the burden of pain but also the hope for changing times. Read the final paragraph of Mustansar Hussain Tarar's *Khana Badosh*:

"I had met hundreds of Palestinians, but Ahmad was a different man. He spoke of Israel with disdain, not emotionally, but with a flat, businesslike tone. For him, the homeland was like a kidnapped child, unattainable through mere sentiment. One had to remember its traces and reach the scavenger's camp through cold, calculated planning."

We are forgetting these traces. How are they remembered? Mothers' lullabies keep them alive; educational curricula remind us of them, and writers and poets refine these memories. But now, mothers have no time, fathers are oblivious to what Palestine or Kashmir even means, education has become alien, and writers and poets have fallen silent.

There is an onslaught that has engulfed everything. Speaking of Palestine now is deemed an outdated stance because the Arabs, who once called themselves Palestine's advocates, have not only lost the case but also absolved themselves of this advocacy, unwilling to even hear its name. Their priorities are to prolong their rule, secure national wealth in foreign treasuries for hard times, and avoid the fates of Saddam, Qaddafi, and Bashar al-Assad.

But they forget that once a sheep is slaughtered, it does not matter to it whether its meat is diced or minced. The countries that call themselves the "mothers of democracy" strangled the democratic aspirations of Egypt and Algeria with their own hands. The treatment of Morsi's government by these champions of human rights will surely shame future generations. Iraq, a land with a history spanning

thousands of years, from Babylon to Nineveh, was devastated, eclipsing even the savagery of the Mongols.

After killing over 125 million people in two world wars, the decision was made to play this bloody game of fulfilling interests in the Third World, especially in Muslim countries, under the guise of "pre-emptive defence." Iraq saw over a million people massacred, families torn apart, and a people who once took pride in their lineage now forget both their history and geography.

America and its allies, having looted these nations' resources, now stand to teach lessons in humanity. What name will they give to their plunder and destruction, from the Red Indians to "Operation Enduring Freedom"? Arab monarchies face criticism, but their rulers are still greeted on red carpets, silencing democracy itself.

In the West, individual freedoms have become a challenge. A woman may have the right to undress, but she cannot wear a scarf of her choice. Religion is insulted without a moment of shame. Afghanistan was turned into a battlefield for 40 years—first as a pawn against the Soviet Union to achieve superpower status, and later under the pretext of 9/11 for 11 years of inhumane violence, only to eventually leave with the ignominy of retreat etched into their history.

Yet even before they caught their breath, war camps were set up in Ukraine. Who doesn't know that under the pretext of the Arab Spring, Qaddafi was punished for resisting economic ties with the U.S. and Western powers? Ostensibly, Libya was attacked to "save its people from Qaddafi," but the reality was that Qaddafi aimed to introduce a gold-backed currency for oil trade, challenging the dominance of the dollar.



The entire Arab and Islamic world watched as Qaddafi's house was bombed and his family killed, yet they could do nothing. It was blatant aggression under the guise of saving the Libyan people and a stark reminder to all Muslim leaders of their limits. This silence from the West weighs heavily on their collective conscience. Even many Western intellectuals have admitted this crime to me.

At last, India's filthy, decayed, and tyrannical treatment of its minorities has been condemned by 75 members of the U.S. Congress, who wrote a letter to Joe Biden, spitting on India's democracy. But did the so-called champions of democracy hear any protests? Syed Ali Geelani, in his autobiography "On the Shores of Volar Lake", refrains from displaying the wounds of his heart, but subtly points to eye-opening scenes between the lines. Sitting on the chest of the Indian usurers, and amidst his millions of followers and martyrs, he publicly declared, "We are Pakistanis, Pakistan is ours," yet we deceived him by posing as Kashmir's lawyer. Is it the fault of the Kashmiris that they are among the few determined, courageous, righteous, freedom-loving, and independent nations that have not been intimidated by the brutality of over 800,000 Indian predators, nor bowed down to their aggression? From 1947 to the present day, their lives have been made unbearable, a continuation of Hindu usurer Dogra rule. The nameless mass graves, innocent martyrs, orphaned children, widows, half-widows, blind children, young, disabled and helpless old people, and the bloodstained Kashmir

valley stand as living proof of Indian atrocities. Yet, they still demand their rightful due from the United Nations, the world's largest institution, which has now become a puppet of the great powers, despite the promise made to them as a guarantee by the world's major powers through their unanimous agreement. Even today, the Kashmiris, deprived of basic human rights, are trying to shake the conscience of the world with silent tongues, blind eyes, bleeding wounds, ravaged honor, and helpless hands, carrying the bodies of young martyrs in a hopeless yet hopeful struggle.

In 1948, the United Nations issued a Universal Declaration of Human Rights with the consent of 48 nations, consisting of 30 articles. To ensure the protection, improvement, and enforcement of this declaration, a permanent Human Rights Commission was also established. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights ensures fundamental rights such as liberty, equality, free movement, freedom of expression, dignified living, social protection, religious freedom, and protection from torture, cruelty, and inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment. Although voices have been raised against human rights violations occurring worldwide, except for Pakistan and a few other countries, the world has continued to ignore the tragic human barbarity in Kashmir and Palestine.

Crying over the suffering of Muslims has now become extremism. Even the study of Pakistan has now turned into a subject of mockery by fools. The narrative is now dictated by the West, which has made it clear that Muslims' rights are not human rights. Our curriculum is filled with meaningless content. Why can we not include two poems of Mahmoud Darwish in it? Read Mahmoud Darwish for yourself. I have also been a student of English literature, and have read Wordsworth, Keats, Byron, Shelley, Yeats, Browning, Hardy, John Donne, Shakespeare, Milton, and many others, but the essence in Mahmoud Darwish's poetry is unparalleled. Mahmoud Darwish, Nizar Qabbani, Sami Qasim, Fawzi Asmar, Hanaa Abu Hanaa, Tawfiq Ziad, Tawfiq Fayyad, Ameen Habibi – a whole galaxy is there, of which we are unaware. Sami Qasim's poem "Aram" is a masterpiece. "I will guide this path, my banner is the sight for the blind." Our flag has always been the light for the blind on this path. How beautifully Mahmoud Darwish wrote: "We yearn for our return, Yes! We are Arabs, Yes, Arabs!" Our enemies shout that they are Arabs, they are crude and barbaric. Yes, listen well, we are Arabs. There is no response to Darwish's "Ana Sheed Kuba."

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Look at this poem by Nazad Qabbani:

"O Israel! What is there to boast about? If the clock's hands stop today, so what? Tomorrow they will start again. There is no grief over the earth slipping away, for even the feathers of a falcon fall sometimes. Fear of prolonged thirst is no concern, for water always lies beneath the rocks. You defeated the armies, but you could not defeat consciousness. You cut down the trees' tops, but the roots remain."

Today we may be helpless, but the roots remain. We can still nourish those roots. While we cannot heal our wounds, we can safeguard them. We can pass this trust onto the next generation. Perhaps our descendants will not be as helpless as we are. After all, the seasons of time can change.

Mourid Darwish once said:

"O my homeland, my chains taught me the toughness of the eagle and the softness of hope, I never knew that under our skin, storms would be born, and rivers would unite. They imprisoned me in a cell, but my heart lit torches there. They wrote my number on the wall, but the walls turned into gardens. They drew a picture of my executioner, but I hid it with bright hair. I took defeat and threw it away, and the conquerors only awakened earthquakes."

How can we forget, "Where our Prophet (PBUH) ascended, there we have fallen."

This grief is the trust of our future generations. There, in your courtyard, children may be playing. Call them, sit them close, and pour this grief into their veins, saying: "Where our Prophet (PBUH) ascended, there we have fallen." And yes, among all these laments, where did we lose the blood-soaked Kashmir, a victim of Indian brutality? Why does it now appear hazy in our memories? Even today, the youth there take pride in wrapping their bodies in the green crescent flag and heading towards the inevitable with a sense of honor. As they leave this world, their smiles reveal that they are content and pleased with the rewards their Creator has promised and are adorned with the medals of eternal and lasting success.

Why should it not be that the spirit of the early Muslim generations, the defiance of the hero of freedom, Syed Ali Geelani, is igniting the blood frozen in the veins of thousands of young men and women in Kashmir? There, in the land of heaven, Asiya Andrabi rises and stares into the eyes of the bigoted devils and tyrant infidels with courage, calling out with the fire of freedom: "Leave my Kashmir, for it was never part of India." The moment the Indian High Court issues its brutal order to ban the slaughter of cows in Kashmir, this determined woman immediately acts upon it, slaughtering a cow in public as an act of charity in the name of Allah, waving the bloodstained knife and tearing apart the cruel law of the court, thereby setting an example for her Lord's pleasure.

Today, that very Asiya, along with her two young companions, is incarcerated in the harshest of India's jails in solitary confinement. Yet her resolve is unbroken, despite the relentless efforts to break her spirit. The cowardly Baniya knows that Asiya has set a golden example of steadfastness, despite her husband, Dr. Qasim, being imprisoned for the crime of innocence for many decades. Even in his wrongful imprisonment, she remains unwavering in her perseverance. This ailing warrior, deprived of vital medication in her jail cell, is still fed harmful, poor-quality food in plastic bags thrown through the bars. But she firmly believes in her Lord's promise, and her faith is unshakable.: *وَلِلْآخِرَةِ خَيْرٌ لَّكَ مِنَ الْأُولَىٰ، وَلَسَوْفَ يُعْطِيكَ رَبُّكَ فَتَرْضَىٰ.*

And the Hereafter is better for you than the first [life]. And your Lord is going to give you, and you will be satisfied. That is why today she is enduring the torture and affliction of the Hindu beasts with great courage.

باطل سے دجنے والے اے آسمان نہیں ہم

سویار لے چکا ہے تو امتحان ہمارا

O heaven, we are not oppressed by falsehood
We have taken the test a hundred times, so ours

When such authentic news reaches me about how easily our media is committing the great crime of forgetting them, it makes me extremely restless, worried and distressed day and night. My master Prophet ﷺ, whom my Lord sent as a mercy to all the worlds:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ:

Why did you forget this message of the Holy Quran, the last book of inspiration and the last book revealed to his blessed chest, that

وَمَا لَكُمْ لَاتُفَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَالْمُسْتَضْعَفِينَ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ وَالنِّسَاءِ وَالْوِلْدَانِ الَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا أَخْرِجْنَا مِنْ هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةِ الظَّالِمِ أَهْلُهَا وَاجْعَل لَّنَا مِن لَّدُنكَ وَلِيًّا وَاجْعَل لَّنَا مِن لَّدُنكَ نَصِيرًا

And what is [the matter] with you that you fight not in the cause of Allah and [for] the

oppressed among men, women, and children who say, "Our Lord, take us out of this city of oppressive people and appoint for us from Yourself a protector and appoint for us from Yourself a helper?"(al Nisa:75)

Have you ever faced self-accountability in solitude, that you will eventually have to give an account for the few days of power in this short, temporary life? This true message from Allah has ever shaken your heart:

وَالْوَزْنُ يَوْمَئِذٍ الْحَقُّ فَمَنْ تَقَلَّتْ مَوَازِينُهُ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ-وَمَنْ خَفَّتْ مَوَازِينُهُ فَأُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ خَسِرُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا بِآيَاتِنَا يَظْلِمُونَ

And the weighing [of deeds] that Day will be the truth. So those whose scales are heavy - it is they who will be the successful.(al A'araaf:8-9)

Also read this command of the Almighty Allah SWT:

فَأَمَّا مَنْ تَقَلَّتْ مَوَازِينُهُ فَهُوَ فِي عِيشَةٍ رَاضِيَةٍ وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَفَّتْ مَوَازِينُهُ فَأُمُّهُ هَاوِيَةٌ وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا هِيَ نَارٌ حَامِيَةٌ

Then as for one whose scales are heavy [with good deeds], He will be in a pleasant life. But as for one whose scales are light; His refuge will be an abyss. And what can make you know what that is? It is a Fire, intensely hot.(Al Qaaria:6-11)

Those who have come to power in Pakistan by saying they will implement the Mustafa system and create a state like Medina should listen with open ears and also take to heart this irrevocable decision of my Lord:

أَحْسِبَ النَّاسُ أَنْ يُتْرَكُوا أَنْ يَقُولُوا آمَنَّا وَهُمْ لَا يُفْتَنُونَ وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ ۗ فَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ الْكَاذِبِينَ

Do the people think that they will be left to say, "We believe" and they will not be tried? But We have certainly tried those before them, and Allah will surely make evident those who are truthful, and He will surely make evident the liars.(Al An Kaboot:2-3)

And yes, listen to this too.

وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ قَوْلًا مِمَّنْ دَعَا إِلَى اللَّهِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا وَقَالَ إِنَّنِي مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ

And who is better in speech than one who invites to Allah and does righteousness and says, "Indeed, I am of the Muslims."(Al Fussalat:33)

Of course, in these circumstances, the heart involuntarily cries out, "Where our Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was exalted, we have become low."

Saturday 4th January 2025

The Rights of Muslims: America's Incomplete Story

The White House Politics and the Future of Muslims

In the United States, public opinion polls are commonly used to predict who the next occupant of the White House will be and to gauge the popularity levels of presidential candidates. Are these surveys accurate? The answer becomes clear in the days following the election results. For instance, after the recent U.S. election results were announced, organisations that had predicted Trump's victory faced opposition from critics who dismissed such surveys as mere propaganda aligned with Trump's campaign.

These critics not only reassured their own supporters but also continued to publish surveys in favour of their candidate, Kamala Harris. However, was the inhumane treatment of Palestinians in Gaza by Israel, which remained a significant topic of discussion, a factor contributing to Kamala Harris's defeat? This cannot be stated with certainty.

Let us explore whether Muslims, amidst the prevailing atmosphere of Islamophobia in the U.S., can influence future American elections and examine the history of Muslims in the United States.

Thomas Jefferson, the third President of the United States and author of the Declaration of Independence, not only owned a copy of the Qur'an but also envisioned Islam as a possible part of American society. He advocated for the protection of Muslims' rights and saw them as potential citizens of the new American state. Jefferson purchased a copy of the Qur'an eleven years before drafting the Declaration of Independence, and his Qur'an is still preserved in the Library of Congress, symbolising the early connections between Islam and America. These connections continue to hold significant importance for candid American scholars even today.

