

WHERE SHADOWS DREAM OF LIGHT

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Where Shadows
Dream of Light

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تُؤَدُّوا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا
وَإِذَا حَكَمْتُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَنْ تَحْكُمُوا بِالْعَدْلِ ۚ إِنَّ
اللَّهَ نِعَمًا يُعِظُّكُمْ بِهِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful.
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.

(Al Imran:58)

Dedication

This book is humbly offered to those indomitable spirits who, in the shadow of tyranny and at the gates of brute force, dared to raise the voice of truth. To those who refused to bow before the altar of oppression, and who, despite the weight of injustice and the sting of adversity, held their ground and laid down their lives upon the sacred cause of righteousness.

It is a testament to those unspoken sacrifices and heroic deeds which teach us, across the ages, that the flame of truth can never be extinguished, and that the struggle for justice — however dark the night — has always been a holy and noble endeavour.

It is in honour of those valiant hearts who bore the beacon of integrity through the corridors of power and the tempest of politics, reminding mankind that even amid the clamour of authority and the arrogance of dominion, it is the steadfast voice of honour that guides the march of history.

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The Discourse of Destiny — Prefatory Reflections

(A detailed introduction written for the book)

From the very bosom of the universe, since the first dawn of eternity, a whisper has travelled—an unuttered murmur that sometimes steals upon the breeze of dawn, sometimes resounds with the dreadful majesty of thunder, sometimes rises in the supplications of the Prophets, and sometimes glows in the crimson testimony of the martyrs. This whisper, this message, this hidden cipher—known to the people of gnosis as the *Hadith-e-Taqdeer*—is to the human spirit what the first touch of sunlight is to the horizon of dawn.

Among the myriad voices that drift across the theatre of existence, there is one that emerges from the silences of pre-eternity and settles into the very heart of time. At moments it awakens as a sigh within the human conscience; at others it descends as an āyah upon the sacred scroll of destiny; and at yet others it stains the chronicles of nations with the hues of blood and tears. This very whisper is *the Discourse of Destiny*—that subtle proclamation which discloses to humankind its responsibility, its trial, its fallibility, and the concealed logic behind the rise and fall of its days.

When the first line of fate was inscribed upon the brow of creation, destiny breathed into the archives of history a sigh so potent that it pierced every tyranny, echoing across every age, and settling into the conscience of every epoch. That sigh belonged not only to the grandeur of the Prophets nor solely to the crimson offerings of the martyrs; it descended into the very soul of humankind, unveiling to it the secret of its own being. And this, indeed, is the secret the discerning calls the *Hadith-e-Taqdeer*.

This foreword stands as the threshold to that very secret—a threshold veiled by the dust of centuries, yet whose wooden planks remain warm with the lingering touch of celestial hands.

The present volume, *Hadith-e-Taqdeer*, seeks to bear that primordial whisper into the heart of the Muslim Ummah—at once a balm for its wounds and a troubling question for the mirror in its breast.

Across the battlefields of civilisation, within the shadowed chambers of history, amidst the weary march of humanity, a perennial question has followed the steps of mankind: Whither does destiny carry man—and where, within destiny's vast expanse, does man place his responsibility?

It is at this junction that this foreword ceases to be a mere introduction and becomes the very pulse of the Ummah—

a sigh, a supplication, a defiance, a lament, and a resolve.

The Qur'an has never cast destiny as a manifesto of fatalism; rather, it has placed at its centre the human will, moral agency, and the dignity of choice.

The Divine Word declares:

﴿وَخَلَقَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ فَقَدَرَهُ تَقْدِيرًا﴾

"And He created all things, and ordained them with precise ordainment."

This verse intimates that each entity in creation bears its limits, its measures, its pathways, and its appointed stages.

Yet the human being is that remarkable creature who must row his own vessel even within the river of destiny.

Thus, the Qur'an further proclaims:

﴿لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ﴾

"Indeed, We created man in toil and struggle."

This struggle is not merely physical—

it is spiritual, ethical, political, and civilisational.

The history of the Muslim Ummah, though adorned with the fragrance of violets and the radiance of springtimes, is far more deeply etched with wounds—its pages stained with the red dust of sorrow and the long echo of lament. Each century has witnessed a tide of tyranny rising from one direction or another—crashing upon the alleys of Baghdad, interrogating the broken minarets of Andalusia, rising like a blood-tinged breeze from the sands of Jerusalem, and etching the bitterness of fate upon the faces of Kashmir and Gaza.

Thus, the Qur'an unveils a timeless truth:

﴿وَتِلْكَ الْأَيَّامُ نُدَاوِلُهَا بَيْنَ النَّاسِ﴾

"And these are the days We alternate among mankind."

The turning of days at times hums with the music of triumph, and at others blazes with the heat of trial. Yet the virtue of trial is that it compels nations to gaze into the deepest chambers of their own hearts.

Today, as one surveys the shattered state of the Muslim world, the weary streets of Ṭā'if come unbidden to mind. The Ummah stands at a crossroads laden with the fatigue of centuries: the crimson memory of Baghdad's flames, the scattered dust of Andalusia's fallen wisdom, the wounds of Delhi's princes, the ashen recollections of Bukhara and Samarkand's libraries.

The sobs of Gaza's children, the wounded eyes of Kashmir's young, the cold stones of Syria's ruins, and the displaced shores of the Rohingya—each writes a new chapter in the Ummah's collective destiny.

Every city of the Ummah is an āyah;

every tribe a question;

every generation a test.

In writing this book, I have not merely taken up a pen;

I have placed my hand upon the wounds whose burning is sufficient to awaken any living conscience.

Gaza — Where the Heart of History Lies Buried Beneath the Rubble

Gaza is no longer merely a city—

it has become the Karbala of our age;

the crucifix upon which an entire humanity stands suspended.

Its mothers have wept so many tears upon the graves of their children that the oceans might blush

in shame.

Its children, with fists full of dust, turn to the world and ask:

“Was rubble the only decree written in our scroll of fate?”

- Netanyahu’s unrelenting ferocity
- The unceasing thunder of bombardment
- Homes reduced to ash
- Schools torn from their foundations
- Children carrying corpses
- Mothers carrying children

Each is an apocalypse unto itself—

an apocalypse the world watches upon screens,

murmurs a polite regret over a cup of tea,

and then returns, unbothered, to its day’s schedule.

But the chronicles of destiny do not operate so lightly.

There, every drop of Gaza’s blood becomes a letter—

a letter from which the history of generations yet unborn shall be written.

Gaza—where the very sky has buckled under the weight of human breath.

No land on earth may have endured the merciless imprint of cruelty as Gaza’s broken dwellings have.

Its dust absorbs the screams of humanity and yet remains silent.

Its children count the tears of their mothers because they no longer possess toys to count.

Every morning unveils new rubble;

every evening prepares a new funeral.

Spring is no longer awaited,

for the trees from which spring emerges

have been burned by the cannons of men.

There, behind the rising steam of each day’s smoke,

a child’s breath falters,

a mother’s lullaby is muted beneath the rubble,

a young man stands beside his father’s funeral bier,

asking the world’s conscience when it intends to awaken.

Amid the shattered byways of Gaza, the little girls threading their way through mountains of debris seem to address not merely their ravaged homeland but the whole of humankind:

“In which book did you inscribe our fate?”

This sorrow is not Gaza’s alone; it is the lament of every dispossessed people across the earth. Yet the most harrowing note in this lament is that, at times, its echo rebounds even from the silent walls of friendly houses.

There, the redness of dusk is not the gentle hue of sunset but the vengeful glare of explosions. And more astonishing than the ferocity of tyranny is the untroubled complexion of the world’s to cast a conscience, where not a single crease appears. It is a question before which even destiny itself seems

long, hushed gaze.

Hadith-e-Taqdeer is the narrative of man's trial and the Ummah's charge—a narrative that encircled me with such intensity that it compelled me to step into one of the world's most difficult arenas, armed only with resolve and that flame of hope which became, for me, a Divine blessing. For Islam does not name destiny *compulsion* but regards destiny as the living interplay of responsibility and volition.

Thus, the Qur'an declares:

﴿وَقُلْ أَعْمَلُوا فَسَيَرَى اللَّهُ عَمَلَكُمْ﴾

"Say: Act! And Allah shall behold your deeds."

Herein lies the place where the despondent heart of the Muslim Ummah discovers once more the lamp of hope.

In the Book of Destiny, no trial reaches completion until man fulfils his obligation.

If the Ummah bears wounds upon its countenance today, they are not merely marks of pain; they are heavenly alarms meant to rouse us from our long slumber.

Behold the face of the Ummah: the shadow of agony upon its brow is not merely political but spiritual; not merely diplomatic but historical; not merely terrestrial but a reminder of the trials decreed by the heavens.

And then, consider the afflicted horizon of occupied Kashmir:

In the icy embrace of Kashmir's mountainous cradle, the cries of humanity have shivered for more than a century. One who stands upon those frozen slopes and listens intently to the silence will find that even silence, at times, becomes a scream.

The winds there carry whirlwinds of torment; the rivers bear faint red streaks in their flowing scripts; and upon every leaf and petal lies perched a host of unspoken questions:

Who hurled this valley of roses into the vortex of gunpowder?

When shall the sobs of its oppressed mothers dissolve into the dawn of peace?

This valley has lain for centuries in the cloisters of tyranny. Its visage stands as an interrogating mark upon the conscience of the world and a tremulous shadow upon the alcoves of power.

The mothers of Kashmir have bid farewell to so many coffins that their eyes seem to have forgotten the art of weeping. The sisters of that land look upon the graves of their brothers and yet pray for light.

Its youth have grown older than history itself beneath the weight of their own deprivations.

Gaza and Kashmir — Two Chronicles, One Wound

The tragedy of Gaza and the shattered life of Kashmir are but two manifestations of the same sorrow—two reflections of the same anguish.

In both lands, humanity endures not only the flames of oppression but also the icy indifference of the world. In both lands, children carry the bodies of their parents; aged mothers measure the length of their prayers; young men watch their dreams vanish into the mist of centuries.

If Gaza burns beneath the heat of bombardment, Kashmir freezes beneath laws that stand beyond the reach of justice.

If Gaza lies beneath heaps of rubble, Kashmir languishes behind the mute walls of interrogation chambers.

If Gaza is shadowed by siege, Kashmir is suffocated by checkpoints.

Upon both soils, a single question is inscribed:
Has humanity become the privilege of the powerful alone?

And the World.....

The world, alas, remains a spectator—and spectators are always the weakest characters in the long theatre of history.

The Silence of Muslim Rulers — Destiny's Trial or History's Reckoning?

History bears witness that nations do not fall solely upon the spears of their enemies; they crumble under the weight of their leaders' hesitations and expediencies.

Today, much of the Muslim world's leadership—save for a few radiant beacons—appears imprisoned in a strange and expedient silence; a silence not written in words but in dispositions.

It is a silence that looks confident within the halls of power
yet shall remain a question mark upon the yellowing pages of history:
Did we fulfil the duty of our time?

Did we stand silent before the wounds of the Ummah?

Did our political conveniences outweigh our faith and our moral principles?

The Qur'an, in this regard, still stands before us as an indomitable argument:

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ﴾

"Indeed, Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change what lies within themselves."

The gates of destiny never remain shut—

but they do not open for hands burdened with indifference.

Remember: the majesty of destiny grows sterner upon a nation only to brighten its horizons. When destiny tests a people, it kindles in their veins a new fire, in their eyes a new insight, and in their hearts a new resolve.

This trial,
this affliction,
this sorrow—

they do not merely break us;
they forge us.

History bears witness:
the nations that crossed rivers of fire were granted new dawns of radiance.
At Badr, their numbers were few, but their resolve towered like mountains.
At Karbala, water was scarce, but honour soared beyond the heavens.
In Gaza, the rubble is vast, but patience stands higher still.
In Kashmir, the chains are many, yet the lamp of hope continues to burn.
These are the mysteries of destiny—
discernible only to hearts that have learned to endure.

The Longest Shadow in History — The Silence of Muslim Sovereigns
This Ummah has never been defeated by its enemies—
it has always been wounded by the silences of its own.

Today,
palaces remain illuminated, but consciences lie extinguished;
thrones stand firm, but virtue has grown frail;
ambitions thrive but honour has withered.

On one side, roofs collapse upon the families of Gaza,
and on the other, the palaces of Arabia glow with heightened splendour.
On one side, the children of Kashmir swallow their tears,
and on the other, the halls of power celebrate beneath chandeliers.
The style of leadership once marked by the distinction of ‘Umar and Ṣalāḥuddīn
lies today concealed behind diplomatic statements crafted for convenience.

This is the very moment at which the Qur’an raises its solemn cry:

﴿أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ﴾

“Will you then not use your reason?”

And elsewhere:

﴿فَلَا تَخْشَوُا النَّاسَ وَاخْشَوْنِي﴾

“Fear not the people; fear Me alone.”

... And yet today,
it appears as though we have mastered the art of fearing men,
while wandering like exiles through the deserts of heedlessness
in the matter of fearing Allah SWT.

The silence of Muslim rulers has already been inscribed as one of the gravest chapters in the ledger
of history.

The true agony of the Ummah is not what its enemies have done—
but what its own have failed to do.
Leadership, in the discourse of destiny, is the most delicate trial of all;

yet most of the rulers of the Islamic world remain imprisoned in the cages of expediency.
 Their decisions do not tremble upon the fate of nations—
 their thrones tremble beneath the weight of their fears.
 They stain the tent of their peoples' hopes
 lest a passing storm dare rattle the windows of their palaces.

At such an hour, the Qur'an stands before us like the noonday sun:

﴿فَمَا لَهُمْ لَا يَكَادُونَ يَفْقَهُونَ حَدِيثًا﴾

"What is wrong with these people, that they scarcely understand a single word?"

Have we refused to understand the summons of our own age?

Has the warmth of faith abandoned our hearts?

Or have our souls grown sluggish, satiated by the cup of worldly comfort?

Destiny's trial is not coercion—

it is a summons to action.

Islam's conception of destiny does not strip man of agency;
 rather, it reminds him that destiny is the river which elevates the hands that supplicate
 and strengthens the hands that strive.

Thus the Qur'an offers a luminous prayer, a compass for the weary traveller:

﴿وَقُلْ رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا﴾

"Say: O my Lord, increase me in knowledge."

This increase is the very light of discernment

through which man begins to comprehend the meaning of his condition—

and destiny itself begins to yield a path beneath his feet.

A New Dawn — Seen from the Horizon of Affliction

And yet—strangely, wondrously—

I perceive the glimmer of a new morning.

History has never been one-dimensional.

Behind every night of darkness lies a thread of dawn.

Behind every wound sleeps a seed of strength.

Behind every defeat stir the first intimations of rebirth.

The Ummah, in its present state, resembles a tree trembling in every gust of wind—
 and yet its roots remain anchored deep within the earth.

In this alone lies the proof of its survival.

The only question is whether we possess

the courage to water these roots.

The time approaching demands from the Ummah

a new resolve,

a new spirit,

and a new moral leadership—

leadership that can guide nations back to their destiny;

leadership unburdened by fear, untouched by expediency,

and bearing in its hand the lamp of humanity.