Jefferson's possession of a Qur'an suggests an interest in Islamic teachings, though it does not necessarily imply he aimed to address Muslims' specific issues. Jefferson's initial understanding of Islamic principles of basic rights was influenced by the writings of the seventeenth-century English philosopher John Locke, who encouraged European societies to incorporate Muslims and Jews. Locke was following the insights of thinkers from a century earlier who had already considered this. Jefferson's concept of Muslims' rights can be better understood within the context of intellectual developments across the Atlantic from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century.

When sectarian conflict arose among Christians in Europe, some Christians viewed Muslims as a means to test the limits of tolerance toward followers of different beliefs. These European precedents made Muslims a subject of discourse in America as well, particularly concerning "the boundaries of citizenship and tolerance." During the formation of the new government, America's founders—all Protestant—considered examples from the Islamic world while deliberating on religious freedoms for people of various faiths. Founding American thinkers debated whether the United States should be predominantly Protestant or openly accept followers of all religions. They even thoroughly discussed whether non-Protestants should be allowed to attain high offices, like the presidency. These considerations inspired reflections on religious freedom and the idea of separating

religion from the state, as well as discussions around religious tests in the Constitution, which persisted in some states into the nineteenth century.

The notion of resistance to Muslim citizenship was not surprising in the eighteenth century. Americans inherited nearly a thousand years of negative European perceptions regarding religious leadership and politics. Yet, despite the negative sentiments surrounding Muslims, it is remarkable that some of America's most prominent early figures rejected the idea of excluding Muslims as potential citizens. The Founding Fathers envisioned Muslims as citizens with full rights, a stance that mirrored a thousand years of European political thought and extended it further. This raises the question: how did the idea of fully recognising Muslims' rights survive in America despite resistance? And perhaps more importantly, what future does this idea hold in the twenty-first century?

This book provides insights into the views of prominent early American figures regarding Islam, showing that they refused to accept negative opinions about Islam as definitive. While Europe subtly encouraged intolerance toward Islam and Muslims, these figures declined to adopt that view.

Most American Protestants believed that Muslim beliefs were unacceptable. This mindset fostered a status quo among Protestants while also encouraging some Americans to consider the value of listening to diverse perspectives. As one part of society resisted the inclusion of Muslims, a growing segment began to see the benefits of welcoming people of various faiths, promoting a more inclusive society. This evolving mindset gradually fostered an awareness that Muslims, too, could be embraced.

Such considerations emerged even before Muslims had arrived in America, with acceptance of them being cultivated in advance. Jefferson and his close associates understood that thinking and debating about Muslims' rights would pave the way for universal rights in America. Consequently, the acceptance of minorities, including Catholics and Jews, advanced within the mainstream of society. The discussions about Muslims' rights helped establish the notion that all people should be welcomed with an open heart.

America gained true independence from Britain in 1783, and in that year, George Washington wrote to Irish Catholics residing in New York, emphasising that America should welcome individuals of every religion and sect, especially those who had suffered persecution. At the time, America had only around 25,000 Catholics, who faced significant restrictions, including political exclusion in New York. Washington also wrote to the Jewish community, then comprising only 2,000 individuals in America. He envisioned America as a haven for the oppressed worldwide, especially those persecuted for their beliefs.

In 1784, George Washington openly expressed his views on Muslims at his home in Mount Vernon. A friend from Virginia had written to him about needing a carpenter and a mason for house construction. Washington replied, explaining that the religion, sect, colour, or race of a craftsman was irrelevant in building a house or making furniture. A good craftsman could be from Asia, Africa, or Europe and could be Muslim, Christian, or Jewish, or even have no religious beliefs at all. This letter highlights that Washington included Muslims in his vision of "America for All." He may have sensed that Muslims were unlikely to play significant roles in various fields for a long time to come.

Different sources suggest that Muslims were living in America during the 18th century, though Thomas Jefferson and his associates seemed unaware of their presence. Jefferson and his colleagues had referenced Muslims as potential future citizens of the United States. Mentions of Muslims in the writings and speeches of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson were certainly intentional. Both of these influential figures inherited two contrasting European perspectives on Muslims.

One perspective argued that the teachings of Islam were entirely opposed, even hostile, to those of Protestant Christianity and that Islamic ideas contributed to oppressive regimes. Accepting Muslims into America's Protestant society meant including a community whose religion and related views Europe deemed alien and dangerous. This was not limited to Muslims; American Protestants similarly regarded Catholic beliefs as foreign and hazardous, as Catholicism was also perceived to oppose American ideals of freedom and inclusivity.

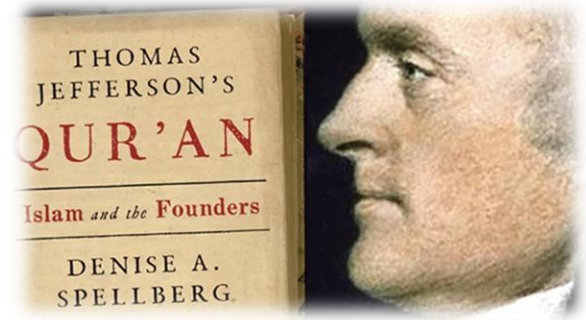
Jefferson and other advocates for non-Protestant citizenship fostered a school of thought that opened the door not only for Muslims but also for Catholics and Jews. In the 16th century, Catholics and Protestants who advocated for their beliefs faced severe persecution, and those who promoted the acceptance of all religions in the 17th century were often sentenced to death, forced labour, or exile. This rejection applied to people from various backgrounds, including aristocrats who embraced all religions and endured harsh punishments for doing so. Non-conformists in religion were typically unorganised, yet they supported the acceptance of organised Muslims within Christian states as a means to avoid persecution.

As a prominent Anglican establishment member and leading Virginia politician, Thomas Jefferson advocated ideas that had previously subjected their proponents to ridicule or even the death penalty in Europe. Because Jefferson himself was part of the establishment, his views on Muslim rights were taken seriously in Virginia. Alongside a few colleagues, Jefferson presented concepts to the fledgling United States that had been largely dismissed or lost in European mainstream thought. It's not that Jefferson was instantly celebrated for his ideas on religious freedom for all, including Muslims; opponents challenged him at every turn. However, he also garnered significant support, especially from groups like the Presbyterians and Baptists, who had experienced Protestant repression.

While few in American society were genuinely committed to extending full American citizenship to non-Protestants, there was still a degree of tolerance for Muslims. What these early proponents of Muslim rights were suggesting was novel and largely unaccepted in the 18th-century social landscape, where American citizenship was typically reserved for white, male Protestants. Distinguishing citizenship from religion was essential, and Virginia's initial legislative steps marked only the beginning of a long journey.

Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and James Madison began the work of separating citizenship from religion, a formidable task. Despite substantial effort throughout their careers, they couldn't fully achieve this ideal and left it as an unfinished mission for future generations. This book is the first to explore how Jefferson and his peers, despite their incomplete and sometimes ambiguous understanding of Islam, were active in advocating civil rights for all non-Protestant citizens, including Muslims.

In 1784, George Washington advocated for allowing Muslims to work in America. Nearly a decade earlier, he mentioned two African women, a mother and daughter, named Fatima and Fatima Sughra, who were part of his taxable estate. Although Washington supported granting Muslims American citizenship, the reality is that he himself bought Muslim slaves, thereby obstructing their fundamental rights. Notably, at that time, enslaved Muslims were not allowed to practice their religion. This may have been the case on the estates and farmlands of Jefferson and Madison as well, though we have little information about the religious background of their slaves.



There's no doubt that the number of Muslim slaves brought from West Africa was in the thousands, possibly even surpassing the number of Catholic Christians and Jews in America at the time. Some former Muslim slaves may have even served in the Continental Army, though there is no evidence that they practised their faith, nor that the Founding Fathers were aware of their presence. It's also noteworthy that these former Muslim slaves did not influence the debate over Muslims' civil rights or citizenship rights.

Although Muslims had been present in America since the 17th century, racial and slavery-based factors were so strong that their religious identity remained largely hidden. When the Founding Fathers thought of the rights of future American Muslims, they likely envisioned only white Muslims. By the 1790s, any white person, regardless of their background, could apply for American citizenship. Jefferson met only two Muslims, both ambassadors from North Africa of Turkish descent. He neither commented on nor wrote about their appearance; both were relatively fair-skinned. Jefferson's attention to these ambassadors was due to their political and diplomatic status rather than their race or religion.

As ambassador, Secretary of State, and Vice President, Jefferson avoided viewing America's conflicts with North African states through a religious lens. American shipping was constantly threatened by piracy in the Mediterranean and eastern Atlantic. Jefferson clarified to the rulers of Tripoli and Tunis that his nation harboured no anti-Islamic prejudice. At one point, he even remarked that Americans worshipped the same God as Muslims.

Jefferson wished to separate religion from politics and governance, a principle he advocated both domestically and internationally. His perspective on Islam and Muslims was largely shaped by relations with the North African states, forming the basis of his foreign policy in that region. It's also possible that Jefferson, being a monotheist, felt some affinity with the Islamic world.

While Jefferson certainly would have been aware of the prevailing negative perceptions of Islam, it's likely that he used certain inherited European notions and examples in the Virginian debate on separating religion from state affairs. The ideological victory Jefferson achieved between the 18th and 19th centuries remains a challenge for Americans in the 21st century. Since the late 19th century, America's Muslim population has grown significantly, exhibiting rich ethnic diversity. However,

American society has never fully embraced Muslims. In Jefferson's era, an imagined Muslim population faced prejudice; in today's America, Muslims are subject to political hostility.

The 9/11 attacks and the War on Terror have cultivated an environment in which many Americans support restricting Muslims' fundamental civil rights. Today, there is growing debate about whether a Muslim can qualify to be the President of the United States. This question first arose in connection with Barack Obama but actually dates back to the early history of the American presidency. Jefferson was the first prominent figure accused of being a Muslim.

The question of whether an American Muslim can be President helps illustrate the degree to which Muslims have permeated the American public consciousness and how Muslim rights became an early component of American ideals. Thus, understanding the debate on Muslim rights that began in the late 18th century is crucial to understanding the contemporary issue of Muslim citizenship in America.

While the rights of American Muslims were theoretically recognised long ago, they still face significant trials in practice. In fact, American Muslims experience challenges regarding their rights on a daily basis. In today's America, even prominent scholars such as historian of Islam John Esposito have been compelled to question the supposed Western tolerance and inclusivity. *Thomas Jefferson's Qur'an* helps us understand when, where, and how Muslim rights were incorporated into American ideals.

Historians have spent considerable energy trying to prove that Islam and American ideals are fundamentally incompatible. Many argue that Protestant Americans have consistently dismissed Islam as inherently un-American. Some historians even suggest that America itself was born in the 18th century as a reaction against the oppressive governance structures attributed to Islam. Certainly, America's early policies and documents contain traces of this viewpoint. However, there are also positive views of Islam and Muslims, such as the discourse on the "rights of future American Muslim citizens." This implies that not all Protestants viewed Islam as an entirely foreign faith.

This book sheds light on the fact that Muslims were not only non-American but that discussions regarding their potential citizenship and expected rights had already taken place at the time of the country's founding. However, it is true that many of these ideals were not openly accepted by the majority of Americans at the time. Alongside exploring Jefferson's views on Islam and the Islamic world, this book also eloquently presents the thoughts of John Adams and James Madison. The discussion about the rights of Muslims was not limited to the Founding Fathers. The struggle of Baptists and Presbyterians in Virginia, as well as their confrontations against the religious establishment, are also detailed in this book, along with the advocacy for Muslim rights by the well-known Anglican lawyer James Iredell and Samuel Johnston. The evangelical Baptist John Leland, who was among Jefferson and Madison's associates, raised his voice for the rights of Muslims in Connecticut and Massachusetts. He also protested against the flaws found in the Constitution, the shortcomings of the First Amendment, and the role of religion at the state level.

The Mention of Two Muslim Slaves in America's History

This book discusses two Muslim slaves from West Africa, Ibrahim Abdulrahman and Omar ibn Said.

Omar ibn Said was literate in Arabic and even wrote his autobiography in the language. The mention of these two Muslims indicates that thousands of Muslims were present in America at that time. However, they were deprived of many rights, including the freedom to practise their religion. They were also denied the right to citizenship.

Even in the 20th century, Catholic Christians and Jews continued to struggle for their rights. The rights they eventually secured were not fully aligned with the constitution. However, the bitter truth remains that Muslims are still the only community in America that has not been fully accepted. Even today, efforts are made to limit their influence.

With the Pharaoh of the White House, Trump, recognising Jerusalem as Israel's capital, there is no longer any room for doubt that this is not only a declaration of hostility against Muslims in America but an open declaration of war against the Islamic world as a whole.

Both candidates in the U.S. elections openly supported Israel in their campaigns. The newly re-elected Trump, once again, expressed his support for Israel to completely destroy Iran's nuclear programme and promised a strong response to Iran's missile attacks.

The question now is whether the ongoing Israeli aggression, openly supported by the candidates of both U.S. political parties, will lead the Islamic world to remain silent—effectively committing suicide by allowing the creation of Greater Israel—or whether it will seize this opportunity to reshape its destiny.

Tuesday 7 January 2025

The Impact of Iran's Internal Weaknesses on Global Politics

Defeat in Syria and Iran's Regional Impact

Five years ago, on 3rd January, during Donald Trump's presidency, Qassem Soleimani was killed by the US military in Baghdad. Qassem Soleimani was the commander of Iran's Quds Force, the branch of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) responsible for overseas operations. He was among the architects of Iranian influence and military strategy in the region. Three months before being targeted by a US drone on 3rd January 2020, Qassem Soleimani had delivered a confidential address to IRGC commanders, advocating for the expansion of a "qualitative" resistance alliance.

It seems as though Soleimani anticipated his death and wished to present a report on two decades of leading the Quds Force. In his address, he stated, "The IRGC has developed resistance in terms of both quality and quantity, expanding from an area of 2,000 square kilometres in southern Lebanon to 500,000 square kilometres. A successful ground connection has been established between the resistance—linking Iran to Iraq, Iraq to Syria, and Syria to Lebanon. Today, one can set off from Tehran and reach the southern suburbs of Beirut by car." This resistance alliance was considered one of Soleimani's significant achievements, but over the past year, this alliance has suffered severe setbacks.