Hold Fast to Hope — For the Ummah Yet Lives
Though the winds of age blow cold,
though the night of trial grows long,
though the ranks of the oppressors stand organised,
though the seven seas appear murky with the blood of the innocent—
yet the spirit of the Ummah remains alive.
It is the spirit that stood at Badr,
the spirit that rose in majesty at Karbala,
the spirit that marched with Salah al-Din,
that flashed in the arrows of the Mamluks,
that thundered in the verses of Iqbal.
This is the spirit that can knock upon the gates of destiny—
and whose knock can redirect the course of history itself.
This preface is not merely an introduction—
it is a summons to reflection,

a call to awakening:
that we must not regard destiny as a passive script of breaths,
but as the name of action, responsibility, sacrifice, and consciousness.
The wounds of the Ummah whisper to us
that our story is not yet over.
The pages of history are not yet sealed.
The scroll of time still awaits many words—
words that may one day tell our descendants
that there once lived a people who possessed pain,
but from that pain arose the dawn of a new beginning.

This Is Not a Preface — It Is a Prayer

This preface seeks not merely to open a book—
it yearns to flow into the veins of the Ummah.
It desires to enter the chambers of the heart
like a wind that clears the stale air,
that lifts the bowed neck,
that rouses the sleeping conscience.
History teaches us this one unchanging truth:
nations do not die from defeat—
they die when they abandon hope.
And this Ummah yet lives
until the last breath of its hope.
These words are not mere prose—
they are a knock upon the heart of the Ummah,
a cry in the ear of the soul,
a call that reminds man of what he truly is.

It cries:

Rise!
Draw does not tear from your wounds but resolve.
Seek not lament from your oppression, but honour.
Seek not pride from your past, but serenity of action.
And flee not from your destiny—
walk towards it.
For destiny opens paths
to the hands raised for God,
and grants strength
to the feet that do not fear
the proclamations of tyranny.
The Ummah lives—
and living nations are never buried.
They merely sleep...
and one day, they awaken.
Destiny, when it tests a people,
breathes into their veins a new blood,
into their eyes a new clarity,
and into their hearts a new resolve.
These trials,
these sorrows,
these afflictions—
they do not only break us;
they are the heavens' own method of remaking us.

History bears witness:
the nations that crossed rivers of fire
were granted mornings of radiant light.
At Badr, their numbers were few,
but their resolve towered higher than mountains.
At Karbala, water was scarce,
but dignity soared above the sky.
In Gaza, the rubble is vast,
yet patience stands higher still.
In Kashmir, the chains are many,
yet the lamp of hope still burns.
These are the mysteries of destiny—
discernible only to the courageous of heart.
And this—
this is the message
of the Hadith of Destiny.

Monday, December 1, 2025

Victory in Silence: Civilization, Prudence, and the Shift of the Global Axis

Not by Sword, but by Strategy: The Rise and Fall of Empires

This essay chronicles a moment in history where two great civilizations—East and West—confronted one another. The roar of power fell into the background, supplanted by patience, wisdom, and the weight of civilization, reshaping the axis of the world. Here, history is not merely a witness; it becomes a narrator, and every silent moment speaks with profound purpose. This is an era where empires are forged not by gunpowder, but by sagacity and patience, and where the currents of time constitute the ultimate judgment of history.

This essay captures the moment when two great civilizations—Eastern patience and Western speed—faced each other, and silence reshaped the course of history. When the story of the rise and fall of empires was written not by the sword but by strategy, how empires endure and fall not by force alone, but by prudence, patience, and foresight, while history silently decides the outcome.

This piece bears witness to a moment when two world powers—China and the United States—met, dragons and eagles, not just in politics or power, but in a dialogue of civilizations, philosophies, and the measurement of time.

Occasionally, history begets moments that are far more than mere political encounters; they are those rare junctures that pry open the concealed pages of civilization itself. Such moments are seldom recorded, for they transcend the simple rivalry of states to become a dialogue between the very souls of cultures. These are the instants that alter the current of time, wherein power assumes a new guise, and civilization redefines its meaning. Epochs, breaking their accustomed measures, establish new scales; scales that once weighed blood, now measure consciousness, prudence, and economic endurance. These are the moments that once set Alexander in contemplation upon the banks of the Ganges, that silenced Roman envoys before the courts of the Silk Road, that bent even the thunder of Mongol hooves before the wisdom of strategy.

In much the same vein, today's contest between China and the United States is no mere struggle of two nations; it is the dialogue of two epochs, two philosophies, two currents of history—on one side, a civilization eager to outrun the world through speed; on the other, a civilization that bends time itself to its patient will.

Such a moment crystallized upon the horizon of history when these two contrasting worlds—the swift American and the patient Chinese—stood face to face. This encounter was not merely political; it was history's own mirror, revealing the contours of the future.

Against the youthful yet prodigiously potent might of America, China presents a civilization endowed not merely with five millennia of consciousness, but with the seasoned authority of the Han courts, the strategic insight of Sun Tzu, and the moral philosophy of Confucius. This confrontation is no echo of the Cold War; it is reminiscent of medieval moments when Europe, lowering its gaze before the Orient, asked its questions, only to receive answers in profound silence.

There was in Trump's roar a tremor reminiscent of the British Empire in 1857, or of Rome when confronted with Byzantine prudence challenging its supremacy. And when, beneath the veils of compliment and cordiality, he inclined his head, the scene recalled the pages of history where conquerors changed tongue, yet the voice of wisdom remained unbowed. The silence of Chinese leadership echoed that of Zhou Enlai in Geneva, or Deng Xiaoping at the dawn of reform—a quietude in which the heartbeat of the future resounded.

Power in the modern world no longer circulates by the drumbeat of cannon but by the mineral reserves that China, like time itself, has tended with patience. When America, a monarch of technology, comes to this Eastern civilization's gates seeking raw materials, it is a tableau reminiscent of the first Western ships entering Chinese harbours—not to command, but to learn.

This essay chronicles that journey—where politics acts, but civilization narrates; where the clamour ceases, and silence speaks to the truth that genuine power lies in the elasticity of time, not in the fleeting brilliance of moments. America's two-and-a-half-century-old tradition, fast, proud, and potent, stands before a civilization forged over five millennia, which regards time not as an adversary but as a tutor, whose philosophy breathes in the continuity of generations rather than in the rotation of days. This is the perennial contest between velocity and profundity: a nation with arms stiffened by the pride of strength, and a civilization whose silence conceals the wisdom of thousands of years.

In this tableau, history is not merely a spectator but a judge, observing that the roar of force wanes while the measured breath of wisdom reshapes the world's temperament. Against America's vehement proclamations, China's centuries-old quietude reveals that the deadliest stroke of power emerges not from noise, but from silence. This confrontation is neither merely of economic models nor political ideologies; it is a collision of temporalities—the impatient, swift time of America against the profound, expansive time of China.

This is the lens through which this essay examines the dialogue: politics may play a role, but civilization narrates. Here, the meaning of power has shifted, and the foundation of the future rests not on the barrel of a gun, but on prudence. The question is no longer who is the superpower, but who possesses the patience to move with time—and time always accompanies those who know how to wait.

It is within these oscillations, these subtle shifts, these civilizational breaths, and these historical signals that this essay dwells—where China is silent, yet the world speaks, and America speaks, yet history lays its hand silently upon its shoulders. On the horizon of history, there emerge moments that are not merely meetings of men, but dialogues of civilizations. These moments alter the pulse of time, where centuries of effort assume new significance in a single instant.

The recent entanglement of China and America is but another link in this chain: on one side, a nation proud of its velocity, and on the other, a civilization triumphant through patience. One embodies the clamour of industry, the other the quietude of wisdom. When 249 years of American history confront 5,000 years of Chinese consciousness, it is not merely a trial of power but a clash of philosophies of time. It is the moment when the Western sovereign steps into the Eastern court, and time, in its ancient judgment, convenes a new trial. The world has watched—the eagle spread its wings, and the dragon rose without a roar.

History's pages have once more repeated the familiar scene: the magic of power fades, yet the resonance of civilization endures. This essay is the chronicle of that dialogue, where words do not merely serve diplomacy but bear the heartbeat of civilizations; where silence speaks, and a smile inscribes history.

When a civilization scarcely two centuries old dares to meet the gaze of five millennia of Eastern wisdom, history does not merely observe—it smiles. That is the moment when the scales of time are unbalanced: a swift but weary West, a silent but profound East. And the question ceases to be who prevails; it remains who endures.

In the annals of modern history, few moments can rival that rare juncture when a civilization scarcely two-and-a-half centuries old—America—stands opposed to a nation custodian of five millennia of cultural tradition. This is the collision that always occurs between velocity and profundity: on one side, the gleam of modernity; on the other, the roots of wisdom. It is a contest not of mere power, but a dialogue of epochs—Western hubris measured against the patient sagacity of the East. China's civilization, embodying the teachings of Confucius, the disciplined order of the Han dynasty, and the accumulated wisdom of centuries, does not flinch at transient economic tremors.

This civilization appraises history not in the measure of fleeting decades, but across the continuum of generations. And it is here that the pride of America—nurtured by industrial revolutions and colonial legacies—found, for the first time, the depths of time intimidating.

Trump, once perched upon the summit of arrogance, had proclaimed, "I will crush China's economy; it shall never rise again." The cadence of those words recalled the proclamations of colonial governors past—a thunder not of certainty but of underlying fear. History, however, heard these declarations as echoes of a familiar refrain, akin to Rome against Carthage, or Britain against India. For the mighty rarely boast with conviction; true power rests in quiet assurance. This was, in essence, the last vestige of American self-confidence that had asserted itself over the globe since the Second World War. Yet history reminds us that the seed of decline germinates in the very moment of triumph.

Time, as ever, took its turn. The same figure who once towered upon threats now sought refuge in words of praise. The very Trump who yesterday thundered, today found solace in flattery. This was no mere meeting—it was the psychology of power laid bare. Such is the sensation that Napoleon felt before the gates of Russia, or the British Empire encountered upon its withdrawal from Delhi in 1947. Praise, in reality, is the first sign of humility; it is not diplomacy but the decorous bow of submission. "You are great, you are visionary," he murmured, hesitant yet smiling—words not of triumph, but the silent sigh of concession.

Xi Jinping's silence, by contrast, was no sign of weakness; it was the mark of civilizational maturity. For centuries, China has learned that the patient nation bends time to its will. This calm mirrors Zhou Enlai's smile under Western mockery, or Deng Xiaoping's composed pragmatism when he declared, "It does not matter whether the cat is black or white, so long as it catches mice." Xi embodies a

tapestry of patience—calm on the face, certainty in the eyes—needing neither words nor proof, for history itself speaks through him.

America, once sovereign of sustenance, who had rebuilt Europe under the Marshall Plan and wielded the World Bank like a sceptre, now extended its hand to China, pleading, “Provide soybeans, so our farmers may survive.” Once the arbiter of global commerce, America now solicited relief. This was no mere trade negotiation; it was a shift in the civilizational tableau. Xi’s response was measured: “We shall see how you comport yourselves.” It was history’s most courteous, yet profound, admonition—a tacit acknowledgment of civilizational ascendancy. As the poet might say, silence too speaks, when the decisions of the heart remain unspoken.



The United States, priding itself on technological supremacy, now sought from China the very lifeblood of the modern world: rare earth elements. Materials essential to mobile phones, fighter jets, semiconductors, and artificial intelligence. And all of it lay within China’s grasp. History had issued its verdict: power now emanates not from gunpowder, but from the earth itself. The scales of strength had tipped. When Trump requested, “Give us rare earth elements, so our ships may sail, our factories operate,” he admitted that the industrial heart of the West now beats within Eastern soil. These four words constitute perhaps the most concise rejoinder in two centuries of Western imperial discourse. Where once the West commanded, the East now deliberates. The world perceived that decisions no longer emanate from New York or London, but from Beijing. Power had changed its tongue—not roaring, but silent.

Historically, the West spoke always in the language of sanctions; China replied in the language of cooperation and commerce. Africa, Latin America, and Asia took note—and gradually, the global pivot shifted from the eagle’s talons to the dragon’s grasp. The principle remains as the Seljuk sages once remarked: “He who wields the sword cannot win the heart.” The West licked its wounds, brandishing the instruments of constraint, while China extended its hand—through partnership, through trade. Europe listened; Africa had long been attentive. The world, without celebration, quietly realigned its axis.

The new global order has not shattered; it has merely shifted its pivot. Production, mineral wealth, and transport routes now pass through the East. Just as once the Silk Road carried the lifeblood of economies, so too today does the Belt and Road Initiative revive that tradition in modern form. History returns, yet in new guise. The centre of global gravity has migrated eastward. Rare treasures, industrial capacity, and pillars of resilience all now rest in China’s hands.

“Liberty,” “democracy,” “leadership”—words resonant in the age of Wilson, Roosevelt, and Kennedy—now echo merely as the propaganda of capitalist machinery. The world watches not slogans, but the balance of supply and production. Factories, not philosophy, now determine outcomes. America may still sing of freedom and leadership, but these are the airs of a bygone era,

broadcasting on the frequencies of a past age. The new epoch is governed not by slogans, but by the supply chain.

Trump departed this encounter not as victor, but as witness. On his countenance lingered the same impression that once met Roman envoys in Eastern courts: here, wars are not won; time is conquered.

Trump returned from that meeting not as a victor, but as a witness—an observer of a civilization that ascends through discipline, not conquest.

The greatest strength of China's leadership lies in its dispassionate conduct. This nation speaks little and acts profoundly. It is the principle long inscribed in Chinese philosophy, in the Tao: "He who is quiet is the deepest of all." Silence, in this context, has become the language of power. Xi need not smile; his silence alone bears the seal of triumph. For true power does not stake its claim in steps or gestures—it diffuses into the air, shaping the world without announcing itself. It is a still force that moves not, yet the world halts without it.

China's ascent has been neither impetuous nor enraged; it has risen through skill. The eagle—America—still preens mid-flight, yet the currents of the air have shifted. This tableau recalls the turning point in history when Rome, intoxicated by its own grandeur, began to encounter a Byzantium emerging with new insight. The dragon rises not in fury, but in mastery; the eagle, once sovereign of the skies, now circles in uncertainty—no foe before it, no confidence behind.

This encounter tells not a story of defeat, but of the transformation of global consciousness. For perhaps the first time, America realized that power is not measured solely in gunpowder, but in patience. China played not to win, but to endure—and therein lay its wisdom, and its triumph. History will remember this moment, not as a defeat, but as a turning of perception. America did not bow; it comprehended. China did not conquer; it did not need to.

History bears witness: Rome, Spain, Britain—all fell not by the sword, but through exhaustion. Empires do not crumble in explosions, but in silence, like leaves of autumn that make no sound as they fall. Thus, empires are not destroyed; they are gradually transformed. Decline comes not through force, but through prudence; not by fire, but by silence.

The dragon did not defeat the eagle; it merely erased its reflection upon the edge of time. The game of power did not end; only the field of play shifted. In the end, the dragon did not conquer the eagle; it lifted from its dreams the burden of reality. This is the story where history sheathed its sword and lifted its pen, where the triumph of civilization is written not on the battlefield, but in the dialogue of wisdom. The East fell silent, and the world began to listen.

The moral is clear: this is not a tale of clashing might, but of the triumph of prudence. It is the moment when Western eyes were opened in astonishment, and the East, without raising a sword, shifted the axis of the world.

When the dragon spoke, the world fell silent. The scene upon history's canvas is no longer one of victories and battles, but of awareness and maturity. This is an age where guns lie dormant and books awaken; where the criteria of power have shifted—empires are now forged not by gunpowder, but by wisdom. China has shown the world that victory belongs not to he who exerts force, but to he who knows how to wait. This lesson echoes from the halls of the Han courts to the chambers of Beijing.

And America? It still chants the slogans of “freedom” and “leadership,” yet centuries of politics no longer heed such songs; the world now watches outcomes. The dragon did not defeat the eagle—it measured the expanse of its sky. This is no decline; it is the reassignment of status with elegance. Like the sun, which does not set in the West but rises anew in the East, the map of the world may remain, yet its meaning has shifted.

The centre of power now rests where patience is worship, and silence is strategy. Perhaps this is history's ultimate justice: when the clamour ceases, silence speaks; when the eagle tires, the dragon rises; and when the world pauses, the East begins its march. The grandeur of history lies not in deciding the future by a single day or a single battle, but by the patience of time, the dignity of civilization, and the character of nations. History writes not in the echoes of gunfire, but in the breaths that reshape the temperament of peoples.

The contest between America and China was such a silent transformation, much like the judgements of the Negus at the Abyssinian court that altered balances between Arab and Persian realms, or the decline of the Ottoman Caliphate that redirected European power. This struggle was not won in battlefields, but in comportment. The decision was made not by gunpowder, but by insight. The thunderous declarations of America, and the quiet yet resolute diplomacy of China, made the world understand that power now resides not in the smoke of cannons, but in the flow of global supply, in silent decisions, in the continuity of industry.

Against the resonating rhetoric of American statesmanship, China's civilizational quietude presented the same tableau once felt by Genghis Khan: not all lands are conquered by sword—some submit to patience. Trump did not return from this encounter as a victor or Caesar; he returned as a traveller and witness, having for the first time understood that the history of the East is built not on thrones and crowns, but upon character and prudence. He witnessed the weight of civilization, the strength of patience, and the wisdom of silence. It was the same sensation that Roman envoys once felt at Eastern courts, realizing that power is measured not by the sword, but by time. And time always accompanies those who know how to journey with it.

China neither roared in reply, nor enveloped the world in the clatter of threats. It shifted the field of play quietly, on the strength of its principles, its ancient tradition, its industrial ascendancy, and its economic wisdom. This is the silence that triumphs over epochs; the stillness that shapes empires. China reiterated the maxim once uttered by Seljuk sages: “Power belongs not to he who shouts, but to he who needs not to shout.”

America may still recite the refrains of liberty, democracy, and leadership, but the world no longer heeds their tune. Outcomes, not ideals, are now observed. The trajectory of global politics is no

longer swayed by slogans, but by the paths of supply. America's anthems of "leadership" and "freedom" now resemble the dying echoes of empires repeating their past in their final days. The world no longer reads Wilson; it watches containers rise from Beijing's ports. The Belt and Road Initiative has ceased to be a mere economic project—it has become a historic moment, much like the Silk Road once redirected the currents of the medieval world.

This is not a story of decline, but of realization. The East changed the centre of the world without taking up the sword, and the West saw its position change without being defeated. Now empires are not built with daggers, but with wisdom. And when the pendulum of time changes direction, neither victories make noise nor decline; only the curtains are opened silently.

China has taught the world that power does not belong to those who shout; it belongs to those who move forward with care, thought, and patience. And America? It is still trying to chant its ancient slogans and intensify the echo of songs, but the wisdom of centuries no longer listens to slogans—only sees results. History no longer listens to songs—only reads results.

The dragon has not risen; it has woken up. The eagle has not fallen, it is tired. The dragon has not defeated the eagle; it has only shown over whom the sky is open. And time? It is flowing eastward again, as the flow always goes where the wisdom of centuries has settled in silence and history has not pronounced its verdict—a sign that the modern era is now moving in the direction where the noise has ceased, and silence is speaking. The silence of China is the same silence that Sun Tzu wrote about in the "Art of War" when he gave the true definition of power: "The real victory is that which is achieved without war." Today, the world is changing under the same principle. The eagle's flight has not diminished, but the expanse of the sky beneath it has changed. The dragon has not attacked; it has only awakened. And the fear of awakening is always deeper than the attack.

Monday, December 1, 2025

The Quetta Conference and the Revival of Enlightened Thought

Eagle, Dragon, and Shaheen: Symbols of Power and Spirit

When history turns upon its hidden axis, its tremor is not confined to the vaulted chambers of empires; it descends into the very soul of nations and bequeaths to them horizons they had not yet imagined. In an age riven by disorder, anxiety, and a profound civilisational disorientation, the two deities of modern power—the Eagle and the Dragon—continue to stain the map of the earth with their colours. And yet, the conscience of humanity still awaits a voice capable of lifting it from the clamour of material storms and compelling it to listen once more to the still, small music of its inner being.

The cartographies that emerge and vanish upon the global chessboard are not mere diagrams of power. They are the dreams of civilisations, the centuries that seep into the marrow of nations, and the decisive moments that alter the destiny of all mankind. Today, as the earth's political crust smoulders under the clash of Eagle and Dragon, as the pillars of global might tremble and the very roots of civilisations quiver before new and searching questions, the Muslim world once again finds itself at a turning of the ages—much as it once stood upon the sands of Badr, before the walls of Constantinople, or in the hushed and twilight lanes of Granada.

In this tempestuous hour, the city of Quetta—standing at the crossroads of ancient cultures and custodian of millennial testimonies—has suddenly been illuminated by a new radiance, becoming a locus of intellectual light in which the world of Iqbal's thought has been rekindled with uncommon intensity. The three-day International Iqbal Conference convened here seemed, in truth, a renewal of the medieval academies, the luminous assemblies of Baghdad and Cordoba, and the echoing resonance of Iqbal's own call in Delhi and Lahore. It was not merely a convocation of scholars; it was the re-awakening of the very pulse of the ummah and an announcement—bold and serene—that Iqbal's spirit walks still among us.

This gathering was not a congress of erudition alone; it was a dialogue with the swift and often merciless tempo of the age—a dialogue reminding the youth that neither the aggressions of the American Eagle offer salvation nor the measured stratagems of the Chinese Dragon promise a faultless road. The only path worth treading is the one to which Iqbal pointed: the free and unshackled flight of the Falcon, the fire of *khudi*, the ardour of faith, and the service of humanity.

This conference, then, was a determined knock upon the locked chambers of history, a courageous summons to awaken the slumbering consciousness of the ummah, and a solemn declaration that Iqbal lives yet—that his message still illumines destinies and may once more become a lamp for nations wandering in a world of gathering shadows.

It was an hour in which the rivers of history, civilisation and thought appeared to converge; and this Quetta assembly became a shining testimony to the truth that when nations return to the centre of their intellectual being, Providence often rewrites their fate afresh.

In shaping this magnificent treasury of ideas, the devotion, diligence, and affection that breathed life into it rest squarely upon the shoulders of **Hafiz Tahir Sahib and his dedicated team**—a team that loves Iqbal not merely in sentiment, but in action. They have raised the torch of Iqbal-scholarship with such grace that not only Balochistan, but all of Pakistan—and indeed the entire Muslim world—owes them a debt of gratitude.

Upon the world's political horizon, the patterns now emerging are not merely tales of shifting power centres; they are reflections of deeper civilisational impulses, intellectual currents, and those subterranean movements of history that become the decisive turning-points in the lives of nations. History is not a dreary procession of events; it is the subtle yet sovereign tide moving within the temperament of peoples and in the hidden chambers of their cultures. When nations cease to look within, external symbols begin carving their marks upon the very surface of their thought.

A mere glance across the pages of world history reveals that power and civilisation have always spoken in symbols and dreamed in metaphors. The lion embodied dominion; the horse agility; the falcon imperial majesty; the dragon the composite idea of fear and strategy. Symbols shape the moral temperament of nations and set the course of their collective vessel. Thus the modern world, too, has chosen to narrate its political fable through symbols: the American Eagle standing for military supremacy, the Chinese Dragon for cultural patience, economic expansion, and far-sighted statecraft.

In our age, the Eagle has become the emblem of assertive vigour, while the Dragon represents a more calculated, strategic, and enduring temperament. These two symbols encapsulate the twin traditions by which power is pursued in the contemporary world. Yet Iqbal drew his youth toward a creature altogether different—one whose wings span the horizons and whose gaze carries the pure light of discernment: the Shahin.

One vision depends upon military power, geopolitical gravity, and financial dominance; the other upon patience, subtle manoeuvre, and a long-held discipline of civilisation. But when Iqbal named his young man a Shahin, he introduced a symbol nobler than both. The Shahin is neither the imperial Eagle nor the many-layered Dragon of cultural cunning. Its essence lies not in conquest nor in craft, but in that burning flame of *khudi* through which man awakens to his God-given stewardship upon earth.

It is here that the meaningful distinction arises—one that grants Iqbal's Shahin a singular dignity amid the global contest of Eagle and Dragon.

The American Eagle may indeed symbolise might and mastery, yet its flight remains fettered by the gravitational pull of material resources and worldly ambition. The skies through which it soars are crowded with the intrigues of politics, the avarice of commerce, and the arrogance of militarism. Its gaze is sharp, unquestionably—but within that sharpness lurks a self-interest that does not hesitate to rend the nests of others.

Iqbal's Shahin, by contrast—

Iqbal's Falcon, by contrast, rises into a realm untouched by the gravity that binds the Eagle to the spoils of terrestrial ambition. Its wings cut through purer air—an altitude where the soul meets duty, and where the heart, emancipated from the fetters of possession and fear, learns once again the majesty of purpose.

The Falcon of Iqbal does not descend upon the weak, nor does it hover over the carcasses of vanquished nations. Its flight is an act of worship; its solitude a discipline; its clarity of sight a moral covenant. For the Shahin embodies neither the Eagle's imperial appetite nor the Dragon's labyrinthine stratagems. Rather, it is the living symbol of man's inward awakening—of that moral sovereignty which springs forth when one recognises the sanctity of one's own soul.

Here the Qur'anic vision stands as a witness, reminding humankind of its true vocation:

﴿وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ﴾

"And indeed We have honoured the children of Adam." (Qur'an 17:70)

It is this divine honour that Iqbal sought to rekindle, urging the youth to rise beyond the entanglements of global contests and rediscover the radiance of their own inner kingdoms.

The global rivalry of Eagle and Dragon represents, at its core, the perpetual tension between force and foresight, expansion and endurance. But Iqbal's Falcon enters the stage not as a third contestant, but as a refutation of the very terms upon which the contest is defined. It summons nations to a higher theatre—to the realm of moral courage, spiritual independence, and the restoration of human dignity.

Where the Eagle governs by dominance,
and the Dragon by design,
the Falcon rules by integrity.
Where the Eagle tears,
and the Dragon coils,
the Falcon ascends.
It seeks not the world, but the soul of the world.

For the modern age, bereft of certitude and trembling under the weight of its own contradictions, Iqbal's Shahin stands as a reminder that true power does not lie in the latitude of empire nor in the longitude of strategy, but in the spiritual altitude of man. It is this height from which nations perceive their rightful bearings—and this height that restores their lost compass amidst the tumult of global tides.

Thus, the Shahin remains the symbol of a civilisation that once carried the lamp of wisdom across continents; and may yet again—should its heirs rediscover the discipline of the spirit and the nobility of action:

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ﴾

"Indeed, God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves." (Qur'an 13:11)

This, then, is the essence of Iqbal's rebellion against the modern idols of power: a call for the reconstruction of man from within, for the purification of motive, and for the enthronement of principle above expediency.

If you wish, I can now:

He is free from the dust-play of the earth, untouched by the fetters of confinement, and indifferent to the fleeting spoils of the world. He refuses to stain his beak with carrion in the pursuit of sustenance, seeking instead the purity of lawful provision. Reared in the fierce winds of mountains and nurtured in the solitude of high places, he discovers his true self where the air thins and the world below melts into insignificance.

Iqbal's Falcon does not stand as an emblem of worldly dominion; it heralds the majesty of *khudi*, the liberty of the spirit, and the nobility of moral elevation. In his realm, the standards of triumph and defeat are not those declared by imperial powers. He perceives pathways where others behold only the desolation of a final reckoning. Iqbal summoned the Muslim youth to this very altitude—where power becomes beauty *without* transgressing the threshold of ethics.

Iqbal's Falcon carries behind its flight neither the far-eastern Dragon nor the distant western Eagle; its entire strength lies hidden within its interior world—its selfhood, its spiritual discipline, its ascetic resolve. When Iqbal said that the Falcon partakes not of carrion and dwells only upon high peaks, he was not rehearsing a zoological trait; he was pointing toward the moral purification of the Muslim youth—a synthesis of lofty ambition, scrupulous thought, iron will, and ethical steadfastness. It is this composite virtue that sets him apart from the conventional emblems of global power.

Those who turn to Iqbal's letters, lectures, and intellectual sources find that this symbolism was not born of poetic fancy alone. It springs from the rich heritage of Islamic thought—from the dawn of Islam to the twilight of the Ottoman age—where the ummah was continually summoned to high resolve and noble purpose. In *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (1930), Iqbal makes plain that the true power of a Muslim lies not in the seizure of the earth's resources but in his moral independence and accountability before the Creator. This vision resounds further in the symbol of the Falcon in *Zarb-e-Kaleem* and *Bal-e-Jibril*.

Iqbal's Falcon is not a mere poetic contrivance; its roots lie deep within Islamic history, Sufi symbolism, and the Qur'anic conception of humankind. The Arabic-Islamic symbolic tradition has long associated birds with virtues of exaltation. In the Qur'an—whether in *Surah al-Nahl*, *al-Mulk*, *al-Baqarah*, or *al-Fil*—birds appear in the context of providence, wisdom, and the consciousness of servitude.

Here the Qur'an reminds humanity:

﴿أَلَمْ يَرَوْا إِلَى الطَّيْرِ فَوْقَهُمْ صَفَّتْ وَيَقْبِضْنَ مَا يُمَسِّكُهُنَّ إِلَّا الرَّحْمَنُ﴾

"Do they not see the birds above them, their wings outspread and folded? None sustains them except the Most Merciful." (67:19)

In the Prophetic tradition, the believer is likened to the bird that sets out in the morning trusting wholly in Allah SWT and returns in the evening with its provision—an emblem of reliance, lawful sustenance, and untroubled faith. It was from this very lineage of symbols that Iqbal chose the Falcon for his youth.

The Ottoman world and the Turkic-Mongol military ethos likewise regarded the Falcon as an emblem of acuity, courage, and sovereign dignity. The imperial ateliers of the Mughals bore repeated witness to this mark of distinction. Iqbal, in *Bal-e-Jibril*, fused this Turkic-Islamic inheritance with the rigours of modern thought.