Iran's regional influence began to expand in the early 1980s when Tehran supported the formation of Hezbollah in Lebanon against the US and Israel. Later, the region's instability provided Iran with opportunities to extend its influence, particularly after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the emergence of extremist groups like ISIS following the Arab Spring in 2011. Deploying the IRGC to Syria and supporting militant groups in Iraq and Lebanon helped Iran establish a territorial and regional link from its borders to Lebanon, extending to Israel's doorstep.

Daniel Sobelman, a professor at Jerusalem's Hebrew University, believes such a regional alliance was unlikely before the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. He states, "The Iraq War enabled Iran to connect the dots—creating a route through Iraq, Syria, and onto Lebanon. This was crucial as Hezbollah in Lebanon was Iran's most important ally in the region." Meanwhile, Yemen's civil war led to several cities falling under the control of rebels aligned with Iran.

In recent years, the resistance alliance also became a symbol of unity between Shia and certain Sunni groups, such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, aiming to counter Western and Israeli influence in the Middle East. This alliance—which included Hezbollah, Iraqi militant groups, Yemen's Houthi rebels, and the Syrian government under Bashar al-Assad—became a powerful weapon for Iran. Without this alliance, Bashar al-Assad's government might have collapsed much earlier. Thus, the alliance created a "ring of fire" around Israel. Additionally, the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan further strengthened Tehran's position and the resistance alliance.

During Trump's first presidency, US National Security Adviser John Bolton remarked, "Iran successfully expanded the alliance while increasing its military strength." According to him, "Iran did serious work in establishing the resistance alliance, which Soleimani described as the 'ring of fire' strategy around Israel. They invested billions, starting with Hezbollah in Lebanon. Iran's nuclear and

ballistic missile programmes also saw significant advancements.”

Five years ago, Trump ordered the assassination of Qassem Soleimani, laying the groundwork for the decline of Iran’s resistance alliance. Now, as Trump returns to the White House, Iran finds itself at its weakest in two decades. During his previous presidency, Trump exerted considerable pressure on Iran, including reinstating harsh sanctions and withdrawing from the nuclear deal. Over the past seven years, these sanctions have exacerbated economic pressure on Iran. Soleimani’s death, coupled with this pressure, weakened Iran’s role in the region.

However, additional challenges arose after Hamas’s attack on Israel on 7th October 2023. The deaths of Hamas leaders and the weakening of its military capabilities in Gaza, along with the killings of commanders such as Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah in Beirut, have dealt a blow to Iran’s ability to challenge Israel. Hezbollah’s weakened military machinery, once Iran’s most powerful arm, has shifted the long-term balance of power in favour of Israel. For years, Hezbollah positioned itself as the strongest member of the resistance alliance. Now, the alliance’s very survival is being debated—a surprising development.

The Shift in Power: Iran's Alliance Under Pressure Amidst Changing Middle Eastern Dynamics

The Resistance Alliance, which once tipped the scales of power in favour of Iran, now finds itself facing significant challenges. The collapse of Bashar al-Assad’s government in Syria—a regime described as a "key pillar of the Resistance camp"—has delivered a substantial blow to Iran’s regional alliance. The unexpected fall of Assad’s government is undoubtedly a major setback for Iran. Hezbollah, too, has suffered as missile and weapon supplies from Iran are now disrupted. Hezbollah, already under immense pressure from Israel, is now grappling with logistical challenges.

Many leaders of Iran’s alliance are no longer in place, and critical ground links have been severed, putting Iran in a difficult position. Apart from a few militia groups in Iraq, the Houthi rebels in Yemen are among the last significant allies left in the region. However, they, too, are under frequent attacks from the United States and Israel. Despite billions of dollars in investment and the loss of countless lives, the once-formidable alliance is now facing extraordinary difficulties.

Meanwhile, with Donald Trump potentially returning to power, there is speculation that if no deal is struck between the U.S. and Iran, the White House may shift its focus to China and Iraq. This could further restrict Iran’s oil revenues, intensifying its economic struggles.

Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in a December statement, declared: “The more pressure that is placed on Resistance, the stronger it will become. The Resistance alliance will expand further.” His remarks suggest that Iran is determined to rebuild this alliance and restore its lost connections. Former Israeli intelligence officer Ibrahim Levin stated: “The determination for revenge within the Resistance alliance is at its peak. Despite losing Syria, Iran will attempt to regain access, possibly by engaging with the current leadership to secure the use of Syrian territory.”

The current Middle Eastern situation provides a critical juncture for political innovation. There may even be an opportunity to resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict. Politicians are urged to seize this moment to analyse the outcomes of the conflict and explore alternative paths for a better future in

the region.

Both Iran and Israel have claimed successful attacks on each other's military targets, but the full extent and impact of these strikes remain unclear. While both sides acknowledge the attacks, they assert their resilience, yet global media remains restricted from accessing these areas, keeping the truth obscured. Iranian air defence forces recently stated that Israel launched attacks on its military bases in Tehran, Khuzestan, and Ilam provinces, which were "successfully repelled," though limited damage occurred in some areas. Israel, on the other hand, has remained silent about any losses.

This standoff leaves the question: militarily, which side holds the upper hand? Iran and Israel are separated by approximately 2,152 kilometres of land. Iran has demonstrated its missile capabilities by successfully targeting areas within this range, showcasing significant advancements in its long-developed missile programme. Iran's missile programme is regarded as the largest and most diverse in the Middle East. In 2022, U.S. CENTCOM General Kenneth McKenzie estimated that Iran possessed "more than 3,000 ballistic missiles."

Conversely, there is no definitive confirmation of how many missiles Israel possesses. However, it is evident that Israel's missile stockpile, built over the past six decades with support from allies like the U.S., makes it a formidable power in the region. Notable Israeli missiles include Delilah, Gabriel, Harpoon, Jericho-1, Jericho-2, Jericho-3, LORA, and Popeye. The backbone of Israel's defence is the Iron Dome system, which has proven its effectiveness by intercepting rockets from Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Israeli missile defence engineer Uzi Rubin describes the Iron Dome as an unparalleled short-range missile defence system.

On the other hand, Iran is significantly larger than Israel, with a population ten times greater. However, this demographic disparity does not necessarily translate into military superiority. Israel allocates substantially more resources to its defence budget, which is its greatest strength. Iran's defence budget is approximately \$10 billion, compared to Israel's budget, which exceeds \$24 billion.

Iran has a larger active military, with 610,000 personnel compared to Israel's 170,000. However, Israel's advantage lies in its advanced technology and superior air force. Israel has 241 combat aircraft and 48 attack helicopters, while Iran has 186 combat aircraft and only 13 attack helicopters. Although neither country has extensively showcased its naval capabilities, Iran has 101 naval vessels, compared to Israel's 67.

Iran's Missile and Drone Programme: A Regional Powerhouse

Since the conclusion of the Iran-Iraq war, Iran has placed significant emphasis on developing its missile systems and drones. Over the years, the country has produced a variety of short- and long-range missiles and drones, which it is alleged to have supplied to its regional allies. Analysis of missiles fired by Houthi rebels at Saudi Arabia revealed that these were of Iranian origin.

Iran's missile arsenal includes the Shahab-1, with a range of 300 kilometres, and its advanced version, Shahab-2, capable of reaching up to 500 kilometres. The Shahab-3, another iteration in the series, can strike targets as far as 2,000 kilometres away. Other notable Iranian missiles include the Zulfiqar

(700 km range), Qiam-1 (750 km range), and the Fatah-110 hypersonic missile, which boasts a strike range of 300 to 500 kilometres.

According to the American Institute for Peace, Iran possesses the largest and most diverse ballistic missile stockpile in the Middle East. While the country does not have nuclear weapons, its ballistic missiles can reach targets up to 2,000 kilometres away, a capability that places it ahead of many regional rivals. Ballistic missile technology, first developed during the Second World War, remains a sophisticated field in which only a handful of nations have achieved self-reliance.



Despite facing decades of stringent international sanctions, Iran has managed to both acquire and develop ballistic missile technology. Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei recently stated that the missile and defence programmes that the West fears so much were entirely developed during the sanctions period.

In 2006, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution banning the sale of nuclear technology and material to Iran, including dual-use items that could be repurposed for military applications. Three months later, the Security Council extended the restrictions to include conventional arms and military technology. These sanctions affected not only Iran's nuclear programme but also its ballistic missile ambitions, limiting its ability to procure weapons from countries like Russia and China, its traditional suppliers since the Iran-Iraq war.

Ballistic missiles are designed to carry nuclear warheads, and Western nations have expressed concern that Iran's mastery of this technology indicates its continued efforts to enrich uranium to weapons-grade levels.

The JCPOA and Its Aftermath

In July 2015, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was agreed upon between Iran and six major world powers, leading to the lifting of UN sanctions. However, the "snapback mechanism" within UN Resolution 2231 imposed a five-year monitoring period on Iran's missile programme to prevent unchecked proliferation. Despite this, Iran's missile development progressed, prompting the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany to file a joint complaint with the UN in March 2016, accusing Iran of violating the resolution by conducting missile tests.

In 2020, former US President Donald Trump withdrew from the JCPOA, citing concerns over Iran's missile programme and the lack of a robust inspection mechanism. Following the expiry of Resolution 2231's monitoring deadline, Iran openly sought to purchase arms from Russia and China. However, continued sanctions have largely thwarted these efforts.

Today, Iran manufactures over 50 types of rockets, ballistic missiles, and drones, many of which have been employed in global conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine war. During the Iran-Iraq war, Iran's artillery had a range of just 35 kilometres, while Iraq possessed Scud-B ballistic missiles capable of hitting targets 300 kilometres away. Faced with these disadvantages, Iran initiated its missile

programme.

In November 1984, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) established its Missile Command under the leadership of Hassan Tehrani Moghaddam. By 1985, Iran had acquired 30 Scud-B missiles from Libya, along with technical advisors who helped execute missile operations. The IRGC's Aerospace Force established its first missile base in Kermanshah, and Iran launched its first missile attack against Iraq in 1985, targeting Kirkuk.

Israel-Iran Tensions: A Potential Conflict

While Iran has launched numerous missiles against Israel, Israel's strength lies in its ability to conduct precision guerrilla operations, often with success. A direct war between the two nations seems unlikely, given Iran's larger landmass and military personnel. Israel's edge, however, lies in its advanced air force, missile systems, and drones, which it would likely deploy in the event of a conflict.

Over the years, high-profile Iranian military and civilian figures have been targeted in attacks widely attributed to Israel, although Israel rarely acknowledges its involvement outright. Both nations continue to prepare for contingencies, adding to the precarious balance of power in the Middle East.

Another aspect of this war could be cyberattacking, and in this regard, Israel appears quite vulnerable. The reason is clear: Iran's defense system is not as advanced as Israel's, making Israel's system more susceptible to cyber-attacks.

The latest development is that after the fall of Syria's ousted president Bashar al-Assad's government last month, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has delivered four speeches on the future of his country, Syria, and the Middle East. The content of these speeches is as significant as the audience present. Among those listening to the Supreme Leader were Iranian soldiers, Iranian-backed militias, and supporters of the government. All of these individuals were in some way connected to the events of the civil war in Syria a decade ago. During the eight-year war against Iraq from 1980 to 1988, these Iranian soldiers had found their identity. In his recent speech, Khamenei addressed the families of the Iranian soldiers who had died in the region, whom the Iranian government refers to as 'martyrs.'

In this situation, Ayatollah Khamenei is under pressure to answer his supporters in the absence of key figures like Hassan Nasrallah and Qasem Soleimani: Why did Iran intervene in Syria to defend the Assad government? Why was Syria not defended this time? And what will be the future of Iran's 'axis of resistance'? It appears that Iran has failed both militarily and diplomatically.

Most Iranian experts on international affairs agree that Iran must acknowledge its failure in regional conflicts, and that it is time for a new strategy. The Iranian government has become accustomed to the 'etiquette of victory', but now it must learn the 'etiquette of defeat'. At the end of the war with Iraq, Iran's then-Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini famously compared the acceptance of the ceasefire agreement to 'drinking a cup of poison'. However, the current Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, has not yet expressed such candour in his speeches, nor has he acknowledged the weakening of Iran's strategy.

It is true, however, that he referenced the Prophet Muhammad's 'Battle of Uhud,' one of the most significant battles in Islamic history, during his speech. In this battle, Muslims suffered a temporary defeat. Khamenei spoke about the early days of Islam, saying, "In the beginning of Islam, in the field of Uhud, Muslims suffered a great loss, and Amir al-Mu'minin Hamza was martyred. Amir al-Mu'minin Ali ibn Abi Talib was injured from head to toe. In this battle, the Prophet Muhammad himself was wounded, and many people were martyred. When they returned to Medina, the hypocrites saw this as a good opportunity to spread discord, and they began propagating lies to exploit the situation."

It appears that the Iranian Supreme Leader is more concerned with the rising doubts among his supporters than with explaining the failure. After the setback in Syria, Iran's position in the region seems weakened. Among the younger generation, there is growing concern about the support for the Islamic Republic of Iran. These are the same individuals who once identified themselves through regional wars and the 'axis of resistance'. Many of the Iranian government's supporters fear that what happened to the former rulers of Syria might be repeated in Iran.

On the fifth anniversary of Qasem Soleimani's death, Ayatollah Khamenei attempted to address these concerns in his speech. He said, "One of the biggest mistakes made by some countries is removing the key factors of stability and sovereignty from the scene. (But) a group of young people is ready to sacrifice their lives. This is one of the most important factors of sovereignty in any nation. These factors should not be removed. This lesson is for us as well. Thanks to God, these factors are still safe here. Some other countries should also pay attention to this. They should know what their stability factors are. When these factors are removed, this is what happens in certain regional countries. When stability and sovereignty factors are removed, they become like Syria."

In his speeches, the Supreme Leader has essentially invited his supporters to rally behind him during this challenging phase. Following the fall of the Assad regime, Khamenei's first speech sought to answer public questions and concerns. He wants to assure his supporters that their doubts will be addressed and their morale will remain high. That is why, in just one month, he delivered his fourth speech on Iran's strategy and the axis of resistance in the region.

Just three days after the fall of Damascus, the Supreme Leader gave his first speech, addressing the issue of Syria without any preamble. He said, "Those ignorant and misguided analysts who consider these events as weakening Iran should understand that Iran is strong, and it will become even more powerful. In reality, the current situation in Syria and the suffering are the results of the weakness and lack of spirit in the Syrian army's resistance. In contrast to Syria's weakness, the morale of the Iranian military's senior officials is high."

In all these speeches, the Supreme Leader avoided mentioning Bashar al-Assad by name. Over recent years, the relationship between Iran and Bashar al-Assad has not been as close as it was during the Syrian civil war. During the years of Syria's reconstruction, and especially in the last four years, Bashar al-Assad had strengthened ties with Iran's regional rivals, including the UAE and Saudi Arabia, due to economic pressures and harsh sanctions. Along with this, Israel's repeated attacks and security issues in Syria have weakened the Iranian military presence there.

It seems that Ayatollah Khamenei fully understands that the fall of Bashar al-Assad's government marks the beginning of a new era for Iran. It is an era that will redefine the lines between friends, enemies, and the realities of war and threats. It remains to be seen whether Ayatollah Khamenei will 'drink the cup of poison' and negotiate with the West or choose to accept defeat like the 'Battle of Uhud.'

Friday 10 January 2025

The Power of Faith and the Dance of Martyrdom

Faith and Resistance: The Secret to Success

Words Are Like Children

Words, much like innocent and naïve children, are loving, playful, full of charm and mischief. They can delight you, annoy you, sulk, and at times, be difficult to console or even turn away forever. Sometimes, like a child nestling in your lap, they come to you willingly. You play with their strands, pat their cheeks, and they giggle with joy. Shower them with affection, and they respond with warmth. Ask them to perform a task, and they oblige. Love, after all, conquers all.

But when they decide to tease you, their temperament changes. You chase after them, exhausted, only to find them hidden somewhere, silently evading your grasp. They revel in troubling you, and when your patience wears thin, they suddenly appear with a triumphant smile, saying, "Here I am."

Words, like children, demand care and nurturing. And heaven forbid if they sulk, and you make no effort to win them back; then chaos descends. An eerie silence engulfs you, loneliness and melancholy seep into your being, and you become estranged even from yourself. Yes, it happens. I don't know about you, but it happens to me. I've been in this state for weeks. Nothing seems clear, life feels meaningless, and living itself has become burdensome. Yet, the compulsion to carry on persists, for it is hard to live, but live we must.

Sometimes, when I briefly check my email, countless messages laden with prayers and love greet me warmly. It feels as though I am drenched in the merciful rain of my benevolent Lord's grace. This renewal of strength enables me to once again take notice of the world around me.

The Strength of Resistance

Resistance empowers the fallen to rise, gives the sinking the courage to swim, and carries them to the shore. It grants a patient victory over illness (by God's will). A dying flame flares up before it extinguishes, as if in defiance, striving to burn a little longer. Perhaps, it is the flame's resistance against darkness.

When a traveller is stranded in a jungle surrounded by wild beasts, they fight alone, for they have no other choice. A frail patient, unable to get a glass of water, may leap out of bed during an unforeseen calamity.

History teaches us that worldly success often dampens and weakens resistance. However, when resistance is coupled with faith in God, it never fades. A spark continues to smoulder beneath the ashes, igniting whenever resistance awakens.

But is it necessary for this strength to awaken only when danger becomes imminent? When the sword's tip grazes the jugular? When the thunderous roars of tanks and planes resonate in the streets and skies? When Daisy Cutters, Cruise missiles, and Tomahawk bombs rain down like droplets in a storm? Must we only resist after losing much to salvage what remains?

Have Pakistani leaders ever attempted to anticipate and address looming threats in a manner that clearly signals to the enemy: provoking us is an invitation to destruction? The reality is that when a nation concedes defeat without fighting, it is a mental surrender, not a physical one. Such a nation becomes physically subdued with little effort from the enemy.

Halaku Khan's forces did not construct towers of skulls without cause. When Sultan Salahuddin Ayyubi mentioned the "Muslim Ummah," a traitor cynically smirked, asking, "What Muslim Ummah?" This was the lowest form of mental defeat—a giant of a man denying his own existence. Yet, Salahuddin combined resistance with faith and reclaimed Jerusalem from desecration, following in the footsteps of Caliph Umar.

Despite economic weaknesses and political instability, our steadfastness in the field today has forced our enemies (India, Israel, and America) to adopt increasingly desperate measures. Despite the likelihood of a definitive defeat, their obsession with global dominance has dragged them into a quagmire where every step further diminishes their superficial might. Have we ever considered why, even as they amass resources to intimidate us at home, they appear more fearful? Their aggression lacks the courage of a lion; it is laden with the cunning of a fox.

They will continue their covert attempts to corner us, instigating political and economic turmoil. Today, we must recognise our strength in resistance, rooted in faith, and reinforced by divine support. To secure God's assistance, we must proclaim His supreme authority in all matters. When a believer dedicates everything to the will of God, divine aid descends upon their resistance, leading them to victory.

The pages of Islamic history are illuminated with countless examples where the resistance of unarmed Muslims forced the tyrants of their time to retreat, nursing their wounds. Today, resistance movements around the world stand resilient. Stones have not yielded to tanks. The world witnesses in Kashmir and Gaza how mere stones challenge modern technology. As oppression intensifies, resistance only grows stronger.

Is Resistance Only of One Form?

When a tyrant, full of arrogance and supported by his armies, attacks a nation, the oppressed naturally take up arms. At such a moment, resistance has no other form; it becomes a necessity. However, we must not forget the earlier stage: resistance is meaningless without faith. Thus, before such dire times arrive, it is crucial to preserve and strengthen faith. A weakened faith leads to mental enslavement and retreat. Therefore, resistance against every attack aimed at our faith is essential.

Our beliefs, our way of life, our education, our economy, and our media are all arenas eagerly awaiting our resistance. They are sinking, and to pull them ashore requires immense strength. Today, we have reached that critical stage where even a feeble patient, clinging to life, relies on a hidden force that electrifies his body with energy. When even the mute, the deaf, and the blind rise to the occasion during such dire times, what stops those who have been blessed with all abilities from utilising their full potential?

When I look towards our beloved homeland, a pang of unease fills my heart: where are we heading?

Then, I reflect—anyone with power, armed groups, obedient servants, music and revelry, intoxicants, flirtation, and endless indulgences—such a person loses all sense of shame. Modesty becomes irrelevant to them! Their arrogance peaks, fuelled by the flattering praise of sycophants and followers. The one who, just yesterday, was threatening reforms in a rally, boldly declaring his plans to storm homes, suddenly falls silent after a mere few hours, his bravado extinguished by new circumstances.

But today, I wish to discuss individuals of the opposite character—those whose mention soothes the soul and brings tranquillity to the heart. Such people have no concept of refusal in their vocabulary. "No" is not an option for them. Yet, defiance has always existed and will continue to rise. The echoes of "We refuse" resound, lashes rain down, skin is torn, blood flows, but something peculiar happens: the more such voices are suppressed, the louder and more persistent they become.

Whether it's boiling oil, blazing deserts, crushing boulders, or icy peaks—defiance does not waver. The chant of "We refuse" only grows louder, and the dance of devotion to faith becomes unstoppable. Who can halt the earth's rotation? Indeed, humans can be enslaved, their livelihoods snatched, their freedoms curtailed, and their dignity violated. They can be shackled, imprisoned, tortured, or even physically crippled.

But consider the likes of Sepoy Maqbool Hussain, who spent forty years in the enemy's prisons. Returning to kiss his homeland's soil, he was laid to rest with such honour by the nation's army that even the heavens seemed to rejoice. Why? Because when the Indian tormentors exceeded all limits, Maqbool Hussain cut out his own tongue to ensure it would never betray his country. His enemies were left stunned.



For centuries, humanity has witnessed defiance. Dissenters have been thrown to hungry beasts before the masses, under the watchful eyes of tyrants. These brutal spectacles were staged to suppress rebellion. Yet, no matter how much oppression is inflicted, the spirit of defiance cannot be extinguished.

Resistance knows no bounds.

You can imprison bodies but not scents. Fragrance cannot be contained, and its hues are endless—words, emotions, selflessness, and loyalty all carry their unique aroma. Above all, there is the fragrance of martyrdom, of those who sacrificed their today for our tomorrow. This is the essence of their beliefs, woven into the miracle that is Pakistan—a state founded on the holy night of 27th Ramadan.

Faith, ideas, and sacrifice—they emit a fragrance that intensifies with every drop of blood spilt. Resistance grows stronger in the face of tyranny. The more it is suppressed, the more it flourishes, like a flower blooming amidst adversity. As the poet says:

"Jitne bhi tu kar le sitam, hans hans ke sahenge hum"

(Do what you will, we will bear it with a smile.)

The greater the pain, the more fragrant its solace becomes. At last, pain transforms into its own cure.

"Rang baatein karein aur baaton se khushboo aaye
Dard phoolon ki tarah mehkey agar toh aaye"

(Let colours speak, let words carry fragrance,
Let pain bloom like flowers, and solace shall come.)

This all comes to my mind because I vividly remember the day I read the news. Surely, you must have seen, read, or heard about it. If not, then perhaps it is my privilege to remind you:

(New York - Online): A US Army specialist, Terry Holdbrooks, embraced Islam at the Guantanamo Bay detention centre after reciting the **Kalima Shahada**. The young officer, whose six-month assignment involved monitoring Muslim detainees and occasionally escorting them, was profoundly influenced by the ethics and worship practices of the Muslim prisoners. In a brief email, Holdbrooks admitted being deeply moved by the conduct and recitation of the Holy Qur'an by the detainees, often heard through the harsh confines of their prison cells. Truly, what else is left to say?

See, a flame can be extinguished with a mere blow, but who can extinguish **light**? Yes, indeed, light cannot be dimmed by a puff of air. Islam is light; the Qur'an is light – a radiance, a guiding path, an eternal truth. It was this very Qur'an whose implementation inspired the creation of Pakistan – a miraculous state that taught us the ultimate honour of sacrificing one's life for its preservation. It taught us that when someone lays down their life for this country, their parents, spouses, children, and even angels gather to celebrate their eternal triumph.

How can we ever forget our 135 soldiers who were buried beneath the icy peaks but remain alive in our hearts? Even when the world's best technology, expertise, and efforts declared their recovery impossible, their brave comrades proved otherwise. They not only retrieved their martyred companions but also showed the world that "impossible" has no place where loyalty to the homeland prevails. This was no isolated feat – over 8,000 of our youth have become part of these cold valleys, honouring their oath to protect this nation's borders under all circumstances. As the great poet Iqbal once said:

**"Faithfulness, with steadfastness, is the essence of faith.
Embed even a Brahmin in the Kaaba if he embodies such faith."**

Listen carefully: Pakistan is also light, and those who sacrifice their lives for it are the beacons who have pledged to cleanse this nation of all the darkness spread by its enemies. You've heard this before, repeatedly – my Lord has proclaimed: **"Martyrs are alive, receiving sustenance from their Lord."** He has warned us never to consider them dead.

Now brace yourself for this: When, even under the worst torture, those prisoners and young soldiers guarding the homeland smile, what is that strength which keeps their resolve unshaken? Could it be that the martyrs themselves look upon them with admiration? Could the examples of the martyrs of **Badr** or **Uhud** illuminate their hearts, dispelling fear entirely?

Our brave warriors and martyrs have unlocked the secret to their strength: an unbreakable connection with their faith and an unwavering love for Pakistan. This bond of faith and loyalty is a fortress, offering eternal victory to those who seek refuge within it. Strengthening this faith is the foremost need of our time. Resistance is only effective when rooted in faith. Without it, everything is lost.

Our martyrs are the crowns of our heads and divine blessings from Allah. Remember: those who find Allah never lose anything, and those who lose Allah never gain anything. This dance of martyrdom, this **Raqs-e-Bismil**, is our true treasure.

"We love Pakistan, and we love our martyrs!"

Monday 13 January 2025

The Taliban and Regional Countries: A New Strategic Reality

India's Role in the Changing Politics of Afghanistan

When the United States and its allied forces completed their withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, accompanied by Ashraf Ghani's departure and the collapse of his government, the Afghan Taliban came to power. At that time, most diplomatic and military experts in Pakistan believed that this significant change would strengthen Pakistan's regional influence. This was attributed to the role Pakistan played in the Taliban's victory, including countless sacrifices, hosting millions of Afghan refugees, and providing unwavering support. It is well-known that, without Pakistan as a loyal neighbour, the Soviet Union might not have faced such a decisive defeat in Afghanistan, which led to its fall as a global superpower and its eventual division into six states. Likewise, the United States and its allies would not have been forced into such a humiliating retreat.

However, despite these sacrifices, the relations between the two brotherly Muslim countries, Pakistan and Afghanistan, have remained tense. Unfortunately, this tension began shortly after the Taliban assumed power in Afghanistan.

In August 2021, when the Taliban took control of Afghanistan, Pakistan's then-Prime Minister Imran Khan remarked that the Afghan people had "broken the chains of slavery." It is worth noting that after the Taliban established their government, Pakistan's then-Director General of Inter-Services Intelligence, Lieutenant General Faiz Hameed, made a sudden visit to Kabul on 5th September 2021. His photographs, particularly one holding a cup of tea in a hotel lobby, became prominent in the media. During an informal conversation with journalists at the time, he said, "Don't worry, everything will be fine." However, this visit was later viewed as a significant mistake by the institution he represented, one whose repercussions Pakistan continues to face. General Faiz Hameed is now under the custody of his former institution and facing a court-martial.

Over the past four years, circumstances have rapidly changed, and Pakistan and the Taliban now seem to be at odds. Pakistan has repeatedly demanded action from Kabul against the banned Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which, according to Pakistan, is using Afghan territory to launch attacks. The Taliban government has consistently denied these allegations. In late December last year, Pakistan conducted intelligence-based operations in Afghan border regions, prompting severe protests from the Afghan Taliban government. The Taliban warned that Afghanistan's territorial sovereignty was a "red line" for their Islamic Emirate and vowed to respond. This was followed by incidents of cross-border firing on Pakistani border posts.

India, unsurprisingly, also condemned Pakistan's recent "airstrikes" in Afghanistan, as it continues to align closely with the policies of its ally, the United States, in the region.

Initially, Pakistan anticipated that the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan would lead to regional stability and a weakening of India's influence in the region. However, in recent months, growing closeness between India and the Afghan Taliban has emerged as a red flag for Pakistan.

The fall of Ashraf Ghani's government was initially perceived as a major setback for India, which had invested billions of dollars in Afghanistan during his tenure. Yet, in the past few months, India has

strengthened its ties with the Taliban. On 8th January, India's Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra met the acting Foreign Minister of the Taliban, Amir Khan Muttaqi, in Dubai. Both sides agreed to enhance trade and strengthen cooperation.