In the mystical tradition too, the Falcon appears as a metaphor for ascension. Ibn Arabi, Rumi, and ‘Abd al-Karim al-Jili likened the perfected human being to a bird ever yearning toward its origin. Iqbal reworked this spiritual image into a symbol of active, worldly life.

*“That which exalts you is selfhood;
that which debases you is mere desire.”*

The American Eagle’s symbolism dates from 1782, when it was enshrined upon the Great Seal of the United States. It reflected a temperament saturated with military assertion, geopolitical intervention, the thirst for global primacy, and the relentless display of power. This Eagle has, before our very eyes, played its great game of dominion in Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, Latin America, and the Middle East—all in the name of “freedom,” but towards the end of territorial influence.

Iqbal understood this disposition with remarkable clarity. In his post-1920 lectures—*The Muslim Community’s Present Political Condition* and *The Reconstruction*—one finds a trenchant critique of European and American imperial psychology.

The Dragon in Chinese civilisation, for its part, has for millennia embodied the triad of *power*, *wisdom*, and *patience*. In the Han, Tang, Ming, and Qing dynasties, it symbolised the emperor’s sagacity, the disciplined strength of the nation, the virtues of restraint and endurance, and the meticulous organisation of society. Modern China’s political conduct—its Belt and Road venture, its economic ascendancy—is but a contemporary echo of that ancient strategic patience.

Why, then, is Iqbal’s Falcon distinct from both Eagle and Dragon?

Because it possesses neither the imperial aggression of the one nor the earth-bound cunning of the other. Its essence is selfhood, spiritual insight, lawful sustenance, fearless ascent, and an inner realm lit from within.

In Iqbal’s universe, the Falcon embodies qualities wholly unlike those of the two civilisations competing for mastery of the modern world. The Falcon is native to high peaks; it abhors captivity; it shuns impurity; it is the emblem of courage; it fears no danger; it seeks solitude not as escape but as contemplation. Above all, Iqbal’s Falcon is not the thrall of power—it is the guardian of virtue. These traits are absent from both the American Eagle and the Chinese Dragon.

The real question, then, is this: What role does Iqbal’s *khudi* assign to the Muslim youth in the global contest between Eagle and Dragon?

The doctrine of *khudi*, elaborated in *Javid Nama* (1932), *Armughan-e-Hijaz* (1938), and *Bal-e-Jibril* (1935), declares that a Muslim’s true capital lies not in outward power but in the inward architecture of his soul—the very architecture that makes him worthy of the divine trust upon earth.

If Muslim nations today find themselves crushed between these two monumental centres of power—America and China—it is a testament not to their weakness but to their lack of inner reconstruction. Iqbal prescribed but one remedy: *khudi*.

It is *khudi* that grants man the consciousness of freedom;

khudi that teaches resistance against tyranny;

khudi that lifts the head high before the mighty of the earth.

Should the ummah grasp this message, neither the shadow of the Eagle could terrify it, nor the wisdom of the Dragon overwhelm it.

History bears unimpeachable witness to a truth often forgotten in the clamour of modern power politics: whenever Muslims placed their trust not in the machinations of empire but in the vigour of their own spiritual and moral resources, they confronted — and frequently overcame — the mightiest forces of their age. The valleys of Badr and Uhud, the minarets of Constantinople, the ramparts of Granada, and the grand reforms of the Ottoman Tanzimat all testify to the same immutable principle: outward strength is but the visible radiance of an inward flame, the fire of **خودي** — **the sovereign Self**.

From the *Maktūbāt* of Mujaddid Alf Thānī to Shah Waliullah's *Hujjat Allāh al-Bālighah*, and from Abul A'la Maududi's *Khutbāt* and *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*, a single echo resounds across the centuries — that the true distinction of the Muslim lies neither in his numbers nor in his weaponry but in the dignity of his moral character and the sovereignty of his intellectual conscience. Iqbal stands in this august tradition as a torchbearer whom the twentieth century itself beheld.



Thus, at a moment when the world is fractured between the talons of the Eagle and the coils of the Dragon, Iqbal's Falcon still has a path to chart — if only the youth can reignite within themselves that spark of selfhood whose radiance dissolves every mirage of the age. Should the Muslim world restore its bond with its scholarly inheritance, spiritual awareness, and civilisational dignity, its lost destination will no longer remain a wistful dream but may once again emerge as a living reality. For Iqbal proclaimed, with the conviction of one who had surveyed both the heights of poetry and the abysses of civilisation, that the conquest of the horizons is meaningless without the conquest of the self.

As the Qur'ān reminds us:

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ﴾

“Indeed, God does not change the condition of a people until they change what lies within themselves.” (Q 13:11)

In Iqbal's philosophy, “self-mastery” is not an affectation of mysticism; it is the precondition for a meaningful engagement with the universe. Without it, the conquest of the outer world degenerates into a hollow materialism — an empire without a soul, a victory without virtue. But with it, man acquires the capacity to behold the universe not as a playground of dominance but as a trust, a realm illuminated by purpose.

Iqbal's metaphors, therefore, are not mere ornaments of poetic craftsmanship; they are a civilisational summons. Today, as the Eagle and the Dragon divide the world into rival theatres of influence, the Muslim world stands as a spectator between them — hesitant, disoriented, and estranged from its own centre. Yet Iqbal provides a compass. In his vision, the source of Muslim strength lies neither in the Eagle's militaristic swagger nor in the Dragon's strategic patience, but in the burning core of the self — **the fire of integrity, courage, and spiritual independence.**

This selfhood teaches man accountability before the Creator, steels him against injustice, lifts his head before the thrones of power, and grants him the courage to reclaim his lost inheritance of liberty, dignity, and civilisational autonomy. If the Muslim youth, like Iqbal's Falcon, inhabit the high mountain ranges of selfhood — if they kindle within their souls the light that springs from faith, knowledge, and action — then neither the shadow of the Eagle nor the looming silhouette of the Dragon shall frighten them. They will rise to reclaim the elevated station destined for them, the station of which Iqbal once wrote: *"I speak not in riddles; what you perceive is not the full measure of reality."*

Iqbal's concept of *khudi* is not a rupture from Islamic history but the latest link in a golden chain forged by the justice of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, the resolve of Khalid ibn al-Walid, the forbearance of Salahuddin Ayyubi, the steadfastness of Tipu Sultan, the piety of Nuruddin Zangi, and the valour of the Ottoman ghazis. In *Asrār-i Khudī*, Iqbal declares that the true strength of the Muslim springs from the inner architecture of his soul. In *Rumūz-i Bekhudī*, he binds this selfhood to the unity of the community. In *Jāvid Nāmāh*, he sets it amidst the vast spiritual cosmos. In *Armughān-e-Hijāz*, he entrusts it finally to the love of the Prophet ﷺ. All these strands converge in the emblem of the Falcon.

We inhabit a world ensnared in the rivalry of two colossal powers. Yet Iqbal had already forewarned that a people who resurrect their selfhood, rediscover their intellectual centre, and reawaken their spiritual energies need not fear the imperial shadow of the Eagle nor be overwhelmed by the cultural tide of the Dragon. In *Bāl-e Jibrīl*, in the prayer "Before God," he offered the remedy for our age:

اے انفس و آفاق میں پیدا تری آیات

حق یہ ہے کہ ہے زندہ و پایندہ تری ذات

Amidst the wars of economies, armies, and global stratagems, Iqbal — with the sensibility of a historian and the audacity of a reformer — sought the secret of the Muslim world's lost glory. And history does not mince its lessons: whenever the Muslim community drifted from its spiritual nucleus, decline pursued it. From the fall of Andalusia to the sacking of Baghdad, from the waning of the Ottomans to the political subjugation of the Subcontinent, every era repeats the same admonition — that nations neglecting their inner life fall prey to the ambitions of others.

Iqbal returns us to this essential point:

خودی کو کر بلند اتنا کہ ہر تقدیر سے پہلے

خدا بندے سے خود پوچھے بتا تیری رضا کیا ہے

This is not verse alone; it is a charter for renewal.

If the Muslim youth adopt the Falcon as their emblem, cultivate their selfhood, warm their faith with resolve, reconnect with their intellectual heritage, and rebuild their collective unity, then the powers

of the world shall lose their dominion over them. History attests that storms cannot break those who are fortified from within. Iqbal, surveying the panorama of civilisation, declared:

افراد کے ہاتھوں میں ہے اقوام کی تقدیر

ہر فرد ہے ملت کے مقدر کا ستارہ

Should these stars reignite, the Muslim world will carve its own path even amidst the clash of Eagles and Dragons — and from Iqbal's vision, a new dawn may yet arise.

It is within this intellectual horizon that we must view the three-day International Iqbal Conference held under the aegis of the Quetta Reconstruction Trust. At its forefront stands Hafiz Tahir — a civil servant and Secretary to the Government of Balochistan — emerging as a torchbearer on today's intellectual horizon. By orchestrating this magnificent global conference with the tireless dedication of his team, he demonstrated with luminous clarity that Iqbal's thought is not a relic of nostalgia but a vibrant, guiding force for a Muslim world navigating one of the most precarious moments in its history.

Hafiz Tahir and his devoted colleagues have reminded us that if the world is descending into the darkness of political turmoil, civilisational confusion, and moral disarray, then Iqbal's message — of selfhood, action, courage, and service to humanity — remains a lantern capable of leading us toward a new dawn.

There exist scholars whose hearts still burn with the incandescent flame of Allama Iqbal's thought—those rare custodians of intellect who carry in their breast the luminous torch of vision, unextinguished by the tumult of modernity. Under the aegis of the Ta'meer-e-No Trust in Quetta, such a scholar, Hafiz Tahir, undertook the remarkable endeavour of convening, for the first time, a three-day international conference of Iqbal enthusiasts. This was no mere gathering of minds; it was a deliberate and resolute attempt to restore Iqbal's philosophy to the centre of contemporary discourse. From every corner of Pakistan, and indeed from various nations across the globe, devotees of Iqbal aligned their hearts and voices in unison, declaring that the world's turbulent present demands the guidance of Iqbal more urgently than ever before.

Hafiz Tahir is not merely a scholar of Iqbal; he is one in whom the fervent, guiding flame of Iqbal's philosophy continues to burn brightly, illuminating a path through the intellectual darkness of our era. His efforts bear eloquent testimony to a truth that is both simple and profound: despite the dizzying pace of technological advancement, the chaos of political upheaval, and the escalating conflicts on the global stage, Iqbal's teachings remain capable of providing the Muslim Ummah with a fulcrum from which its collective life may draw renewed vigour.

It is a matter of considerable admiration that in Quetta—a city perched at the confluence of civilizations—Hafiz Tahir gathered the devotees of Iqbal and orchestrated this global conference. In doing so, he not only answered the clarion call of the moment with timely precision but also raised a beacon of enlightenment for Pakistan's youth, particularly those of Balochistan, guiding them through the present political darkness. This was not merely an administrative triumph; it was a revival of intellectual consciousness. Participants from Pakistan, Iran, the Maldives, Bangladesh, Iraq, Morocco, Central Asia, and other Arab countries came together, and a scholar from Bangladesh drew a direct line between Iqbal's poetry and the recent revolutionary fervour in his country, explaining

how Iqbal's words had ignited the spirit of selfhood among the youth, compelling even the oppressive regime of Sheikh Hasina to retreat.

This serves as concrete evidence that Iqbal's thought continues to resonate on an international scale. During the conference, scholarly papers on *Tashkeel-e-Jadeed*, *Javid Nama*, *Asrar-e-Khudi*, and *Shairiyat-e-Iqbal* were presented with exceptional insight. For once again, the clarion call of Iqbal's eagle—his metaphorical *shaheen*—was heard collectively, reverberating through minds attuned to the soul of the Ummah. Scholars engaged not only in critical study of Iqbal's oeuvre but also in reinterpreting seminal works such as *Asrar-e-Khudi* (1915) and *Rumooz-e-Bekhudi* (1918) in the light of contemporary exigencies. Attention was given to the historical context of *Khutbat-e-Allahabad* (1930) and *Pas Cheh Bayad Kard* (1936), which convey that a Muslim community rooted in its intellectual core is fortified rather than destabilised by the rapid currents of change.

The political cartography of the world may shift; empires may rise and fall; yet, Iqbal's eagle remains a living and enduring symbol. His message transcends the vicissitudes of time. Today, when the world is ensnared between two symbols of power—the American eagle and the Chinese dragon—Iqbal's *shaheen* reminds nations that true strength lies in the flight of the soul, not in the terrestrial machinations of geopolitics. The *shaheen* embodies selfhood, faith, moral courage, and spiritual elevation. Until the Ummah apprehends this flight, its destiny remains shrouded in uncertainty. Yet, once awakened, the *shaheen* soars beyond the clutch of the eagle and the stratagem of the dragon; wherever its gaze falls, the mirages of worldly power fade into insignificance.

Though the conference has concluded, its intellectual luminescence spreads like the dawn across the sky of the Ummah. These three days were not mere scholarly deliberations; they were a covenant renewed with history itself. The fervour displayed was akin to that which once invigorated the sands of Badr, the insight that unlocked the gates of Constantinople, the spiritual dignity that illuminated Granada for centuries, and the moral fortitude that elevates Iqbal's *shaheen* above the contemporary eagle and dragon alike.

In a world where idols of power rise mercilessly and the foundations of ethics tremble, global politics continues to orbit around the same pillars of might. Yet, Quetta's intellectual gathering has proclaimed with clarity: the destiny of the Muslim Ummah is not inscribed upon the tables of Washington nor charted across the maps of Beijing. Its true strength lies within: in its selfhood, in the steadfastness of its spirit, and in the fervour of faith—the very qualities that Iqbal manifested in the flight of his *shaheen*. Destiny is illuminated when the fire of selfhood ignites within the heart, when the spirit revives the flight of the *shaheen*, and when Iqbal's message is embraced as the guiding principle of life.

The efforts of Hafiz Tahir and the Ta'meer-e-No Trust are no mere academic accomplishment; they resonate through history like a clarion call awakening generations. Through this conference, they have demonstrated that even in the rugged valleys of Balochistan, Iqbal's message echoes as it once did from the minarets of the Badshahi Mosque in Lahore or the ruins of Delhi. And all this was made possible by Hafiz Tahir's vision, devotion, and sincerity—but equally by the ceaseless labour, selflessness, and steadfast resolve of his entire team. They have erected, in the valleys of Quetta, a beacon whose light now spreads across the entire region.

The papers, dialogues, and intellectual beacons presented here testify that Iqbal's *shaheen* can still rise as a star upon the Ummah's brow—if only its flight is nurtured. The world may shift, power centres may change, but Iqbal's message neither ages nor diminishes. Until Muslim youth awaken their selfhood, illuminate their intellect, and safeguard their moral compass, the maps of the world will remain adverse. Yet, once that spark ignites, no talons of the eagle can restrain it, nor the philosophic roars of the dragon deceive it.