The Taliban's Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that Afghanistan considers India an important regional and economic partner. This meeting marked the highest-level interaction between the Taliban administration and India since the Taliban assumed power in 2021. Discussions also included increasing trade via Iran's Chabahar Port. India is developing this port to bypass Pakistan's Karachi and Gwadar ports and establish trade routes with Afghanistan, Iran, and Central Asia.

After the meeting, Afghanistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement highlighting that its foreign policy is balanced and focused on strengthening the economy. It expressed a desire to bolster political and economic partnerships with India. India's Ministry of External Affairs also stated that it is considering restarting developmental projects in Afghanistan and enhancing trade relations.

Notably, no country, including Pakistan, has officially recognised the Taliban government. India is among those nations. However, the recent meeting between the Taliban and India in Dubai has sent a significant message to Pakistan.

In an article for *The Hindu*, Indian journalist Nirupama Subramanian wrote that the Shahtoot Dam on the Kabul River is a priority for the Taliban. In 2020, India and Afghanistan signed a \$250 million agreement for this project, which stalled after the Taliban's return to power. Now, the Taliban are urging India to resume the project.

Husain Haqqani, Pakistan's former ambassador to the United States, stated during an interview with a Pakistani news channel that Pakistan had expected the Taliban to secure Kabul and ensure Pakistan's future stability. Instead, he said, "they have become a burden for us."

Haqqani later tweeted that the meeting between Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra and the Taliban's Foreign Minister should serve as a lesson for Pakistan's policymakers, who believed the Taliban's rise in Afghanistan would benefit Pakistan and diminish India's influence. He added, "Understanding foreign policy requires expertise. Being a brigade commander does not mean you understand everything."

The Shifting Dynamics of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India

Christopher Clary, a professor of political science at the University of Albany, wrote, "For decades, U.S. policymakers have told Pakistan that supporting the Taliban is unlikely to yield strategic benefits. Now, things are becoming clear." Contrary to Pakistan's expectations, the rise of the Taliban in Kabul has led to a surge in militant attacks within Pakistan. According to the Pakistan Centre for Conflict and Security, November 2024 saw the highest number of attacks, with 240 people killed, including approximately 70 security personnel.

Michael Kugelman, director of the South Asia Institute at the Wilson Center, commented on the growing ties between India and the Taliban, stating, "One could argue that India's increasing closeness with the Taliban is an attempt to outmanoeuvre Pakistan in Afghanistan. However, there

is also a practical aspect: India does not want Afghan soil to be used for terrorist attacks against it." He further added, "India also seeks to strengthen ties with Afghanistan via Iran's Chabahar port, which could serve as a gateway to Central Asia. Such initiatives could foster trust among the Afghan populace. While Pakistan desires the Taliban to control its adversaries within Afghanistan, the Taliban seems reluctant to do so, which benefits India. However, India-Taliban relations shouldn't solely be viewed through a Pakistan-centric lens."

Stanley Johnny, International Editor at The Hindu, wrote, "Both India and the Taliban wanted to maintain contact with each other since 2021, driven by various reasons. India has invested heavily in Afghanistan and is concerned about terrorism. The Pakistan factor is also significant, as the Taliban seeks independence from Pakistani influence, presenting an opportunity for India. This does not imply that India is in a hurry to normalise relations with the Taliban, but the two sides will continue to explore opportunities at a gradual pace."

Abdul Basit, Pakistan's former High Commissioner to India, remarked that Pakistan's Afghanistan policy has failed miserably, pointing to a lack of clear strategy. While Pakistan discusses trade and relations with Afghanistan, militant attacks simultaneously escalate. He believes the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is the biggest obstacle to improving relations, as the group's safe havens in Afghanistan remain a source of conflict.

The intertwined relationship between Afghan and Pakistani Taliban has historically involved cooperation, but Pakistan now finds itself forced to conduct operations against TTP sanctuaries in Afghanistan. This necessity arises from the Afghan Taliban's unwillingness to take direct action against the TTP.



Meanwhile, former Afghan diplomats have raised concerns over increasing ties between India and the Taliban. M. Ashraf Haidari, former Afghan ambassador to Sri Lanka, India, and the U.S., criticised the recent meeting between Vikram Misri and Taliban representatives, describing it as a betrayal of Afghanistan's people. He argued, "This is a betrayal of Afghan democracy, freedom, and human rights. Just as Pakistan has regretted betraying its values, India may also face repercussions. Let us not forget that the Taliban have vowed to fight for Kashmir's liberation and previously destroyed the Buddhas of Bamiyan, which were part of our cultural heritage."

Farid Mamundzay, Afghanistan's former ambassador to India, asserted that no dialogue with the Taliban could be legitimate without addressing the concerns of oppressed Afghan citizens. He urged prioritising the rights of Afghan women and children and resolving the ongoing humanitarian crisis.

The meeting between an Indian delegation and Taliban officials in Kabul has drawn significant attention, with observers viewing it as a step toward improving relations. Recently, J.P. Singh, a senior official from India's Ministry of External Affairs, led a delegation to meet acting Afghan Defence Minister Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob, acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, and former Afghan President Hamid Karzai. This marked the first official meeting between an Indian

ministry representative and Mullah Yaqoob, a prominent leader and the son of the Taliban's founder, Mullah Omar.

India's Ministry of Defence posted a photo of the meeting on X, highlighting discussions to strengthen ties. The Taliban have repeatedly expressed interest in fostering relations with India, particularly in the defence sector. Historically, India trained Afghan military personnel, and large numbers of Afghan soldiers attended Indian military academies.

Professor Balqees highlighted that India-Afghanistan relations have traditionally been strong. "Since the Taliban's rise, India has limited visas for Afghan citizens. However, recent talks also addressed student, business, and medical visas for Afghans, reflecting India's growing interest in restoring ties."

India's strategic goals include ensuring that Afghanistan does not exclusively fall under the influence of China and Pakistan. Following the meeting, the Taliban's Ministry of Defence emphasised the need to expand mutual relations. Indian media reported that this interaction indicates India's readiness to go beyond humanitarian aid and explore broader engagement. Future developments are expected to bring both nations closer, despite the absence of formal diplomatic ties.

India's Offer to Afghanistan and Diplomatic Shifts in the Region

India's Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson, Randhir Jaiswal, stated during a media briefing on Thursday that Indian officials offered Afghanistan trade opportunities via Iran's Chabahar Port during discussions with Afghan leaders. According to him, Indian representatives explained how Iranian traders and businessmen could benefit from exporting, importing, and conducting other business activities through Chabahar Port, which is being developed by India. This port is often viewed as an alternative to the Gwadar Port in Pakistan, constructed by China.

A few weeks before this meeting in Kabul, some Taliban officials had visited Delhi. Over time, India has gradually taken steps to establish relations with the Taliban government in Afghanistan.

Despite the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in 2021, India has not officially recognised their government. The Afghan diplomats from the previous administration have already departed from Delhi. While no country has formally recognised the Taliban regime, regional nations like China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, and Qatar continue to operate embassies in Kabul. Recently, India resumed its diplomatic mission in Kabul.

The Taliban have repeatedly urged India to allow the appointment of their diplomats in Delhi. This matter was also raised during the meeting and reports now suggest that India may be considering permitting the posting of Taliban diplomats in Delhi. The Taliban have assured India on multiple occasions that Afghan territory would not be used for anti-India activities.

Pakistan-Taliban Relations

Over the years, the relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban has experienced ups and downs. Pakistan's Foreign Office has consistently urged the Afghan Taliban to ensure that their territory is not used for attacks on Pakistan. However, Taliban officials claim that Afghan soil is not being used for such purposes.

India's Regional Engagement

This year, India's relations with its neighbours have been marked by challenges. In October, India agreed to extend financial assistance to the Maldives for its economic recovery, despite strained ties earlier in the year. In May, Indian authorities expressed displeasure over Nepal's issuance of a 100-rupee banknote featuring its new map. Meanwhile, Bhutan has been working on improving its diplomatic ties with China.

In Sri Lanka, left-leaning politician Anura Kumara Dissanayake, perceived as pro-China, was elected president in September. Bangladesh's former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina remains in

India, where the issue of granting her political asylum is being debated.

India's Cautious Approach with the Taliban

Foreign affairs experts in India believe there is a mutual lack of trust between the Taliban government and India. While India has not recognised the Taliban government, allowing Taliban diplomats to work in Delhi's Afghan embassy would be a significant step towards formalising relations. However, India continues to adopt a "wait-and-watch" policy.

On the other hand, Pakistan's Foreign Office spokesperson mentioned in August that the interim Afghan government must fulfil its commitments to its citizens and the international community. Ensuring that Afghan territory is not used against its neighbours would pave the way for recognition.

Geopolitical Strategies and Observations

Observers note that India's current government appears aligned with the policies of its new ally, Trump, and is actively working within the Troika framework to obstruct the completion of Pakistan's China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project. In this context, Afghanistan's strategic importance in the regional landscape has increased, and India's government is now moving towards fully restoring ties with the Taliban regime.

However, it is crucial to recognise that the same Taliban, who are now assuring India that their territory will not be used for anti-India activities, had previously made similar commitments to the global community in Doha. The Taliban must also acknowledge the sacrifices made by Pakistan, which enabled them to achieve their current position. Ignoring such contributions could result in consequences far more severe and unexpected for India in the future.

Finally, the Taliban's leadership should remember the divine principle articulated in the Quran: "Is the reward for good [anything] but good?" (Surah Ar-Rahman 55:60).

Wednesday 15 January 2025

Bangladesh and India: The Grave Consequences of Border Issues and Domestic Politics
Sheikh Hasina Wajid, Relations with India, and Bangladesh's Internal Struggles

The India-Bangladesh border dispute is intensifying, particularly along the extensive boundary shared by the state of West Bengal with five districts of Bangladesh. At a time when the political landscape in Bangladesh is undergoing a transformation, tensions along the border with neighbouring India have escalated. This became evident when Colonel Rafique Islam, commander of the 58th Battalion of Bangladeshi Border Guards (BGB), issued a statement to Bangladeshi media on Tuesday, claiming that "a five-square-kilometre area along the banks of the Kotlia River has been occupied."

In recent days, several significant incidents have occurred in this border region, leading to heightened tensions and unease between India's Border Security Force (BSF) and Bangladesh's Border Guards (BGB). Normally a relatively calm area, this border has recently witnessed noticeable tension, especially over the past week. This led to an emergency 'flag meeting'—a formal meeting between the two forces—to address the escalating situation.

The immediate trigger for the meeting was the reported occupation of five square kilometres along the Kotlia River by Bangladesh. Both countries discussed measures to de-escalate the issue during the meeting. Whether the concern is preventing border infiltration or installing barbed wire fences on the Indian side, regular meetings between the BSF and BGB are commonplace. While no confirmed reports of clashes between the two forces have emerged, the situation remains strained in several areas.

One of the most critical locations in West Bengal is the Petrapole border post in the North 24 Parganas district, a heavily trafficked checkpoint where Bangladeshi border guards are also stationed.

The disputed territory along the Kotlia River, claimed by Bangladesh, falls within the Bagda constituency's Ranaghat village, located near the Petrapole border post. On the opposite side of the border lies Maheshpur in Bangladesh. Following Rafique Islam's statement, tensions rose between the two nations. However, border officials stated that the situation was quickly brought under control and further deterioration was prevented.

Amidst these developments, Bangladesh's Foreign Secretary Mohammad Jashim Uddin summoned Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma in Dhaka to express "deep concern" over the recent activities of the Indian Border Security Force (BSF). He conveyed a message urging Indian authorities to refrain from "provocative actions." Highlighting attempts to erect barbed wire fencing along the border, which he deemed "illegal," Jashim Uddin warned that such actions could escalate tensions between the two countries.

Indian media reported that Jashim Uddin accused India of violating bilateral agreements, specifically regarding fencing at five locations along the border, and demanded an immediate halt to such activities. In response, ahead of the emergency flag meeting at Petrapole, the BSF categorically rejected Rafique Islam's claims, calling them baseless and misleading. "The BSF assures that not an inch of land has been occupied, nor will we permit such actions," stated an official. The Indian Border

Security Force clarified that the international boundary runs along the middle of the Kotlia River and is already well-demarcated with boundary markers and stones on both sides to delineate the border clearly.

This raises the question of what prompted the immediate need for the flag meeting.

Colonel Rafique Islam further claimed in his statement that, historically, residents of Bangladeshi border villages had faced difficulties accessing the Kotlia River. However, he asserted that the current situation had enabled them to utilise the river's waters freely. In response, Indian BSF officials stated that residents on both sides of the river have always accessed the water within their respective territories, and this remains unchanged. Notably, this section of the border lacks barbed wire fencing.

The Leader of the Opposition in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly, Suwendu Adhikari, shared a video of the incident on his social media page, which led to a temporary halt in the work of installing barbed wire fencing. The Indian Border Security Force (BSF) stated that Bangladeshi border guard officials were informed about the installation of barbed wire along the Indian border. The BSF clarified to the Bangladeshi security officials that the barbed wire installation was being carried out based on a bilateral agreement between the two nations. Speaking to reporters, Neelotpal Pandey said that after resolving the misunderstanding, the installation work resumed.

In a post on social media platform 'X,' Suwendu Adhikari, a leader of India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), remarked that Bangladeshi border guards were compelled to retreat due to the nationalist sentiments of the people in Sukhdipur village. He further stated that the local Indian citizens, in collaboration with the BSF, made it clear to the Bangladeshi Border Security Force that such attempts would not be tolerated in the interest of national security. Adhikari credited this to the growing awareness among the people.

Meanwhile, another video has gone viral on social media, allegedly showing “suspected Bangladeshi smugglers” clashing with BSF personnel in the Mukuroli area of Kailashahar, Tripura.

Since the formation of Bangladesh in 1971, the country has maintained friendly relations with India, ensuring that tensions on the India-Bangladesh border remained minimal. Trade and movement of people between the two nations continued smoothly. However, recent developments in Bangladesh suggest that tensions might arise. Residents of border villages have always been vigilant about their security. In areas where barbed wire fencing is absent, locals have taken proactive measures for their safety. They have started installing surveillance cameras and patrolling at night to ensure security.

India has long considered alleged infiltration from Bangladesh a major issue, and this concern often resurfaces during elections in various Indian states. Political parties use this issue to attack each other in the border regions. The BJP prominently raised the issue of infiltration during the Delhi Assembly elections in February. In West Bengal, the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) and the BJP frequently engage in heated exchanges on this matter.

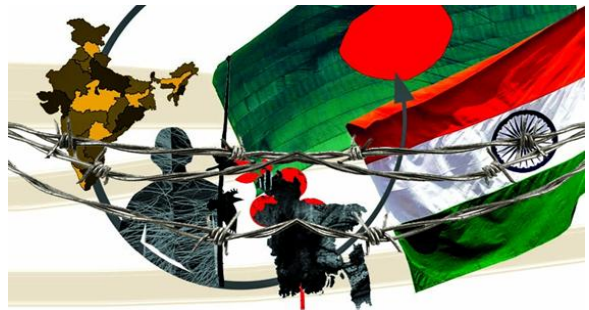
Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, during her annual meeting with officials, highlighted areas where infiltration is allegedly taking place. While reviewing the state secretariat's departments, Banerjee remarked, “Border security is not the responsibility of the TMC or the state police. It is the job of the

Border Security Force. They are facilitating infiltration and aiding criminal activities. I will take action against them and write to the central government regarding this.”

Banerjee also named three border regions in West Bengal where infiltration is reportedly most prevalent. Following her statement, Deputy Commissioner of Police Neelotpal Kumar Pandey from the BSF’s South Bengal border area released a statement saying such remarks demoralise BSF personnel. He asserted that the BSF is a “responsible force” and is fulfilling its duties with integrity. He also clarified that despite the Bangladeshi border official’s confusing statements, the situation in the border areas remains unchanged, with peace prevailing on both sides.

Another incident occurred on Tuesday in Sukhdipur village of Malda district, where barbed wire installation was underway. Bangladeshi Border Security Force personnel attempted to halt the work, leading to tensions in the border area. Villagers from Sukhdipur gathered at the site, chanting slogans such as "Bharat Mata ki Jai," "Jai Shri Ram," and "Vande Mataram."

Meanwhile, the BJP has adopted an aggressive stance against Mamata Banerjee’s statement. Opposition leader Suwendu Adhikari wrote a letter to the Chief Minister, raising several questions. He stated that security forces’ officers and soldiers serve the nation and protect its borders even in the harshest conditions. He warned that the country would not forgive disparaging remarks about the armed forces.



Adhikari questioned how local authorities issue ration cards and identification documents to infiltrators who cross the border and take refuge in villages, and how police officials verify their credentials. In his letter, he alleged that the West Bengal government is not cooperating with the BSF in installing barbed wire fencing. He also highlighted that the state government has been slow in allocating land for approximately 300 kilometres of barbed wire fencing along the Bangladesh border.

It should be noted that when the student movement in Bangladesh for securing government jobs turned into violent anti-government protests, Sheikh Hasina Wajed, the ruthless former Prime Minister who had held power for 15 years under the guise of democracy, was forced to flee. She sought refuge under her ally, Narendra Modi, and has since been living under strict security. In this entire episode, Sheikh Hasina's favoured appointee, General Waqar Uz Zaman, the Army Chief of Bangladesh, played a central role. He not only provided a helicopter for Sheikh Hasina's escape but, under pressure from the students, appointed Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus as the interim head of government. Furthermore, several political opponents, including former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, were also released.

This extraordinary and sudden political shift caught the Modi government off guard. Meanwhile, Sheikh Hasina's son, Sajeeb Wajed, in an interview with international media, blamed Pakistan for the change in Bangladesh, expressing concerns that the political future of Bangladesh could mirror that of Pakistan. He warned, "Islamist extremists, whom our government had painstakingly contained, may resurge, and Bangladesh may turn into another Pakistan."

Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs declined to comment on this statement. However, several former Pakistani diplomats, when contacted, dismissed the comparison as flawed and baseless. Political analysts observing Bangladesh's situation have expressed mixed opinions on the matter. Dhaka-based lawyer Rizwana Muslim, responding on the same international media platform, refuted Sajeeb Wajid's statement, stating, "This is an emotional and biased remark with no truth. It's crucial to understand that Islamist leaders no longer exist in Bangladesh. The former Awami League government eradicated all political parties that could harm its long-term interests, including Jamaat-e-Islami, whose key leaders were executed, thousands of members imprisoned in dark cells, and the party itself banned. Its leadership is now largely in exile. The student movement does not favour religious governance or old political faces, so the situation today is vastly different."

New Delhi-based journalist Jayanta Roy Chowdhury also disagreed with the comparison between Bangladesh and Pakistan. Responding to Sajeeb Wajid, he pointed out, "If we compare Bangladesh with other countries in the region, it has outpaced not only Pakistan but also India in development. Bangladesh is currently the world's largest exporter of ready-made garments. However, we must not overlook Sheikh Hasina's repression of opponents and rampant corruption, which has been highlighted in British media, specifically involving her niece."

It is worth recalling that after the fall of Dhaka in 1971, Bangladesh was South Asia's poorest country, with its economic conditions so dire that US National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger labelled it a "basket case." The situation worsened in 1974 with a devastating flood and subsequent famine, during which US President Richard Nixon's administration halted aid to Bangladesh. However, nearly 52 years later, Bangladesh has emerged as one of South Asia's fastest-growing economies.

Experts in Bangladesh attribute this progress primarily to non-governmental organisations such as Muhammad Yunus's Grameen Bank and Fazle Hasan Abed's BRAC. Jayanta Roy Chowdhury, responding to another query, stated, "In India, there is more concern about Bangladesh turning into Afghanistan than Pakistan." He drew parallels with the Taliban regime of the 1990s, stating, "At that time, many Bangladeshi youth, inspired by the Taliban, moved to Afghanistan and fought for them. After the Taliban's fall, these young men returned to Bangladesh."

He noted that this was a period when Sheikh Hasina's government had been ousted, and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) came to power. He warned that groups supporting the Taliban ideology could become active again, saying, "The greater concern is not about becoming Pakistan but about Bangladesh potentially turning into Afghanistan."

However, the Institute of Strategic Studies in Pakistan's India Study Centre highlighted key structural differences between Pakistan and Bangladesh. In Pakistan, the military has ruled for extended periods, whereas Bangladesh has consistently experienced democratic governments, especially since the 2000s. Bangladesh has shown a stronger economy, greater empowerment of women, and a robust student union with a better understanding of politics. The nation's unique culture, language, and emphasis on democratic values further strengthen its fabric.

Comparing Bangladesh to Pakistan, it becomes evident that military rule is unlikely to occur in Bangladesh. Even if a hybrid political system were introduced, it would not last long. It is noteworthy

that when the Bangladeshi military chief announced the end of Sheikh Hasina's government and proposed forming an interim government, the student unions rejected this outright. They nominated Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus as their candidate. The military officers advised their chief to accept the students' demands, leading to negotiations with the students and eventually inviting Yunus to form a government.

The strong student union of Bangladesh has also announced that their active movement will limit the role of the military in politics, as they have loyalists and supporters within the military. The primary reason for the support group within the army is Sheikh Hasina's tendency to promote loyal military personnel within her party, the Awami League. A clear example of this can be seen with the army chief, Waqar-ul-Zaman, whose loyalty was initially with Sheikh Hasina and the Awami League. His assistance in Hasina's escape indicates that he repaid her kindness by helping her flee. However, the student union now does not want Sheikh Hasina or her remnants to be a part of the forthcoming government. Therefore, Pakistan and Bangladesh are quite different from each other.

Friday 17 January 2025

Malik Riaz and Imran Khan: Two Major Figures in Pakistan's Corrupt Mafia

Deep Collaboration in Corruption Scandals

Pakistan's history is replete with numerous sensational corruption cases, many of which have seen its rulers facing legal trials and even convictions. However, in the 190 million pounds case, presided over by Judge Nasir Javed Rana of Islamabad's Accountability Court, a long-awaited verdict was delivered on 17 January 2025. This came after three postponements of the judgment, reserved on 18 December 2024, at Adiala Jail. Former Prime Minister Imran Khan was sentenced to 14 years in prison and fined 1 million rupees, while his wife, Bushra Bibi, received a 7-year prison term and a fine of 500,000 rupees, in the presence of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's leadership.

The 190 million pounds or Al-Qadir Trust case revolves around a donation of over 450 kanals of land given by the private housing society, Bahria Town, for the establishment of Al-Qadir University. The court has also ordered the nationalisation of Al-Qadir University.

According to the court's verdict, the prosecution presented evidence during the trial, which the defence team—representing Imran Khan and Bushra Bibi—failed to refute. The prosecution's case was primarily built on documentary evidence, which successfully substantiated charges against the accused with incontrovertible proof. While there may have been minor inconsistencies in the prosecution's evidence—common in white-collar crime cases—the defence was unable to discredit the prosecution's arguments despite being given numerous opportunities.

The reference regarding the 190 million pounds or Al-Qadir Trust was filed in Islamabad's Accountability Court on 1 December 2023 against eight individuals, including former Prime Minister Imran Khan and his wife, Bushra Bibi. Two of the accused, Imran Khan and his wife, were formally charged on 27 February 2024, and both denied the charges. The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) stated that five of the accused, including Imran Khan's advisor Shahzad Akbar, former minister Zulfi Bukhari, Bahria Town owner Malik Riaz, his son, and Bushra Bibi's friend Farah Shahzadi, have been declared absconders. The court has issued perpetual arrest warrants for them and ordered the confiscation of their properties in Pakistan.

During the trial, the NAB presented 35 witnesses, including two federal ministers from Imran Khan's cabinet, Pervez Khattak and Zubaida Jalal. The NAB had converted an inquiry into formal investigations against Imran Khan and his wife concerning hundreds of kanals of land in Jhelum, Punjab, under the Al-Qadir University Trust. The NAB was previously investigating allegations of misuse of authority and the handling of funds received from the United Kingdom. This is the same case in which Imran Khan was arrested on 9 May 2023 from the Islamabad High Court premises. Initially, the accountability court rejected his bail plea, but the Islamabad High Court later granted him bail against a surety bond of 1 million rupees.

The matter came to light in 2019 when a statement attributed to former federal minister Faisal Vawda surfaced in the media. He claimed that an issue had been approved during a cabinet meeting without prior notice to its members. Shahzad Akbar, Imran Khan's then-adviser on accountability, verbally briefed the cabinet members about a secret agreement between the UK's National Crime

Agency (NCA) and the Pakistani government. Faisal Vawda stated that federal ministers Fawad Chaudhry and Shireen Mazari had also raised questions about the matter during the meeting.

According to Cabinet Division rules, any matter to be discussed in the federal cabinet must be circulated seven days in advance. The NAB raised this issue in its reference, questioning the urgency that bypassed the seven-day rule for circulating the agenda.

The NAB alleges that the matter wasn't merely a donation but the result of a secret agreement between Malik Riaz, the owner of Bahria Town, and the government led by Imran Khan. The 190 million pounds (equivalent to 60 billion rupees) frozen by UK authorities and later handed over to the Pakistani government were adjusted against the 460 billion rupees owed by Bahria Town in a Supreme Court ruling. In exchange, Bahria Town donated 458 kanals of land in Sohawa, Jhelum, to the Al-Qadir University Trust in March 2021. The NAB claims that this alleged agreement was made between Bahria Town and Bushra Bibi.

The NAB's reference further highlights that the agreement with the UK's National Crime Agency was signed on 6 November 2019, during Imran Khan's tenure, with the first instalment of the funds reaching the Supreme Court's account on 29 November 2019. However, the federal cabinet approved the agreement on 3 December 2019, and the members were not informed about the receipt of the first instalment.

According to NAB officials, discussions between Pakistan's Asset Recovery Unit, headed by Shehzad Akbar, and the UK's National Crime Agency (NCA) had been ongoing since 2018. Allegedly, later approval was sought from the federal cabinet to conceal certain aspects of the matter. NAB officials maintain that no law in Pakistan stipulates that the agreement signed between the NCA and the Asset Recovery Unit should remain undisclosed.

In the reference filed against Imran Khan and Bushra Bibi, it is also alleged that the funds received from the UK were deposited into the Supreme Court's account instead of the federal government's account. The reference further claims that Imran Khan, as Prime Minister, extended favours in exchange for which donations were received.

"Under the NAB Ordinance, if a matter is pending with a public officeholder, receiving anything from anyone falls under the category of bribery." The reference also alleges that 240 kanals of land were transferred in the name of Bushra Bibi's associate, Farah Shehzadi. Similarly, land was transferred in the name of another accused in the case, Zulfi Bukhari, even before the trust's formal establishment.

Imran Khan and the other accused deny these allegations. Trustees of the university included Imran Khan, his wife Bushra Bibi, and PTI leaders Zulfi Bukhari and Babar Awan, though the latter two later dissociated themselves from the trust. Following a federal cabinet meeting, some details of the alleged secret agreement were revealed. Documents contained Bushra Bibi's signature as a trustee of the Al-Qadir University Project Trust.

PTI's leadership and lawyers have described the reference as a "political case," asserting that Pakistani law prohibits any court from challenging federal cabinet decisions.

PTI argues that the funds mentioned in the reference did not enter Imran Khan's personal account but were deposited into the Supreme Court's account. The government could transfer these funds to the national treasury if it chose to. PTI further claims that the actual amount received from the UK following the NCA agreement was £171 million, not £190 million.

Conversely, the government has termed the £190 million case a "mega corruption scandal," accusing Pakistani property tycoon Malik Riaz of laundering money from Pakistan to the UK. The NCA returned this money, considered the rightful property of the Pakistani public, to the government. While the NCA fulfilled its commitment, Imran Khan allegedly directed the funds, through his aide Shehzad Akbar, to the Supreme Court account linked to Malik Riaz's £460 billion settlement in the Bahria Town Karachi case.

The government argues, "How can a trust, funded by a business tycoon, have a husband and wife as trustees?" They claim, "The money received from the NCA was entrusted to the people of Pakistan, but corruption and collusion started as soon as the money arrived. How does Imran Khan justify this?"

At one point, Malik Riaz was considered one of Pakistan's wealthiest individuals, renowned for his residential projects. His success stories frequently appeared in interviews on television and in newspapers. Both Malik Riaz and his son, Ahmed Ali Riaz, are wanted in the £190 million reference. A year ago, an Islamabad accountability court declared Malik Riaz a proclaimed offender in the case and froze his and his son's assets. The court ordered their arrest and the seizure of their remaining assets in Pakistan due to their continued absence. Both currently reside abroad.