Finally, we pray that Hafiz Tahir's dedicated endeavour, his tireless labour, and his devotion to Iqbal become a source of worldly and spiritual reward. May the radiance of this conference spread across the Islamic world, kindle the fire of selfhood in the hearts of the youth, and allow Iqbal's *shaheen* to guide the Ummah to the morning of its lost glory. So long as Iqbal's *shaheen* soars, the dawn of the Ummah shall never fade.

This is the hope upon which the future of nations stands, and this is the covenant which Quetta's international Iqbal conference has boldly laid before the world: the *shaheen* is awake, its flight declared, and it remains capable of reshaping the destiny of generations. In gratitude and admiration, the Muslim Ummah acknowledges Hafiz Tahir and his team, whose efforts illuminate the path toward a renewed intellectual and spiritual renaissance. May Allah accept their sincerity, reward their labour in this world and the next, and transform the light of this conference into a solar beacon guiding the Ummah's journey into modernity. Hafiz Tahir and the Ta'meer-e-No Trust of Quetta stand as living exemplars that Iqbal remains vibrant today, and that his *shaheen* continues to herald the dawn of a new awakening.

Friday, December 5, 2025

The Empire's Bargain: Kashmir, America, and the Theatre of Deception

Sands of Betrayal: America's Mediation and the Muslim World

A Historical Tapestry of Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations: Brotherhood, Sacrifice, and the Trials of Jihad

There are chapters in the annals of history whose dust cannot be swept away by the mere passage of time; the saga of Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan is indubitably one such chapter. This bond, woven from the twin threads of faith and fraternity, sanctified by shared tribulations, now, lamentably, appears draped in lamentations, wounds, and uncertainty.

In 1979, when the Soviet forces marched upon Afghanistan, the world at large remained a silent spectator. Yet one nation rose above the common indifference: Pakistan. The country flung wide its doors, its heart, and the folds of its very being to shelter its Afghan brethren. For over four decades, Pakistan has offered refuge to more than five million Afghan refugees, extending to them its cities, its employment opportunities, its land, and its resources.

During the jihad against the Soviets, Pakistan wagered not merely its territorial security but also bore the sacred mantle of representing the Islamic world. Millions of Pakistani lives were sacrificed, and the nation's economy strained under the weight of generosity—but the purpose was singular and unwavering: *to ensure the liberation and sovereignty of their Afghan brothers and to close the chapter on Russian aggression*. Such sacrifices defy measurement in the ledger of history.

Certain events are more than mere past occurrences; they become the mirror reflecting the collective conscience of a nation. The Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship, forged from such crucibles, embodies faith, jihad, sacrifice, and brotherly bonds. When Soviet boots desecrated the sacred valleys of Afghanistan in 1979, the Islamic world stood silent, but Pakistan remained vigilant. It risked everything—its economy, borders, security, and the happiness of future generations—to ensure that Kabul might remain free, that Afghans could lift their heads high, and that the banner of Islam might flutter proudly beyond the mountains.

Over the ensuing forty years, Pakistan accommodated over five million Afghan refugees, embraced them, allocated its lands for their sustenance, opened its markets to their enterprise, and laid the foundations of their security with the sweat and blood of its own citizens. No other nation has displayed such patience, sacrifice, or sincerity. As the Qur'an reminds us:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ

"The believers are but brothers." (Al-Hujurat: 10)

This verse became the clarion call of Pakistan's faith and the guiding principle of its actions. In the spirit of this brotherhood, Pakistan sought to unite disparate Afghan factions, whether through the Peshawar Accord, the sacred covenant of Makkah, or the conferences held in Islamabad. The nation consistently emerged as the ambassador of peace and beacon of hope.

Following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, Afghanistan's internal divisions—ethnic, linguistic, and political—gave rise to multiple armed factions. The unified front that had resisted the Soviets

gradually fragmented into internecine conflicts, as power vacuums fostered temporary and violent struggles for dominance.

History bears witness that when Soviet forces withdrew on **15 February 1989**, the world expected a return of peace to Afghanistan. Yet the mujahideen, who had once rallied under a single banner, splintered over questions of power. Pakistan, hearts brimming with hope, endeavored to reunite them.

The most documented and internationally acknowledged attempt at reconciliation was the **Peshawar Accord of 24–26 April 1992**, which sought to establish a provisional governance structure among the various mujahideen factions. Under this agreement, no single faction would monopolize power; rather, an interim Islamic administration, grounded in consultative and religious principles, was to be formed. Afghan leaders swore, in the hallowed precincts of Makkah, that henceforth blood would not be shed for the sake of authority. Interim presidencies, councils, and power-sharing arrangements were drafted, with figures such as **Sabghatullah Mujaddidi, Burhanuddin Rabbani, and Ahmad Shah Massoud** central to this fragile hope. Massoud was appointed interim Defence Minister, while Mujaddidi and Rabbani assumed provisional guiding roles. This accord represented a sincere attempt to create a unified administration after the collapse of the communist regime.

Alas, history soon revealed the frailty of such pledges. The lust for power, external interference, and personal ambition dissolved the sacred oath into a deluge of blood. The covenant sworn at the House of Allah was buried in the alleys of Kabul. Ambitions, tribal rivalries, foreign influence, and selfish interests once more drenched the homeland in blood. The streets of Kabul, once witnesses to jihad's triumph, became graves for civil strife.

Factions remained bound only by transient alliances and ephemeral interests. Every promise, every oath, was consumed in the smoke of power struggles. Documentation and human rights reports confirm that the accord quickly collapsed in practice: commanders defied or nullified the agreement, armed confrontations erupted, massacres occurred, and the commitments of the accord were left unrealised. These events subsequently spiraled into protracted internal conflicts and urban warfare.

The failure of the accord was attributable to multiple interwoven internal and external factors: the regional entrenchment of factions hindered their political unification; each commander wielded territorial, tribal, and financial influence; mutual distrust and personal ambitions undermined enforcement; external interventions by Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and other powers complicated reconciliation; and armed capacities, resources, and foreign support emboldened factions to breach the accord. While the Peshawar Accord remains recorded in history, in reality the streets and neighborhoods bore witness to bloodshed, deceit, and repeated violations.

History often presents chapters that cannot be erased by the sands of time, and among these enduring narratives is the story of Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan. This bond, forged through faith, fraternity, and shared suffering, today appears veiled in grievances, wounds, and uncertainty.



The ground realities are stark: all mujahideen factions failed to implement the Peshawar Accord. The ensuing tableau of accusations was nightmarish—each group blaming the others for breaking the agreement. Particularly in Kabul, the city became a theatre of ghastly conflict: sectarian lines were drawn, districts contested, and civilians caught in the crossfire. Local and international observers noted that these allegations often constituted a blend of truth and propaganda. Each faction used political posturing to conceal their own incompetence and internal turmoil, seeking to sway public opinion to their side.

Pakistan watched in pain, the very nation that had acted as a benevolent guardian, now forced into the role of mere spectator. Other states of the Islamic world, once ardent supporters of the Afghan jihad, were silenced, overwhelmed by the chaos. But Pakistan did not retreat. With weary hands and a tired heart, it continued to stand behind its Afghan brethren—bearing the standard of peace and the banner of sacrifice.

Herein lies an unvarnished historical truth: Pakistan was the sole country to share in the sorrows of the Afghan people. Despite Pakistan's enduring patience, steadfastness, and the generosity shown to Afghan refugees, the world turned away from Afghanistan. Pakistan remained the sole nation to clutch the mantle of hope. Its economy was sacrificed, refugees cared for, wounded tended, and prayers offered for their future. Yet the cruel irony of history is that today, elements within the Afghan leadership, seduced by the eternal adversary that is India, hurl accusations against Pakistan. The very hands that once provided refuge now point fingers of suspicion.

Yet Pakistan's conduct remains unwavering, guided by patience, tolerance, and the desire for peace.

Pakistan's wounds remain hidden, but the Afghan leadership may have forgotten the sacrifices made. Today, under the burdens of terrorism, economic stress, and border pressures, arrows of hostility continue to rain from Afghan soil—attacks by the TTP, silent cooperation by certain Afghan authorities, and diplomatic proximity with India inflicting deep scars. How ironic it is that the country which, for forty years, opened its arms to Afghan brothers like a mother, is today the target of reproach. Is this the essence of Islamic brotherhood? Have the oaths sworn in the House of Allah been forgotten? Have the historical hospitality, the sacrifices, and sincerity been reduced to dust?

The Qur'an provides timeless guidance:

وَأِنْ جُنَحُوا لِلْسَّلَامِ فَأَجْنَحْ لَهَا وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ

"And if they incline towards peace, then incline towards it [also] and rely upon Allah." (Al-Anfal: 61)

Pakistan has consistently adhered to this principle: peace is preferable to war.

A bitter, yet enduring maxim has also etched itself into the annals of Afghan politics, reflecting the hard realities of loyalty and power:

"You cannot buy the Afghans, but you can hire their services."

Whether uttered by a statesman or whispered in popular discourse, this saying carries profound truth. It finds its roots in both colonial and modern interventions: foreign powers may attempt to secure temporary allegiance through financial or military aid, yet genuine loyalty cannot be purchased. Historical and contemporary analyses alike confirm that this transactional relationship, often framed as 'rented' allegiance, has repeatedly armed Afghan commanders with temporary power, fostering cycles of prolonged, unstructured violence. Today, the Taliban regime, comfortably

ensconced in India's embrace, furthers agendas contrary to Pakistan's interests—a fact underscored by the statements of the Taliban founder and spiritual guide, Mullah Omar, during his visits to India.

Afghan history teaches a somber lesson: in the struggle for power, faith, promises, and friendship are often the first casualties. Loyalty and brotherhood flourish only in an environment of mutual respect. Pakistan's grievance is thus not merely political—it is an emotional wound. Yet Pakistan persists in its declaration: the path to peace does not lie through war. Afghan brethren were never considered enemies; rather, the conduct of some Afghan factions has compelled Pakistan to reconsider its own stance.

It is time for Kabul to acknowledge that Pakistan is not an adversary but the sole nation that has stood with the Afghan people through every storm. If Afghanistan allows India—a perennial foe—a foothold on its soil while casting doubts on Pakistan, this is not mere political error; it is a direct affront to the very notion of Islamic brotherhood.

Forty years of sacrifice, lives lost in the tens of thousands, billions spent on hospitality—these remain the crowning jewels of Pakistan's historical record. Pakistan has shed blood and tears for the Afghans, and despite the world's reproaches, has never forsaken them. Today, when Afghan leadership sits in the embrace of India, Pakistan's heart may be wounded, yet it is far from empty. The flame of hope still burns, whispering to Afghan brethren: we have never considered you enemies; we have always counted you as part of our own heart. If you have strayed, we shall voice our grievances, but never hatred. Pakistan remains the nation that once, under the shadow of the Kaaba, sought to unite factions through the oath of peace. Then, as now, it strives to maintain the bonds of faith, fraternity, and harmony between brothers.

One can only hope that history will one day witness the same scene once more: the skies of Kabul echoing not with the thunder of artillery, but with the call to prayer. That the oath sworn in Makkah will again serve as the foundation of Afghan peace. The dream of brotherhood, envisioned by countless hearts like mine, may yet return—the scene when Afghan mujahideen swore their oaths beneath the shadow of the Kaaba, with Pakistan behind them in prayer.

May the two brotherly nations once again perceive each other not through the eyes of enemies, but through the mirror of the Ummah. Afghanistan must remember that Pakistan's sacrifices are etched indelibly in the pages of history. And Pakistan must also remember brotherhood is never one-sided. The hope for peace, the sting of grievances, and the dream of fraternity—this is our story, our message, our eternal call.

Tuesday, December 9, 2025

The Mirage of Mediation

The Lollipop of Power

The question of Kashmir stands as one of the most enduring and intricate disputes between the two principal nations of the Subcontinent—Pakistan and India—its embers fanned intermittently by the world's major powers. Foremost among them is the United States, which has at times presented itself as mediator, at times as a strategic partner, and at times merely as a spectator of convenience. This paper seeks to illuminate the historical landscape within which Washington's overtures to arbitrate were made, the expectations entertained by the Pakistani state, and the often-perverse outcomes that ensued.

History, that silent chronicler which never lies—provided it is read by minds schooled in reflection—records with unflinching clarity the political evolution of South Asia. In the labyrinth of Indo-Pak relations, America's role is a chapter repeatedly shrouded in the mirage of hope, only to dissolve in the fog of disappointment. The present analysis retraces those very twists and turns in which American mediation, Pakistani anticipation, and Indian calculation were so tightly entangled.

It is one of history's iron laws that in global politics there exist neither perpetual allies nor eternal adversaries; interest alone is the final arbiter. And judged by this measure, the world's most powerful democracy—the United States—has revealed time and again that once its strategic aims are secured, it does not hesitate to sacrifice those very partners who once risked their own security for Washington's designs.

The moves played upon the world's diplomatic chessboard are often deadlier and more intricate than those in any game of kings. When America—merchant of peace by self-proclamation—dons the cloak of arbitration while holding in its hand the scales of its own advantage, the oppressed often receive the same cold bargain a living soul might obtain from a trader without conscience: *"Be silent, surrender the land, and leave the rest to us."*

Those with discernment know well that every page of the Subcontinent's recent past bears witness to a recurring sorrow: whenever Pakistan lit the lamps of hope and resolve in anticipation of American support, the winds shifted so capriciously that neither the flame survived nor the oil remained. The milestones of the past stand as grim reminders of how Pakistan, time after time, laid its treasure, strength, and trust at the feet of "Uncle Sam," only to receive in return a few perfunctory assurances and a handful of patronising "advice."

One recalls that in the autumn of 1962, as Indian and Chinese artillery thundered across the Himalayan frontier, voices of sober calculation in Pakistan's corridors of power declared, "Now is the time—Kashmir can be regained." Strategists and commentators urged that India, weakened by its conflict with China, had presented Pakistan with a golden opportunity to take a decisive step towards the liberation of Kashmir. It is said that Beijing, through discreet diplomacy, conveyed similar signals, inviting Pakistan to seize the moment.

Yet Field Marshal Ayub Khan—self-styled and self-assured—chose to repose faith in the pledges of President Kennedy’s administration, adopting a posture of neutrality in the naïve expectation that the United States would later assume the mantle of an impartial arbiter, uphold the scales of justice, and deliver Kashmir into Pakistan’s hands. In this misjudgement—egregious, costly, and historically unforgivable—Ayub sheathed his sword upon the promise of a morrow that Washington never intended to honour. The dream of American mediation proved an illusion, and the hopes raised during the Sino-Indian war of 1962 still echo today in Islamabad’s halls of power as a lament for lost chances and strategic naïveté.

During the 1950s, Pakistan entered the defence pacts of SEATO and CENTO. Though these agreements brought military assistance, the aid was strictly earmarked for countering the Communist threat—not for confronting Pakistan’s regional rival, India. The Defence Agreement of 1959, too, was merely another link in the same chain—offering theoretical protection against Communist adversaries yet yielding no real advantage on the ground. In essence, these alliances proved unilateral in benefit; Washington gained much, Pakistan almost nothing.