Details of Malik Riaz and his son's assets have been presented in court by NAB, yet these documents paint a different picture. The court was informed through NAB that Malik Riaz remains the CEO of Bahria Town Limited, although no formal ownership of Bahria Town was attributed to him.

In the £190 million case, besides former Prime Minister Imran Khan, other accused include Bushra Bibi, Farah Gogi, Zulfi Bukhari, Shehzad Akbar, and Malik Riaz, along with his son Ahmed Ali Riaz.

Details of Malik Riaz and his son's assets, such as plots in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, as well as bank accounts, have been submitted to the court. A NAB official disclosed to the media that these are declared assets, officially recorded by revenue authorities and subsequently submitted to the court.

According to court documents, Malik Riaz owns land in Rawalpindi's Kotka Kalan, Bamla Kanat, and Islamabad's Mohra Noor areas. On paper, Malik Riaz and his son appear to lack vehicles or a roof over their heads, indicating a stark contrast between official records and their perceived wealth.

How did the list of assets shrink so dramatically on the journey to the £190 million reference? Are Malik Riaz and Ali Riaz no longer shareholders in Bahria Town? According to a senior NAB official, the details of Bahria Town presented in court reveal much about the country's justice system. It is common practice in Pakistan for wealthy individuals not to hold assets in their own names; such assets are often benami (undeclared or proxy ownership).

Currently, the "Transfer of Property Act" is not being enforced effectively in the country. Private housing schemes issue "allotment letters" in exchange for purchasing plots or homes instead of proper agreements to sell or sale deeds. This practice deprives the national treasury of taxes. In the past, Malik Riaz has adopted unique methods when settling matters with the authorities. In his dealings with NAB, Malik Riaz often paid through third parties rather than directly. These agreements were termed "package bargains," an unusual term not mentioned in NAB's legal framework. These agreements included clauses stating that neither Malik Riaz nor his co-accused would be arrested in the relevant reference, and the case would be permanently closed.

Previously, Judge Muhammad Bashir of the accountability court ordered the freezing of Malik Riaz and his son's movable and immovable properties. He also ordered the freezing of assets belonging to former Prime Minister's aides Zulfi Bukhari and Shehzad Akbar, Farhat Shehzadi (known as Farah Khan Gogi), and lawyer Zia-ul-Mustafa Naseem.

The court directed revenue officers across the country to seize the immovable properties of the accused and ordered excise and taxation officials to confiscate vehicles registered in their names. Commercial banks were instructed to freeze their accounts, prohibiting any transactions or withdrawals. Additionally, the court appointed an additional director from NAB as a receiver to collect rental income from the accused's properties.

However, this is not the first time that asset seizure orders have been issued. We all know that enforcing court decisions remains a significant challenge in the country. The Supreme Court has issued several rulings regarding Malik Riaz and his Bahria Town housing projects, yet years have passed, and forest lands remain unrecovered. Malik Riaz has never appeared before NAB for investigations.

While the court has the authority to investigate such matters, it appears that even institutions like NAB do not provide the judiciary with a complete picture. Witnesses often fail to reveal the truth, enabling influential defendants to escape accountability. Eventually, frozen assets often revert to their original owners.

Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa, heading a Supreme Court bench, had previously ordered the £190 million from the UK to be deposited into Pakistan's national treasury.

Malik Riaz, a property tycoon and owner of Bahria Town, has already been declared a proclaimed offender in the Al-Qadir Trust case. Malik Riaz is known for his connections with political parties, the media, and both the civil and military establishments in Pakistan. He is widely regarded as someone skilled at navigating through challenges.

On 28 May 2024, Malik Riaz claimed via the social media platform X that NAB officials had raided the offices of his private housing society, Bahria Town Rawalpindi, to pressure him into becoming an "approver."

He stated, "Malik Riaz will not become an approver. Government machinery, without legal authority, raided Bahria Town offices in Rawalpindi. After publicly declaring neutrality in any political power struggle, I am being subjected to open vandalism and persecution. These raids continued for hours, during which office security and staff were harassed, and property was vandalised. The raiding team took over 5,000 critical project files, office records, 23 computers, network data, departmental cash, and nine vehicles."

Malik Riaz alleged that these raids were part of a political agenda to pressure Bahria Town. Previously, on 26 May, Malik Riaz made a cryptic post on Twitter, hinting at "political pressure" and vowing never to yield. In response to becoming an approver, he declared, "I will never be a puppet. Over my dead body."

Monday 20 January 2025

Hamas' Bravery and Resolve: Unprecedented Resistance Against Superpowers

Hamas' Resolve: Battling Global Powers with Limited Resources

On Wednesday, 15th January 2025, Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani finally confirmed, during a press conference in Qatar, the truce agreement that had been brokered over several months through covert negotiations between Israeli and Hamas officials, mediated by Qatar, Egypt, and American intermediaries. The agreement includes the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, the release of hostages by Hamas, and the release of Palestinian prisoners by Israel. The truce is set to commence on Sunday, 19th January, though specific timings are yet to be finalised.

The war in Gaza began on 7th October 2023, with an attack on southern Israel that resulted in approximately 1,200 fatalities and the capture of 251 civilians as hostages. In retaliation, Israel launched an offensive on Gaza with the aim of dismantling Hamas. According to Gaza's Ministry of Health, the war has claimed 46,640 lives in Gaza, although the actual death toll is believed to be significantly higher. The Hamas attack and the subsequent Israeli response have permanently altered the region's dynamics. The question arises: how did Hamas orchestrate such a coordinated assault from Gaza?

When the attack began, many Israelis were likely asleep. Saturday, being the Jewish Sabbath, meant that many families were at home, meeting friends, or planning time in synagogues. However, in the early hours of the morning, a sudden barrage of rockets signalled the onset of an unprecedentedly large and well-coordinated assault. For years, Israel had isolated the Gaza Strip with barriers. Yet, within mere hours on that Saturday, Hamas breached these barriers.

The rocket assault began at approximately 6:30 a.m. The organisation controlling the Gaza Strip, Hamas, has long employed rocket attacks as a tactic, and this time was no exception. The group used these rockets in its offensive. Although Israel's advanced Iron Dome defence system is typically effective against such attacks, the sheer volume of rockets fired within a short period overwhelmed the system on that Saturday morning.

The scale of the rocket fire demonstrates that planning for this assault had been underway for months. Hamas claims to have launched 5,000 rockets in the initial phase, while Israeli officials estimate the number to be half of that. Alarms blared as far as Tel Aviv, 60 kilometres from the Gaza Strip, and soon smoke rose from sites in western Jerusalem and other cities where missiles struck.

Amid the rocket fire, armed Hamas fighters gathered at locations from where they would breach the barriers isolating Gaza.

Notably, Israel evacuated its forces and settlers from Gaza in 2005, yet it still controls Gaza's airspace, borders, and coastline. Around the Gaza Strip are concrete walls, barbed wire fences, military checkpoints, camera networks, and sensors designed to prevent such attacks. Nevertheless, within a few hours, Hamas breached these barriers at several locations. Some fighters bypassed these barriers entirely, using methods such as airborne gliders—at least seven of which were reportedly seen in Israel, according to unverified footage. Other fighters entered Israel by sea.

The Israeli military stated it intercepted two Hamas boats attempting to infiltrate Israel, but the hallmark of this assault was the multiple, coordinated attacks on crossing points.

At 5:50 a.m., Hamas's armed wing published initial images on its Telegram account showing fighters at Kerem Shalom, the southernmost entry point from Gaza into Israel. These images depicted armed fighters attacking a military post beyond the fence, with two bloodied Israeli soldiers lying on the ground.

Another image showed five armed fighters on motorcycles crossing a barbed wire fence that had been cut. In another location, a bulldozer was used to dismantle the barrier, with dozens of armed men present, some of whom began crossing the breached fence.

Approximately 43 kilometres from Kerem Shalom, in the northern part of Gaza, Hamas launched another attempt to breach the barrier at the Erez crossing. Footage from this location shows an explosion at a concrete barrier, marking the beginning of the assault. Subsequently, an armed fighter waved his hand to signal his comrades to advance. Wearing bulletproof vests and armed with rifles, eight fighters charged towards an Israeli military post, opening fire. The video later shows the bodies of Israeli soldiers on the ground as the fighters, clearly trained and organised, methodically searched each room in the compound.

The Gaza Strip has seven official crossing points, six controlled by Israel and one by Egypt. However, within hours, Hamas found a way to infiltrate Israeli territory across the entire border.

Hamas Fighters Expand Beyond Gaza

Hamas fighters moved out of Gaza, spreading in all directions. Information obtained from Israeli officials indicates they attacked 27 locations, seemingly instructed to shoot on sight. The farthest point reached by Hamas fighters was the town of Ofakim, 22 kilometres east of Gaza. In Sderot, militants were seen passing through the town in a pickup truck, just three kilometres east of Gaza. Nearly a dozen armed fighters were spotted on the deserted streets of Ashkelon, north of Erez. Similar scenes were observed in various parts of southern Israel, prompting officials to urge civilians to remain indoors.

According to Israel, a music festival was taking place in a desert near Re'im, attended by a large number of young people. Armed militants abducted around 100 soldiers and civilians from the festival and other locations, taking them to Gaza. Along with civilian areas, Hamas also targeted two military installations. Footage from Re'im showed several burned vehicles on a road near the base.

Within hours of the rocket attack, hundreds of Israelis had been killed in a manner that no one had anticipated. While Israeli reinforcements began arriving in the southern regions, Hamas retained control of significant areas outside Gaza for a period. The speed and devastation of this unprecedented attack shocked Israel, leaving many questions unanswered questions likely to persist for years.

Confirmation of the Ceasefire Agreement

US President Joe Biden, alongside Vice President Kamala Harris and Secretary of State Antony

Blinken, confirmed the ceasefire agreement in a press conference. He stated that the agreement would halt the fighting in Gaza, facilitate humanitarian aid to Palestinian civilians, and reunite hostages with their families after 15 months of captivity. Biden acknowledged the immense difficulty of reaching this agreement, describing it as one of the most challenging negotiations of his career. He noted that Iran is significantly weaker than in previous decades, Hezbollah is "severely weakened," and Hamas, after losing several senior leaders and fighters, agreed to the terms of the ceasefire. However, critical issues remain, preventing this agreement from becoming a permanent ceasefire.

Ceasefire Agreement Details

While the official announcement of the agreement's details is pending, sources involved in the negotiations have provided insights. The draft agreement is structured in three phases, which Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani hopes will serve as a precursor to a permanent ceasefire.

A Palestinian official disclosed that the proposed peace plan's first phase includes a ceasefire lasting 42 to 60 days. During this phase, Hamas will release 33 hostages to Israel, including children, women (including female soldiers), men over 50, and the injured and sick. Following this, further hostage releases will be suspended for weeks. On the first day of the ceasefire, Hamas will immediately release three hostages.

Israel believes most hostages are alive, although Hamas has not officially confirmed this. Among the hostages, 94 are reportedly in Gaza, 34 of whom have been killed. Four additional Israeli hostages were taken before the war began, with two already confirmed dead.



Future Phases

The draft suggests that on the 16th day of the ceasefire, Israel and Hamas will begin negotiations for the second and third phases of the peace plan. These phases include the exchange of remaining hostages for Palestinian prisoners. Israel will allow displaced residents from northern Gaza to return south, subject to weapons inspections. Pedestrians will be permitted to travel via the coastal road, while vehicle travellers will be allowed entry through Salah al-Din Road into central Gaza.

It is noteworthy that nearly all of Gaza's 2.3 million residents have been displaced due to evacuation orders, Israeli strikes, and the war. Within days of the ceasefire's initiation, Israeli forces will begin a phased withdrawal from Gaza, starting with the Netzarim Corridor in central Gaza. However, Israel will maintain some military presence along Gaza's southern border with Egypt, known as the Philadelphi Corridor.

The Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza will gradually reopen to allow the sick and wounded to leave for treatment, with increased humanitarian aid permitted.

In the second phase, surviving male soldiers and civilians will be returned to Israel, while the bodies

of deceased hostages will also be handed over. Israel maintains that there are currently 94 hostages in Gaza, with 34 confirmed deaths. Additionally, four Israeli citizens abducted before the war remain in Gaza. Reports suggest that the Hamas fighters who carried out the October 7, 2023, attack on Israel will not be released.

Israel has stated that it will only fully withdraw its forces after all hostages are released. Subsequently, it reportedly plans to maintain an 800-metre-wide buffer zone along the eastern and northern borders of Gaza, adjacent to Israel, to retain security control over Gaza. The third phase of the ceasefire agreement pertains to the reconstruction of Gaza. It is worth noting that a significant portion of Gaza has been reduced to rubble during the conflict between Hamas and Israel, and this reconstruction phase is expected to take several years.

No agreement has yet been reached on the second and third phases of the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. Negotiations regarding these phases will commence on the 16th day of the initial ceasefire. However, critical questions remain unanswered, the most pressing being: Who will govern Gaza? Israel is unwilling to hand over Gaza's administration to Hamas and has also refused to transfer administrative control to the Palestinian Authority, which manages several areas in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

Israel intends to maintain security control over Gaza even after the current conflict ends. However, Israel, in collaboration with the United States and the United Arab Emirates, is reportedly working on a plan to establish an interim administration in Gaza. This administration would manage Gaza's affairs until reforms within the Palestinian Authority are implemented. Hamas, meanwhile, may harbour concerns that Israel could refuse to agree to a permanent settlement after the first phase of the ceasefire is completed. Even if the Israeli Prime Minister consents to a peace process with Hamas, it is uncertain whether his cabinet would support such an initiative.

Israel's Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir oppose any such agreement. Smotrich wrote on social media that any agreement of this nature would be "catastrophic" for Israel's national security, and he would not support it. Hamas is reportedly concerned that after the hostages are returned during the first phase of the peace plan, the Israeli government might resume its attacks on Gaza.

There are other factors that could undermine the agreement. Israel wants the return of all hostages, but it remains unclear which hostages are alive or deceased, and it is possible that Hamas may not have information about some of them. Israel also refuses to release certain prisoners whom Hamas seeks to free. Reportedly, these include individuals involved in the 7 October attacks. Additionally, it is uncertain when Israel will withdraw its forces from the proposed buffer zone along Gaza's borders or whether these forces will remain there permanently.

The unprecedented speed and devastation of this attack left Israel, and its allies astonished. It raises a critical question that will likely be debated for years: How was this possible? One lingering mystery is how Israel's intelligence agency, Mossad—renowned for its claims of uncovering even the most concealed threats—failed to anticipate Hamas's extensive planning. Could it be that this was allowed

as part of a strategy for establishing "Greater Israel," aiming to dismantle both Hamas and its supporting forces?

It is noteworthy that Hezbollah, founded in 1982, decisively forced Israel into retreat during its aggression in 2000, leaving Israel's allies stunned. From that day forward, a deliberate strategy was devised to ensure Israel's dominance in the region. While countries such as Libya were ravaged under the guise of the "Arab Spring," Arab monarchies were sent a clear message about their vulnerabilities. Gradually, efforts began to isolate Hamas, leveraging the weaknesses of regional rulers. Despite this, Hamas's remarkable resilience and sacrifice over 15 months have created a legacy of unparalleled courage that history will never forget.

As poet Allama Iqbal beautifully expressed in *Saqi Nama*:

رُکے جب تو سُل چیر دیتی ہے یہ
پہاڑوں کے دل چیر دیتی ہے یہ
اٹھاسا قیام پر وہ اس راز سے
لڑا دے مولے کو شہباز سے

**"When it halts, it pierces through rocks,
It pierces the hearts of mountains.
Unveil this secret, O Bartender!
And let the butterfly challenge the falcon.**

Wednesday 22 January 2025

Social Media and Its Impact on the Mental Health of the Youth

Effective and Positive Use of Social Media: A Necessity

Social media has become an integral part of human life, revolutionising communication and information dissemination across the globe. It is a significant manifestation of modern technological advancement, which has not only simplified communication but also profoundly impacted every sphere of public life. Recently, a highly respected friend of mine, recognised globally for his contributions to the medical profession and humanitarian service, sent me an article written by Dr Colin Fisher, a lecturer at the UCL School of Management in London, UK. The article, titled "*The dynamics that polarise us on social media are about to get worse*" prompted me to delve into the subject. It highlights the growing influence of social media and raises concerns from Western intellectuals about the distortion of truth on platforms, particularly those under the "Meta" umbrella, in the face of hate speech and an overwhelming flood of misinformation.

In this discussion, let us examine the history, current state, benefits, and drawbacks of social media, supported by research references, to understand its impact comprehensively.

History of Social Media

Social media emerged in the 1990s with the widespread availability of the internet. The first social media website, "Six Degrees," launched in 1997, allowing users to create profiles and connect with friends. Facebook's inception in 2004 revolutionised the social media landscape, followed by Twitter's introduction of microblogging in 2006. WhatsApp (2009) and Instagram (2010) further popularised messaging and photo sharing. Research shows that social media usage surged after 2010, particularly with the proliferation of mobile internet, where misinformation and hate speech have overshadowed the truth and justice.

Current Usage Trends

Social media usage has skyrocketed globally. According to the 2023 report by "We Are Social" and "Hootsuite," approximately 4.9 billion people use social media platforms. These platforms connect people for various purposes, including news, entertainment, education, and business. In Pakistan, the trend is rapidly increasing. The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority's (PTA) 2022 report states that internet users in the country have surpassed 124 million, with a significant portion engaged on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok.

Social media has dramatically simplified and accelerated information dissemination. A study reveals that 80% of people rely on social media for news.

Benefits of Social Media

1. Business Opportunities

Social media has transformed business practices. E-commerce and digital marketing have enabled companies to introduce their products and services globally. The E-Commerce Journal reports a 30% annual increase in business conducted through social media.

2. Educational Resources

Social media has become an essential source for accessing educational materials. Students

benefit from online lectures, videos, and other resources. A University of California study indicates that online education has improved student performance by 25%.

3. ***Connecting People***

Social media has brought distant individuals closer, making it an excellent tool for maintaining relationships with friends and family. It has replaced costly landline and mobile communication with free programs and introduced video links for group interactions across countries. However, it raises the question of why these platforms offer free services while incurring substantial expenses.

4. ***Social Life Improvement***

According to a Harvard Business Review study, social media has enhanced the social lives of 60% of users.

Drawbacks of Social Media

1. ***Time Wastage***

Excessive use leads to time wastage. On average, users spend two to three hours daily on social media.

2. ***Mental Health Impacts***

Unrealistic standards and negative comments affect mental health. The American Psychological Association (APA) notes a 25% increase in depression and anxiety linked to excessive social media use.

3. ***Misinformation and Security Risks***

Sharing inaccurate information is easy. The Cybersecurity Journal states that 80% of global data breaches in 2021 were associated with social media. Platforms have become breeding grounds for fake news and rumours, causing social and political unrest. The Reuters Institute reports that 70% of people share information without verifying its authenticity.

4. ***Political Misuse***

In developing countries like Pakistan, political parties exploit social media for propaganda, defaming opponents, and inciting the public. Hostile nations use these platforms to fuel political and social instability. A BBC report highlights organised misinformation campaigns by certain countries to destabilise others, such as Pakistan.

5. ***Exploitation of Collaborative Systems***

Community-based systems often face exploitation by organised groups. For instance, Chinese nationalists have reportedly manipulated Wikipedia entries concerning China-Taiwan relations to favour China's stance. Similarly, Indian and Israeli intelligence agencies extensively misuse social media to achieve their objectives.

Social media has undeniably revolutionised communication, information dissemination, and connectivity. While its benefits are immense, the challenges it poses, particularly in terms of misinformation, mental health, and political exploitation, cannot be overlooked. Effective

regulations and ethical practices are crucial to maximizing its advantages and minimising its adverse effects.

False Narratives and Their Impact on Political Stability

False narratives exacerbate political differences, leading to severe damage to political stability. The growing hatred among the populace is causing an increase in social divisions. Campaigns run by hostile elements pose threats to national security and lay the groundwork for enmity between neighbouring countries. Such animosities elevate security risks to such an extent that adversarial forces exploit the situation, creating conditions for war. This puts the lives of millions at risk. Even a single day of war can push nations' development back by years.

Over the past three years, artificial intelligence (AI) has surpassed other social media programs. Its advantages include superior data analysis, product design, and automation, which allow complex tasks to be executed swiftly and efficiently. In industrial and business sectors, AI saves both time and costs. In healthcare, it aids in diagnosing patients and producing instant results for X-rays, MRIs, and scans. AI is also utilised in robotic surgeries and personalised treatments.

In education, AI improves learning platforms by offering students tailored resources. It simplifies online learning and makes it more interactive. In transportation, it has revolutionised travel with automated vehicles and navigation systems, ensuring safer and more efficient journeys while saving valuable time. Furthermore, AI has created new industries and job opportunities, particularly in technology and the digital economy.



The Dual Nature of Artificial Intelligence

While AI offers countless benefits, its drawbacks must also be acknowledged. Automation driven by AI is eliminating many traditional and manual jobs. Training AI systems requires vast amounts of data, increasing the risk of privacy violations. Algorithms can incorporate biases or inaccuracies, leading to unfair decisions and raising concerns about partiality and lack of transparency. Additionally, AI can be misused for cyberattacks, fake videos (deepfakes), and other criminal activities, significantly heightening security risks. Overreliance on AI can weaken human decision-making and emotional intelligence, contributing to moral and social challenges. The use of autonomous weapons in military systems poses a major risk to human lives. A recent example includes Israel's exploitation of Hezbollah's wireless communication system, where they spied on the system for months and later triggered a blast with a single command, killing hundreds and leaving many permanently disabled.

It is undeniable that AI and other social media programs offer numerous opportunities to enhance human life. However, for their effective and safe utilisation, appropriate regulations and ethical boundaries must be established. Without strategies to mitigate their disadvantages, these technologies could darken the future of the entire world.

Islamic Perspective on False Information

إِذْ تَلَقَّوْنَهُ بِأَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَتَقُولُونَ بِأَفْوَاهِكُمْ مَا لَيْسَ لَكُمْ بِهِ عِلْمٌ وَتَحْسَبُونَهُ هَيِّنًا ۖ وَهُوَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ عَظِيمٌ ۚ وَ لَوْ لَا إِذْ سَمِعْتُمُوهُ قُلْتُمْ مَا يَكُونُ لَنَا أَنْ نَتَكَلَّمَ بِهَذَا ۖ سُبْحَانَكَ هَذَا بُهْتَانٌ عَظِيمٌ... (النور: 15-16)

When you received it with your tongues and said with your mouths that of which you had no knowledge and thought it was insignificant while it was, in the sight of Allah, tremendous.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنْ جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا أَنْ تُصِيبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصْبِحُوا عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نَادِمِينَ. (الحجرات: 6)

O you who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also said:

"Whoever accuses a Muslim falsely will be stopped at the bridge over Hell until he repents." (*Sunan Abu Dawood*)

Global Consequences of False Narratives

Globally, intellectuals agree that false news and misinformation on social media are significantly contributing to domestic unrest. Such platforms have even been weaponised to destabilise nations. A glaring example is the "Arab Spring," where media campaigns led to widespread destruction. In Iraq, false accusations about weapons of mass destruction resulted in the deaths of thousands of Iraqis and the obliteration of a civilisation thousands of years old. Similarly, Libya's leader Muammar Gaddafi, who provided unparalleled services to his nation and transformed Libya into a prosperous welfare state, was overthrown. His refusal to bow to foreign pressures and his decision to sell oil outside the dollar system led to a campaign of misinformation. A false claim that his air force bombed Benghazi, killing 50,000 civilians, was later denied. However, it was enough to justify a no-fly zone over Libya, paving the way for external intervention and plunging the country into civil war. Today, Libya's oil wealth is entirely under foreign control.

Islamic Teachings on Truthfulness

Islamic teachings prohibit the spread of lies and misinformation, as these disrupt societal peace and erode trust. The Quran and Hadith emphasise that truthfulness is the foundation of a harmonious society, while falsehood breeds discord and turmoil. Adhering to these principles can shield communities from the devastating consequences of false narratives and ensure a just and stable society.

In countries like Pakistan, false information not only leads to social conflicts but also provides opportunities for adversarial elements to exploit the situation and fuel political anarchy.

According to the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah, it is the responsibility of Muslims to avoid spreading any news without proper investigation. It is essential to promote the importance of Islamic principles through quality education and training and to cultivate a culture of critical inquiry. Following the teachings of the Qur'an, verifying the authenticity of every piece of information should be mandatory, and strict legal action should be taken against slander and the dissemination of falsehoods.

If we begin taking these steps today, you will observe that increased awareness about social issues and rights will enhance people's consciousness, improve communication, and expand educational opportunities. However, it is evident that the excessive negative use of social media is harming social

relationships, isolating individuals, and causing mental stress and anxiety among the youth. False information and propaganda are further contributing to social divisions.

While it cannot be denied that social media has brought significant improvements in connectivity, reuniting family members who had become distant, and raising awareness about social issues and rights, it has also increased educational opportunities and enabled remote work, saving billions of dollars for businesses globally. This has enhanced convenience, reduced depression, and improved quality of life. However, we must not overlook the adverse effects of social media, such as mental pressure and anxiety among the younger generation, which often leads to social isolation, misinformation, and propaganda. In some cases, it has even driven individuals to commit suicide, impacting numerous families.

To address these issues, it has become imperative to enforce strict laws to curb the misuse of social media. Public awareness campaigns should be conducted to help people identify and avoid false information. Modern technology should be utilised on social media platforms to detect fake accounts and misinformation. Revolutionary changes must be introduced to tackle cybercrime more effectively. Moreover, social media technology experts should step forward to develop secure programs that ensure the safety of future generations.

Social media is a platform that influences every aspect of life. While it offers countless benefits, its drawbacks cannot be ignored. Therefore, it is crucial to use social media with moderation and for constructive purposes to minimise its negative impacts and maximise its advantages. According to reports by research institutions and recommendations from experts, the use of social media should be organised and constructive to further enhance its positive effects.

Note: As soon as I completed my column, I first sent it to my esteemed colleague who sent the article by Dr Colin Fisher asked me what ordinary individuals could do to better benefit from use of social media and be less harmed by false information. He had looked for guidance on how best to avoid misinformation. At my request, they have sent short comments, and I believe that their valuable comments have completed my article. I am very happy to publish their comments with their permission.

“A source from the University of California had suggested the importance of trusting the source of information not the ‘sharer’. If news was not from a trustworthy source known to have strong ethical editorial control and employ honest fact checkers, then maybe it was less likely to be true. He learned that social media content tended to be selected to drive polarization of views reinforcing differences between groups rather than helping to seek common ground. He noted that in his own area of scientific medical research he recognized that everyone had biased views to some extent and would tend, like everyone else outside of professional science, to seek evidence and views that confirmed their own. Scientific processes were designed to overcome these biases, but these processes are lacking in social media. Humans are curious creatures. Our curiosity is what has driven us to the highest levels of achievement, but some are more curious than others. In journalism there is a tendency to over-emphasise the new, the exciting and the novel and to under-report the dull, the not immediately new but nevertheless very important facts that ultimately prove to be closer to the truth than the new, exciting and novel facts. On social media people do the same – they share

the new, the novel and exciting – who wants to read about dull facts that are not new. When looking at shared content about new scientific and medical studies, whether in social media or even in standard print and broadcast media, remember to gather information from many sources. One study does not change the landscape about how we perceive an entire area of knowledge. Science is in any case always an exercise in probability. Such and such a fact is probably true – we can never be absolutely certain about any so-called fact. In his opinion the most dangerous people in the world are the ones who think they know the truth and are absolutely certain that they are right. It is always wise to seek a range of opinions from many sources and in science it is wise to take the totality of evidence before coming to conclusions. My colleague likes to hear the phrase ‘it is probable that’ or ‘it is highly likely that’ rather than ‘I’m certain that this is the answer to the problem’. He was also sad to note that there are entities, perhaps more in the political arena rather than the scientific arena who deliberately share false information, though science has its own catalogue of cases of falsification of scientific data. The latter is harmful but the former, generating false facts of political relevance is likely to be more damaging to the social fabric of society.

Thus, in conclusion, he said, we should be diligent in accepting facts only from proven reliable sources, try to develop a balanced perspective rather than extreme views that deny other perspectives, and that we should all remember that we are biased in our thinking, to greater or lesser degrees. We should avoid being fooled by the latest novel and exciting facts from a single source and should instead seek out information from diverse sources. Bearing in mind these points may help all of us to avoid information that originates from sources that have evil intent.

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