History attests that America, once its objectives are fulfilled, does not tarry in abandoning those allies who served its geopolitical ambitions—militarily, diplomatically, or morally. Pakistan has endured this bitter lesson more acutely than most. The mirage of SEATO and CENTO lured Pakistan down a path whose promised destination proved nothing more than shimmering sand. Under the umbrella of these treaties, Pakistan served as a cog in Washington’s anti-Soviet machinery.

But when war broke out in 1965 and Pakistan took up arms to defend its own territory, the very weapons supplied by the United States were abruptly halted. Washington brusquely reminded Pakistan that the arms were provided “to deter Communists, not Delhi.” Thus, when Pakistan expected practical support during the conflict, it received instead sanctions and suspensions. It was a grim awakening: the United States was never to be Pakistan’s partner against India. And though Ayub Khan had been led to believe that Washington would assume the role of mediator, the Kashmir issue remained precisely where it had stood. The episode was a bitter testament to Pakistan’s position—not as a sovereign strategic ally, but as a pawn upon America’s geopolitical chessboard.

And then came the fateful winter of 1971, when the twilight over Dhaka yielded to a night of national calamity. Pakistan not only lost half its territory but paid the price of securing the release of its prisoners of war by accepting the provisions of the Simla Agreement—whose clauses effectively consigned the United Nations’ Kashmir resolutions to the dusty shelves of diplomatic history. Whether this concession was a necessity or a failure of political wisdom remains a question on which historians will differ, though each narrative carries an unmistakable undertone of Pakistan’s isolation.

India, possessing thousands of Pakistani POWs, bargained from a position of strength. The stipulation that all disputes—including Kashmir—be resolved bilaterally weakened the international standing of the UN resolutions, though it did not erase them. It was, nonetheless, a diplomatic setback for Pakistan.

It is worth recalling that in 1970, General Yahya Khan played a pivotal role in facilitating the historic rapprochement between China and the United States. Yet its “reward” brought neither Kashmir nor the salvation of East Pakistan. The war of 1971 left Pakistan sundered, and the Simla Agreement formalised a clause that diminished the import of the UN resolutions on Kashmir. Bhutto’s diplomacy was celebrated as triumphant, but time has shown that the triumph existed largely on paper, not in the realm of realities.

At such junctures, the words of the Qur’ān offer timeless clarity:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ

“Indeed, God commands justice and moral excellence.” (16:90)

Justice, however, has rarely found an advocate among the great powers when weighed against the heft of their interests.

The conflict of Kargil in 1999 once again compelled Pakistan to retreat—this time under the unambiguous pressure of the United States. By then, both nations had crossed the nuclear threshold, and Washington, invoking the gospel of “peace,” restrained Pakistan even as it extended, albeit discreetly, a sympathetic nod towards India. After 9/11, General Musharraf—an adventurer in uniform more than a statesman—capitulated at the weight of a single American phone call. Pakistan committed itself to the so-called War on Terror with such abandon that two of its airbases were effectively handed over to the United States, where Pakistani personnel were barred even from entry.

From these very airfields, according to American records, **57,000 aerial strikes** were launched upon Afghanistan; the mountains of Tora Bora were assaulted with munitions scarcely distinguishable from tactical nuclear devices—deployed from the soil of Pakistan itself. In exchange for logistical, intelligence, and ground cooperation, Pakistan received a trickle of financial aid; but it surrendered over **seventeen thousand lives**, absorbed an economic loss estimated at **110 billion dollars**, and carried the burden of hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees—all in the desperate but futile hope of appeasing Washington.

Meanwhile, the United States concluded a landmark civil nuclear agreement with India, cemented a strategic partnership, and to this day India continues—under American patronage—to orchestrate acts of terror within Pakistan. Evidence presented repeatedly before the international community and the United Nations has yielded no meaningful response from the latter, now reduced to little more than a handmaiden of American power, shirking the very responsibilities it claims to uphold.

In 2019, when Donald Trump—ever theatrical—hinted at mediating on Kashmir, he encouraged Prime Minister Imran Khan with the tantalising suggestion that he might “gift the nation a moment of triumph akin to a World Cup victory.” Imran Khan embraced this overture with misplaced optimism. History knocked once more upon our door, yet the pharaoh of the White House soon made it plain that Prime Minister Modi had been granted a free hand to “cash his political cheque” on Kashmir. It became clear that Washington expected Islamabad to stage whatever drama was necessary to secure its own political survival.

General Qamar Bajwa, then Pakistan’s Army Chief, was invited to the Pentagon and accorded an ostentatious *18-gun salute*. But behind the ceremonial façade lay a directive: acquiesce to the

impending decision on Kashmir. Bajwa's subsequent briefing to two dozen journalists betrayed a timorous resignation rather than resolve. Trump, in turn, repaid Modi for sharing his stage at two mammoth diaspora rallies, harvesting Indian-American political support during the presidential campaign. Modi, emboldened by American indulgence, revoked Article 370 and declared Kashmir an integral part of India.

To preserve his tenure and lend triumph to his American visit, Imran Khan—echoing Bhutto's theatrics—ordered party cadres to amass at Chaklala Airbase to enact the charade of a victorious return. Instead of learning from history, we accepted Trump's mirage of mediation. Upon their return from Washington, Khan and the Army Chief displayed the jubilation of men convinced they had secured a diplomatic conquest. Their staged reception at Chaklala resembled the homecoming of a conqueror. Yet only weeks later, on **5 August**, this illusion shattered as Modi dissolved Article 370 and reduced the corpus of UN resolutions to a footnote within India's own constitution. India had eliminated Kashmir's special status unilaterally—and America remained silent.

What manner of mediator speaks of arbitration while anointing one party to swallow the contested land? Was this mediation—or a prelude to auctioning maps? If such is the architecture of their diplomacy, then one can all too easily imagine their "solution" for Palestine: hand over Gaza to the United States, let it refashion the territory into a tourist haven in exchange for dispersing the Palestinians across neighbouring Arab states.

The Qur'ān warns with timeless clarity:

فَمَا لَكُمْ كَيْفَ تَحْكُمُونَ

"What is the matter with you—how can you judge so?" (68:36)

At what point shall we recognise the futility of placing faith in those from whom fidelity has never flowed?

A survey of history reveals that since the Second World War, the United States has intervened—directly or indirectly—in more than three dozen nations. Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen—the list is a sombre chronicle of shattered societies. In the end, Washington has either departed in humiliation or cloaked its defeat in the garb of a "partial success." The return of the Taliban in Kabul and the fall of Saigon stand as indelible monuments to these truths.

During his electoral campaign, Trump had vowed to extricate America from "endless wars." Yet upon assuming office, his demeanour transformed. Threats were flung at Canada, Greenland, and China; grievances aired against NATO; pressure exerted upon the European Union. His carte blanche to Israel on Palestine, and his silence on the brutalities in Gaza, exposed the gulf between his rhetoric and his actions.

America's trade war with China ultimately ended in retreat. The endurance of Beijing's economic model and its expanding global influence forced Washington to temper its ambitions. Meanwhile, in recent Indo-Pak hostilities, the myth of Western military superiority began to unravel. Israel's alliance with India became starkly visible. Pakistan not only downed Israeli-origin Harop drones but demolished their operators and ground stations within India. The supposed invincibility of American-Israeli military technology evaporated. The furtive repatriation of Israel's eighteen fallen specialists

confirmed what the world had begun to suspect: the much-advertised supremacy of Indian and Israeli weaponry was but a puff of manufactured legend.

In the aftermath, the United States intervened hurriedly to press for a ceasefire—at Israel and India’s urging—to rescue its partners from complete humiliation. For Pakistan, however, this was no new encounter. From 1962 to 1965, from 1999 to 2019, Washington offered the same temporary reassurances, the same chalk-upon-water promises, while the realities on the ground remained stubbornly unchanged. The situation in Kashmir not only failed to improve; it grew more entangled. Now, once again, America has extended the lollipop of mediation on Kashmir. The reality, however, is unmistakable: Washington intends to employ India as a *joker card* against China. India’s inclusion in the Quad alliance is a calculated pivot of this design. Yet the United States, in repeating this misjudgment, is once more wagering upon a fragile and unreliable partner.

The role America has played in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Iraq—and now Ukraine and Gaza—casts grave doubts upon its credibility as an arbiter of peace. President Trump advised Ukraine to surrender twenty per cent of its territory to Russia in exchange for “American peace.” In Gaza, mediation amounted to the grotesque suggestion that the war would end the moment the Palestinians vacated their own land. Such proposals do not constitute arbitration; they are coercion dressed in diplomatic finery.

Modi’s campaign-trail threats against Pakistan are but the revival of that threadbare rhetoric through which Hindu nationalism is stoked in India. The objective is not merely electoral gain; it is also to ensure India’s active participation in America’s anti-China project—the “Quad.” Yet the United States refuses to acknowledge the stubborn reality that India could not confront China in 1962, and remains equally incapable today. America’s “lame horse,” hobbled by strategic and military frailties, is little more than a pawn upon the chessboard of global power.

America’s past behaviour, present manoeuvres, and future indications collectively reveal a superpower shackled by its own self-interest. Its promises, treaties, and offers of mediation serve short-term objectives alone. The time has surely come for Pakistan to reshape its foreign policy, to cultivate self-reliance, and to recognise that dependence upon any American president—Trump or otherwise—is to chase that very mirage which forever dissolves upon approach.

CPEC represents the new horizon of Pakistan’s partnership with China. When Pakistan embarked on this project—heralded as a “game changer”—China steadfastly supported Pakistan on the diplomatic front, including on the question of Kashmir. And yet, segments of our own elite persist in anticipating some miraculous American intervention, as though yearning for an old wound to be healed by the very hand that inflicted it.

Suppose, for argument’s sake, that the United States were to advance a formula for mediation: to divide Kashmir; to assign Gilgit–Baltistan to Pakistan and the remainder to India; or to declare the entire region a demilitarised state. Would any party accept such proposals? And if they did not—upon whom would Trump’s ursine wrath descend?

Pakistan must understand that external arbitration—especially American arbitration—is a mirage

that invariably shatters upon the granite of disappointment. Nations resolve their crises not by surrendering their agency, but through the strength of their own will, wisdom, and unity. Whether the issue is Kashmir or any other national interest, Pakistan must anchor its decisions in its own capability, diplomatic clarity, and internal cohesion. The soft illusions of mediation crumble inevitably before the hard truth of sovereignty.

Washington's story is the same tale retold with new actors. Yesterday, General Zia sought American benediction to legitimise martial rule; today, others polish their political armour in the glow of Washington's welcome. Yet every traveller who clings to the finger of Uncle Sam is eventually left unclothed in that marketplace of power where only might is traded.

Even now, should Pakistan trust Trump's mediation, the likely proposals would be depressingly familiar: "Accept the status quo; recognise whatever part of Kashmir each side already holds—or lease it to us for twenty years, and then we shall discuss matters again." What self-respecting state could acquiesce to such terms? And if Pakistan declined—what then? Trump's rage, as the world has witnessed, resembles the crushing embrace of a bear from which escape is rare and breath scarce. America is a mediator only in the sense that a merchant is: it bargains exclusively for profit, even if that profit requires the erasure of entire Muslim populations.

Those who are shown mirages and led into dreams fall either into the captivity of illusion or reveal their ignorance of history. Pakistan must accept that the Kashmir dispute will not be resolved through American mediation, nor through any international platform, unless the nation itself summons sovereignty, resolve, and internal unity. Every American promise conceals a motive; every offer of arbitration, a barter. The moment has arrived for Pakistan to define its path by its geographical centrality, defensive capability, and ideological foundations. Otherwise, history will once more record a deception added to a long ledger of deceptions.

And the final truth—harsh though it may be—is that nations which repeatedly indulge the same dream find it turning either into addiction or despair. We have time and again imagined that some external saviour will plead our case, liberate our jugular vein, or shoulder our burdens. But a vein wounded by one's own neglect cannot be healed by another's hand. History's inscription is unmistakable: only those seek arbitration who have lost faith in their own strength, their own argument, and their own wisdom.

What is needed now is to learn from our past, to judge friends and foes not through sentiment but through reality, and to place national interest at the apex of our concerns. Otherwise, the lollipop—presented in its dazzling wrapper—will continue to deliver nothing but poison.

Thurs, December 11, 2025

Between the Lamp and the Sword: India, Power, and the Lessons of History

The Conscience of Nations: Wisdom, War, and the Path of Peace

Today this convocation of reflection assembles for no small reason: the age is turning its page, the world is shifting upon a fresh axis of power, and the destinies of nations are no longer forged solely in marble chambers but in the furnace of global pressure, economic scourge, and the harsh metallurgy of geopolitical coercion. At times, the fate of nations hangs upon a single drop of oil; at others, one ill-starred decision hurls them back centuries. The vista before us is not confined to the electoral intrigues of India alone; it touches the dawn and dusk of an entire region.

The world observed with a familiar chill when the clouds of Western suspicion settled over Delhi's sky; when Washington's gaze acquired the glint of doubt; when India felt its footing falter upon the highway of Russian crude—a route once as effortless as a river in monsoon flood, now reduced to a hesitant trickle. Bloomberg's report held up a mirror before the world, and in that clear reflection Delhi's new compulsions glimmered without disguise. Thus, the saga of India and Russian oil—like a lamp sputtering in the wind—was heard across the globe.

As Western misgivings deepened, and whispers of sanctions crept through the corridors of Washington, the political pulse of India began to throb irregularly. The dense clouds of the West, the looming spectre of punitive measures, and Washington's cold metallic stare cast a long shadow across Delhi's courtyard, until India deemed it prudent to extinguish its lamp upon the stream of Russian oil.

The same Russian crude which, until yesterday, had seemed the very life-essence of India's economic machinery now appeared as though tinged with guilt. What had once flowed like the evening prayers along the ghats of the Ganges now dimmed; and the world sensed that Delhi grew faint to the rhythms of Moscow. Entangled in the knots of its own decisions, India withdrew its feet from the Russian path, and what had been a river became little more than a drainage trickle. This was not mere commerce; it was the poetry of power altering its metre in profound and silent ways.

Bloomberg, in its customary fashion, penned the revelation that stripped away the veil from the economic tremors rattling the chambers of Delhi—tremors which even the Modi establishment, for all its efforts, could not suppress. It reported with unsettling clarity that India had sharply reduced its purchases of Russian crude for December, as though a covert tremor had passed beneath the feet of the Indian state. That month's imports—once a preference, almost an instinct—now slipped from India's grasp like a frightened hand releasing a burning ember. The world understood then that Delhi's decisions were no longer sovereign; some other hand now moved its pen.

Five major refineries—normally prompt in dispatching their monthly orders to Moscow—fell silent. This silence was a political scream. Modi's hubris reverberated through it, for it declared that India's decisions were no longer unchained.

On another facet of Bloomberg's crystalline mirror flickered the revelation that India's five principal oil refineries, which seldom delayed their orders past the tenth of each month, had this time sunk into a sepulchral quiet—as though the pen had been snatched from their hands, or vibrant life had

been abruptly gripped by the cold fingers of death, or circumstances had coerced them into new, unwelcome choices. This was not commercial discretion alone; it was testament to fear, compulsion, and the weight of consequences. In the language of statecraft, silence is often the most piercing cry.

Meanwhile, the state-run Indian Oil Corporation issued a proclamation that laid bare the new orientation of Delhi's strategic posture: it would henceforth procure only such Russian crude as lay beyond the compass of sanctions. A vessel caught in a swirling political whirlpool had shifted its rudder, fearful that the approaching tempest might capsize its fragile balance.

This was no announcement—it was a confession. A moment when a large state sensed the shadow of foreign will upon its own choices. And above this hung the American tariff, levied at fifty per cent—an economic lash whose stroke did not merely stagger Delhi but scorched it. Against this backdrop, President Trump's remarks thundered like a gale: he declared India an unreliable trading partner, and its purchases of Russian oil tantamount to fuelling the battlefields of Ukraine.

His words did not merely fall upon Delhi's ears; they entered the very sinews of its politics. This was not a remark but an indictment—ethical, political, and strategic—upon which the world's gaze instantly fixed. It was not a sentence but a verdict, one that binds nations within the iron clasp of geopolitical necessity. America's imposition of a fifty per cent tariff upon India's Russian purchases was a message unmistakably cast: that in the economic world one cannot sail upon two vessels at once. On one side stood the iron pressure of Washington; on the other, the surging river of Moscow's energy. India appeared trapped between them.

Thus, the IOC's statement—claiming it would import Russian crude only from non-sanctioned suppliers—was, in truth, a political avowal. It was not refusal but partial surrender. Modi, the wolf who had donned a lion's hide to roar at the region, now found himself reduced to a cowering jackal before Trump's doctrine—driven not merely to bow but to fall flat upon his face, tasting the dust like a soldier who lays down his shield only to cast his sword at the feet of his adversary.

(وَتِلْكَ الْأَيَّامُ نُدَاوِلُهَا بَيْنَ النَّاسِ)

"These are the days We alternate among mankind." (Qur'an 3:140)

The United States' imposition of a fifty-per-cent tariff upon India was, in truth, the harshest chapter in this unfolding economic chronicle. It was not a proclamation but a whip-crack—struck at the very moment when India had begun to fancy itself an emergent force in the global marketplace. One could almost sense Washington whispering into Delhi's ear the same imperious phrase rulers once uttered during the darker ages of subjugation: "Our decisions shall prevail; yours are merely to obey."

The lash of the American tariff sent tremors through India's corridors of power, and at last Mr Modi found himself assuring Washington that the conduits of Russian oil would henceforth be constricted, sinew by sinew, until they faded entirely—much as a junior partner must display a spotless cloak before his greater ally.

President Trump's words were not merely a warning; they were a hatchet laid upon India's policy, heard the world over. Those phrases etched themselves upon the margins of India's diplomatic ledger like a dark stain across the proud visage of Mr. Modi.

A question thus arises: has the turbulence of Modi's own policies driven India to the brink of an economic quake? Among the intelligentsia a murmured conclusion takes shape: that misguided decisions, diplomatic imprudence, and a bravado steeped in folly can upturn the entire economic chessboard of a nation.

Beneath the weight of this heavy tariff, India did what weaker states often find inevitable: it pledged to shutter the doors of Russian oil. This was the juncture at which India appointed constraint—not sovereignty—as its counsellor. From such policies are born the dark outcomes which surfaced starkly during the military tensions of May 2025. Warfare—whether brief or prolonged—strikes deeply at a state's political poise and martial confidence. The destruction of Indian aircraft and the ensuing global commentary, however one interprets it, left question marks burning in the minds of Delhi's strategic planners. And yet, India's renewed drift towards confrontation with Pakistan revealed a troubling truth: that Mr Modi and his war-minded coterie appear unwilling to learn the lessons which history—etched with defeat and humiliation—has already taught.

Thus, the question reverberates in every Delhi research room and across every economic observatory: is aggression overwhelming prudence within Modi's policy machine? Does his government's own folly stoke the fever and decline of India's economy? Restlessness in the markets, distrust among investors, and an unending submission before political pressure—all herald the approach of a greater economic storm. The intoxication of aggression, the frailty of diplomacy, and the perpetual opening of fronts against neighbours—these are paths upon which nations ultimately tire and then drown. These are the very fruits Delhi now consumes: suspicion, fear, and economic helplessness. Nations meet their ruin when their rulers govern not by reality, but by illusion.

In such conditions, should Modi's war-driven inner circle commit yet another folly, it would not be mere political incompetence—it would be tantamount to national suicide. Even retired Indian generals have conceded, "If India commences a new war, it shall break—and it shall be ruined." This is the mirror held up to Delhi's ruling chambers, wherein the reflection of future defeat is plainly visible. Yet, lamentably, some rulers would rather cloak the mirror than face its truth.

World politics has never been still. At times a single whisper in the halls of power reshapes continents; at others a solitary sentence from a president makes whole economies tremble. It is within such whirlpools that India's political chessboard now finds itself overturned in ways that have confounded even the Chanakyan minds of Delhi's strategists.

War—the book of history whose every page is written in blood. Before us lie analyses and declarations by observers who have highlighted the spectre of future conflicts. The chapter of war is always bitter—no matter the nation. Reports of military setbacks—whether exaggerated or grounded in inquiry—induce that chilling tremor which forces nations to think anew.

The chapter of May 2025 is no exception: a searing and shameful lesson, whose martial revelations tore away the veil India's military leadership had concealed for years. The destruction of aircraft, the global ridicule, and the reproach of powerful allies—each exposed the fissures within Delhi's military planning. And yet, astonishingly, despite defeat, India's political leadership has shown none of the humility by which wise nations salvage themselves.

(فَاعْتَبِرُوا يَا أُولِيَ الْأَبْصَارِ)

“So take heed, O you who possess insight.” (Qur’an 59:2)

The question that looms above all others today is this: Could the Modi government once again commit the folly of war? This query now circulates not only within Pakistan but among India’s own sober circles of thought. Leadership beset by internal fragility, external pressure, and economic unease will, on occasion, seek refuge in war as a means of distracting its populace from its failures. History bears grim witness that such moments mark the beginning of a nation’s ruin.



When a war lobby gains ascendancy over the institutions of state, destruction stands upon the threshold. And when wisdom departs from politics, when reason is exiled, nothing remains but the bitter tears of regret.

Military observers the world over have declared repeatedly that war in South Asia has never been a solution—only a problem uncoiled. Even India’s own retired generals have placed their seal upon this truth: that India could not defeat Pakistan even if the father of India himself were to command the battlefield. Should a new conflict ignite, they warn, the Indian state could fracture—and collapse. And with over thirty separatist movements simmering across the subcontinent, it is not unthinkable that under Modi’s heavy hand India could splinter into two dozen pieces, each insurgent movement claiming the destiny it has long imagined. The Soviet Union—a superpower—crumbled into half a dozen states; and compared to that colossus, what truly is India? These are not mere words; they are history reflected in a mirror. Wars do not enlarge nations—they only enlarge graves.

The admissions of India’s retired generals comprise not opinion but military fact. Wars are not won by slogans; they are won by reason, prudence, and foresight—three virtues now distant from India’s present political leadership. Should Mr. Modi’s war-driven coterie raise its head again, it would be not merely political folly but national suicide—its consequences etched into the lives of generations yet unborn.

Nations are not built upon the smoke of war, but upon the light of peace. We are inhabitants of a region that has already borne too much pain, too many wounds. This land cries out for wisdom, conciliation, and progress. Wars carve lines that divide nations; peace is the river that unites them in a single crossing. Leaders come and go; governments rise and fall; but a people’s life is shaped by the celestial descent of wisdom, justice, and tranquillity—and this is the message we need most urgently today.

Remember: leadership devoid of prudence, estranged from reason, drunk upon power, and willing to fling its people into the fires of war for the sake of political survival—is not a nation’s treasure, but its curse. And history tells us that wars are not won by leaders... they are lost by nations. It is not borders that burn—it is homes.

Today time calls out to us; history knocks at our door; and the future of the region rests upon our decisions—our restraint, our insight, our wisdom. War does not open roads; it closes them. Peace

alone opens the path. Prudence builds nations; wisdom preserves them. It is upon every one of us that we seek not a future in the fumes of war but in the clarity of peace. This region cannot afford conflict; it is deserving of tranquillity.

Across the world every thinker, every general, every observer repeats the same truth: war lays no new chessboards—it simply overturns the old. The decision for war is not made in sealed rooms; it is made within the conscience of a nation. And conscience whispers: embrace reason, do not stoke the flames of discord.

Allow me now to speak directly to Modi's war establishment, and to the people of India themselves: History demands a pledge from you, and the future stands before you with outstretched hands. The choice before you is stark—one of two paths: either pursue power through the tinder of conflict, or walk the earth with dignity, wisdom, and peace. Nations are not forged by the arrogance that fuels war; they are built by unity. Lands are not secured by cannon fire, but by justice. Prosperity is not born of blood, but of reason. This region does not need war—it needs peace. Not fresh wounds, but healing. Not darkness—but light. This is not an hour for war, but an hour for peace with honour. But if Mr Modi still wishes to stoke the furnaces of conflict, then let him remember: the Pakistani nation stands shoulder to shoulder with its valiant armed forces, a fortress of steel—and no tempest can break a people who rise with thunder in their voice.

Address to the Brave Youth of Balochistan

And now, within the same canvas of thought, I turn to the proud Baloch youth:

O young sons of Balochistan,

you are lamps whose flame burns higher than mountains and deeper than the ocean's breast. In your veins runs both the cool breeze of this ancient land and the fierce heat of its proud blood. Your history is like a solitary tree in the desert—centuries old—its roots set deep in patience, honour, and dignity, unbowed even in the fiercest storms.

Today the world is shifting. Powers are drawing new circles, and the tempests of time often blur the line between truth and deception. In such hours, it is the youth who are tested most. This is the moment when awareness becomes a sword, and insight a shield. Remember—nations that surrender the torch of their destiny into the hands of others are destined to wander. Only those find their path whose gaze is attuned to the heartbeat of their homeland.

O youth of Balochistan,

your land is rich in treasure; your future, your skill, your education—these are the keys that unlock the doors of generations to come. Your greatest strength is unity—that unity which turns the grains of a desert into a storm. Your power lies in creation, your thought in aspiration, and your love of peace in your identity. This land no longer needs wounds—it needs healing. And that healing is found in knowledge, in craft, in affection, and in the confidence a nation places in its own children. Your enemies seek to destroy these very qualities—not because of your weakness, but because of their own. They are besieged by more than thirty separatist movements within India itself and seek to distract their people by casting false dreams before you.

﴿وَلَا تَهِنُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَنْتُمُ الْأَعْلَوْنَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ﴾

“Do not falter, nor grieve; for you shall be the higher, if you remain steadfast in faith.” (3:139)

O youth,

You are the generation in whose breast dwell the pride of mountains, the vastness of seas, and the liberty of winds that sweep across the desert. Yours is a lineage wrought from courage, steadfast loyalty, and that fierce dignity of soul which has long lent this region its enduring honour. Yet the age before us is more intricate, swifter in its turns, and more unyielding than any your forefathers confronted. The world shifts beneath our feet; powers redraw their orbits; and global politics sketches circles whose shadows fall even upon the most distant of peoples. In such a time, a heavier burden of responsibility rests upon your shoulders: that you should act not merely from emotion, but from wisdom, discernment, and a far-seeing judgment.

If today's youth seek to be the architect of tomorrow, he must first recognise that not every whisper from beyond his borders comes with goodwill. Nations falter when doubts are sown in the hearts of their young—when they cease to trust their own compass and begin instead to move at the echo of another's call. The path you must choose will be your own: shaped by your reason, your conscience, and your commitment to the collective good. No nation ever strode forward while living at the nod of others; progress belongs only to those who take their steps with their own feet.

Young sons and daughters of Balochistan,

your homeland is rich in resources, resplendent in culture, and radiant with the promise of a luminous future. Let your hands be adorned with knowledge, your thoughts devoted to construction, and your labour become the foundation upon which generations to come may walk with confidence and security. Your strength lies not in division, but in unity—in your learning, and in the integrity of your character.

Time calls upon you to banish the shadows within, to lift your courage to the height of the sky, and to hew such a course for your homeland that tomorrow's lamps may be lit upon it. Power does not reside in the mere raising of a sword, but in opening the gates of hope for those yet unborn. Rise—for the very resolve of this soil is anchored in your stride. Rise—for your thought is the cornerstone of the future. Rise—for Balochistan seeks light from you, and light springs only from those hearts that dare to dream and labour to bring those dreams to life. Your land asks of you illumination, and illumination belongs only to those who behold the future with the eyes of hope.

This region can no longer endure fresh discord, further estrangement, nor the machinations of strangers. It bears many wounds already; now it yearns for balm—for the balm of knowledge, of skill, of dialogue, of peace, and of that respect which one human being owes another.

You are the generation that, will it so, may raise Balochistan to a new exemplar of progress, harmony, and self-assurance. In every age, the mightiest youth is not he who conquers enemies, but the one who conquers the fear within, the darkness of ignorance, and the turmoil of disunity. Time summons you to take wisdom as your companion, to claim the future as your field of endeavour, and to become for your people that lamp which brightens the path ahead.

Sat, December 13, 2025

Iqbal's Thought in the West — Its Necessity and Significance

(A Historical, Scholarly, and Literary Lecture)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This gathering of ours is not merely an intellectual symposium; it is, in its deeper essence, a spiritual sojourn. The flame of thought we hold aloft today belongs to a man whose voice cast its radiance across centuries of darkness—a voice whose verse breathed warmth into the hearts of subjugated nations, and whose ideas sent tremors through the grand halls of Western scholarship, compelling new shoots of inquiry to emerge. He is the sage whom the world reveres as Dr Muhammad Iqbal—poet, philosopher, and voyager of the realm of Truth.

In convening today, we contemplate a mind so luminous, a spirit so incandescent, and a philosopher-poet so profound that speaking of him is not merely to recall a chapter of history, but to invoke a charter for the intellectual epochs yet unborn. Iqbal—the poet who lit lamps of hope amid the decline of nations, who shook the hollow foundations of decaying civilisations, and who awakened within the human conscience a reverberation whose echo has not faded to this day.

Iqbal's greatness does not rest in the simple truth that he stands among the titans of Urdu and Persian letters; rather, it lies in his unifying vision—a rare capacity to weave philosophy, history, religion, politics, civilisation, and spirituality into a single, compelling tapestry. His writings are no mere literary utterances but a summons—a call that rouses the latent potentialities slumbering within the human soul.

He once proclaimed:

سہزار خوف ہو لیکن زباں ہو دل کی رفیق

یہی رہا ہے ازل سے قلندروں کا طریق

A thousand terrors may assail you yet let your tongue remain faithful to your heart;

For such has ever been the way of the free-spirited and the brave.

This is not merely the bold cry of a poet; it is a manifesto for the renaissance of a civilisation.

Why does the West need Iqbal today?

At first glance, the question seems deceptively simple; yet beneath it lies the rumbling of an entire civilisational upheaval. Its answer is not confined to the realms of literature or philosophy alone; it is embedded in the long, troubled arc of human history.

The West—despite its mastery of science, technology, and political dominance—finds itself wrestling with a profound intellectual void, a spiritual disquiet, and a civilisational lightness of being. In such a moment of existential fragility, Iqbal's voice does not echo like some distant desert wail; it rises rather as a beacon—an illuminated minaret calling humanity back to its primordial essence.

Indeed, to inquire why the West needs Iqbal is to listen to the murmurs of history itself.

There was a time when Europe bore upon its shoulders the weight of Greek thought; then came the long shadow of the Christian Church; and subsequently, science, with imperial confidence, lulled

religion into a deep slumber. British imperial might reigned supreme, Germany soared in the realm of philosophy, while France became the laboratory of political doctrines.

Iqbal surveyed this entire intellectual odyssey—not merely observing it, but discerning its very soul. He understood well that the seeds of both Western ascent and Western ruin lay buried

within the soil of its materialism.

He stood, thus, at the confluence of East and West—
a sage who could gaze simultaneously upon both horizons.

Iqbal's Encounter with Europe

When Iqbal arrived in Europe, the continent was intoxicated by the triumphs of the Industrial Revolution. Man had been reduced to a cog, and the soul relegated to a discarded metaphor. Human worth was measured not by dignity but by profit and power. Freedom was proclaimed from podiums, yet the spirit remained enchained.

Into this atmosphere, Iqbal did not merely step as a traveller; he descended as an interpreter of civilisations. As he observed:

“I did not find the true soul of Europe in its libraries, but in its marketplaces—where man was valued less than the merchandise he sold.”

Again, and again Iqbal lamented that Western civilisation had lost the very idea of Man—that being whom the Qur’ān describes as God’s vicegerent upon earth:

﴿وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً﴾

“And when your Lord said to the angels: Indeed, I am placing upon the earth a vicegerent.” (2:30)

It was this loss that Iqbal diagnosed with prophetic clarity:

بے ٹھیک ہے تجھ کو پرستارِ مکاں کچھ بھی نہیں

فکرِ انساں ہے مگر تیری نگہبانی سے محروم

You may claim mastery over space, yet you remain estranged from guarding the destiny of Man.

Here Iqbal does not merely critique the West; he offers it a path—a return to selfhood, love, spiritual ascent, and the centrality of the human being.

The West Today: A Civilisation in Disquiet

To understand why Iqbal’s thought is essential to the modern West, three points are indispensable:
Spiritual Vacuum

Civilisational Disorientation

The Solitary Individual and the Existential Crisis

Technology has strengthened the hands of man but weakened his heart.

Science has unlocked the universe but sealed the spirit.

Democracy has granted freedom but withheld purpose.

Capitalism has multiplied wealth but diminished human connection.

Iqbal captured this malaise with surgical precision:

نظر کو خیرہ کرتی ہے چمک تہذیبِ حاضر کی

یہ صناعی مگر جھوٹے نگوں کی ریزہ کاری ہے

The glitter of modern civilisation dazzles the eye;

Yet its craftsmanship is but the delicate inlay of counterfeit jewels.

This is no mere Eastern poet's rebuke; it is a critique of that very inner crisis which Western scholars today themselves concede—

that the West has progress but no peace,

wealth but no affection,

power but no purpose,

freedom but no spirit.

Iqbal restores the human being to the centre of the cosmos;

he rekindles the soul;

he moralises civilisation;

he reconciles reason with love.

For Iqbal, this crisis is ultimately the crisis of the forgotten human being—and it is from here that the West's need for Iqbal begins.

He warned:

تمہاری تہذیب اپنے خنجر سے آپ ہی خود کشی کرے گی

جو شانِ نازک پہ آشیانہ بنے گا، ناپائیدار ہو گا

Your civilisation shall one day perish by its own dagger;

For the nest built on a fragile branch can never endure.

When Iqbal penned these lines, Europe was still dressing the wounds of the First World War. Yet today, as the West stands amidst storms of political convulsion, cultural collisions, social disorientation, and the silent desolation of youth's inner loneliness, his words bear an almost prophetic lustre.

1 — The Cure for Spiritual Thirst

(a) The West's Spiritual Drought and Iqbal's Doctrine of the Self

Having strayed far from religion, the West now finds itself wandering in a desert where reason remains intact, but the heart lies lost. Its estrangement from faith has left the human being solitary and inwardly famished. The decline of the Church weakened the spiritual citadel; philosophy could not replace it; psychology reduced the human being to a laboratory specimen; and art, in its modernist impulse, sought refuge in abstraction rather than reality.

Against this backdrop, Iqbal's concept of **khudī**—the Self—enters the Western mind like a fresh, vitalising breeze.

Iqbal laments:

یہی ہے رُخِ خزاں، اور یہی ہے رُخِ بہار

نہ خدا کی جستجو، نہ مجھے اپنی خبر

Whether autumn's face or spring's—

Neither the search for God remains, nor knowledge of one's own self.

And then he offers the antidote:

خودی کو کر بلند اتنا کہ ہر تقدیر سے پہلے

خدا بندے سے خود پوچھے، بتا تیری رضا کیا ہے

Cultivate thy Self to such heights

That before every decree,

God Himself shall ask thee: What is thy desire?

This is no mere verse; it is a response that gathers the scattered anxieties of existentialism into a single, throbbing answer.



Iqbal holds the key to this thirst.

His philosophy of **khudī** re-establishes the human being at the centre of existence—alive, conscious, and tethered to his Creator.

Thus, Western youth, professors, and thinkers hear Iqbal today with new attentiveness; for when man loses his origin, the first question that rises like smoke from a burning soul is: *Who am I?* For such hearts, Iqbal's words open a new cosmos.

2 — The West's Social Crisis and Iqbal's Moral Order

The family has fractured; generations have become strangers to one another; and man, now seeks companionship in machines. Capitalism has drawn the household into the ruthless logic of the marketplace.

Witnessing this, Iqbal warns:

جلال پادشاہی ہو کہ جمہوری تماشا ہو

جدا ہو دیں سیاست سے تو رہ جاتی ہے جنگیں بی

Be it imperial majesty or democratic spectacle—

If politics divorces itself from faith, tyranny is all that remains.

For Iqbal, a society is built only when the individual is self-aware, rooted in moral foundations, animated by purpose, and spiritually alive. These, indeed, are the four pillars the West desperately lacks today.

The collapse of the family unit in the West is among the great tragedies of modern history. Secularism and materialism have torn the moral fabric; capitalism has turned human beings into mere instruments of utility. In such times, Iqbal offers not nostalgia, but reconstruction—rebuilding society on human, moral, and spiritual lines.

He reminds me:

نگاہ بلند، سخن دلنواز، جاں پر سوز

یہی ہے رختِ سفر میر کارواں کے لیے

Lofty vision, eloquent speech, and a soul ablaze—

This is the rightful provision of the leader of any caravan.

This triad is not simply poetic flourish; it is an architecture upon which any civilisation—including the Western one—may be renewed.

3 — Intellectual Resistance Against Imperialism

One of Iqbal's extraordinary achievements is that he stood before the intellectual citadels of the West and, with remarkable dignity, exposed the fissures within Western thought. He challenged Western intellectual imperialism **without rancour, without hostility, without bitterness**—speaking instead with serenity, truth, and civilisational poise.

He declares:

نہ ستاروں میں ہے پنہاں، نہ تقدیر میں ہے

جو ہمارے ہاتھ میں ہے، وہ ہماری ہمت ہے

Neither in the stars nor in destiny lies the secret of our fate;

What lies within our grasp is our own resolve.

This was not a call for Asia or Africa alone. Today, even within the West, those communities crushed by capitalism's iron grip are finding strength in Iqbal's defiant yet dignified voice.

Iqbal's Standing in the Western Academy

Wherever one goes—colleges, libraries, conferences—one encounters conversations on Iqbal. It is no surprise that Oxford, Harvard, the Sorbonne, Berlin, Vienna, and Cambridge now host dissertations, seminars, and courses on him. His poetry adorns Western shelves; his ideas inspire Western minds.

The British scholar **Raymond Dawson** observed:

"Iqbal is the voice of Eastern revival."

The German philosopher **Annemarie Schimmel** remarked:

"He is one of the few poets whose words seem to speak beyond centuries."

And truly, such a voice is no ordinary voice—it is a melody that traverses eras.

Iqbal did not merely *see* Europe; he *read* its mind. He admired its strengths but did not shy from exposing its flaws. He once wrote:

"Europe astonished me with its face, yet I did not remain heedless of its heart."

Thus, Western thinkers regard him as a critic who was scrupulously just—lavishing neither blind praise nor unfair condemnation.

Iqbal — The Voice That Points to the Future

Today, humanity wields enormous power yet stands bereft of direction. We stand at the threshold of an age shaped by artificial intelligence, genomics, robotics, and nuclear capabilities. The question before mankind is no longer: *What can we do?*

The question is: *What ought we to do?*

This is the question the West has not yet answered—

but Iqbal answered it a century ago:

عقل عیار ہے، سو بھیں بدل لیتی ہے

عشق بے چارہ نہ ملا ہے، نہ زاہد، نہ حکیم

Reason is cunning, assuming a hundred guises;

Love, poor love—neither the mystic nor the scholar has yet truly met it.

Iqbal does not repudiate reason; he seeks **the harmony of reason and love**.

For intellect alone cannot guide civilisation; spiritual consciousness must accompany it.

Here I add, by your permission, a Qur'ānic verse whose essence resonates profoundly with Iqbal's message:

﴿ أَفَمَنْ يَمْشِي مُكِبًّا عَلَىٰ وَجْهِهِ أَهْدَىٰ أَمَّنْ يَمْشِي سَوِيًّا عَلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴾

"Is he who walks with his face bowed down more rightly guided, or he who walks upright upon a straight path?" (67:22)

If the West grasps this equilibrium—of intellect wedded to spirit, of power bound to ethics—then it may not only overcome its present crisis but offer humanity a new horizon.

For Iqbal, true civilisation is born only when **knowledge and spirit walk hand in hand**. In this synthesis lies the future of humanity itself.

Iqbal offers the modern West five cardinal teachings—principles not merely for an age, but for the long pilgrimage of civilisation itself.

First, that Man is *the very purpose* of the cosmos; he is not a stray particle abandoned to the void, but the **vicegerent of God upon earth**, entrusted with meaning, will, and moral imagination.

Second, that freedom without a transcendent purpose degenerates into ruin, and liberty severed from ethics becomes but a polished illusion—fair to behold, yet hollow within.

Third, that science is indeed indispensable, yet its surest compass is the spirit. A civilisation armed with science but denuded of spiritual anchorage is like a ship empowered by mighty engines but deprived of a rudder—*a peril to itself and others*.

As the Qur'an declares:

﴿ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ ﴾

"Verily, in the remembrance of God do hearts find their rest." (Qur'an 13:28)

Fourth, democracy without ethics is but a nuanced deceit; capitalism and socialism alike remain maimed without a conception of man at the centre. Capitalism unrestrained descends into tyranny, and socialism without liberty sinks into a subtler bondage.

Fifth, that life is the name of constant becoming—of movement, striving, discovery, renewal; an unending ascent, a ceaseless evolution. For Iqbal, life is not a static inheritance but a task, a summons, a perpetual rising.

It is in this spirit that he proclaims:

ستاروں سے آگے جہاں اور بھی ہیں

ابھی عشق کے امتحاں اور بھی ہیں

"Beyond the stars lie realms yet undiscovered;

And Love has many trials still to come."

This is a message to the West: progress has not reached its terminus; its direction, not its velocity, is the true question of the age. These lessons are the inheritance of every civilisation, yet the West stands today in greater need of them than any other. For the first time in its history, its **intellectual vanguard openly confesses**:

The West stands at a crossroads. It has acquired science, yet not tranquillity; freedom, yet not belonging; wealth, yet not affection; power, yet not purpose. Iqbal is the very name of that purpose. He returns man to his rightful centrality; he breathes life back into the spirit; he restores ethics to civilisation; he shows reason and love how to walk hand in hand.

Once more he reminds me:

ستاروں سے آگے جہاں اور بھی ہیں

ابھی عشق کے امتحاں اور بھی ہیں

—a declaration that the journey of progress is far from over, but its compass must be set aright.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Iqbal is not merely the poet of the East, nor is his thought the private inheritance of Muslims alone. He is a poet of humanity. His gaze is not confined to the misted horizons of the earth; it extends to the vast architecture of the heavens.

His anguish is global; his vision, cosmic; his message, timeless.

The hour has come for the West to recognise Iqbal not merely as the “*Voice of the East*,” but as an “**Architect of the Human Future**.”

Let us close with a few of his verses—verses that are less poetry and more revelation of destiny:

کھول آنکھ، زمیں دیکھ، فلک دیکھ، فضا دیکھ

مشرق سے ابھرتے ہوئے سورج کو ذرا دیکھ

اس جلوہ بے پردہ کو پردوں میں چھپا دیکھ

ایام جدائی کے ستم دیکھ، جفا دیکھ

Open your eyes—behold the earth, the heavens, the boundless air;

Gaze upon the sun rising from the Orient’s rim;

Contemplate how this unveiled splendour veils itself behind its own radiance;

Witness the cruelties of days of separation, and the rigours of love’s long exile.

And elsewhere he commands:

نیا زمانہ، نئے صبح و شام پیدا کر

خودی میں ڈوب کے ضربِ کلیم پیدا کر

Fashion a new age—summon new dawns and new dusks into being;

Plunge into the depths of the self, and from its crucible forge the thunderbolt of Moses.

And then this thunderbolt:

اگر ہو عشق تو ہے کفر بھی مسلمانی

نہ ہو تو مردِ مسلمان بھی کافر و زندیق

If Love be present, even unbelief is touched with the grace of faith;

But if Love be absent, then even a professing Muslim is but a heretic and a wanderer astray.

The West today stands in dire need of these very truths—and Iqbal is the name of that truth. This is not merely the wisdom of the earth; it is the counsel of the heavens. And perhaps that is why the West has never needed him more than it does at this moment in history.

16 December 2025

Tolling Bells or Banners of Resolve?

A New Chapter in Indo-Pak History Beneath the Shadows of Pahalgam

When history lifts her pen, she does not merely string together a rhyme of events. Rather, she casts into prose the very pulse of a trembling age. And when the perfumed tresses of history bear the scent of blood, and the brow of politics wears the furrow of gunpowder, then even the smallest tremor may shift the course of destiny.

The Pahalgam incident, far from being a mere military skirmish, unveiled strata of tension lying deep beneath the surface. In one explosive moment, it thrust India and Pakistan—two nuclear-armed neighbours—once again upon the perilous ledge of escalation, where a single word, a solitary bullet, or a flag raised in haste might tremble the very foundations of global peace. This was no mere exchange of fire across tense borders; it was a season of smouldering minds, quickened heartbeats, and narratives forged in the crucible of conflict.

Each point in this account is not merely reportage; it is an echo chamber of the past, a chronicle bearing the weight of bygone reckonings.

At the dawn of 2025, a four-day confrontation unfolded—a tempest that summoned not only the martial will of Pakistan's armed forces but redefined their strategic persona. No longer confined to reactive defence, the Pakistani military revealed itself as a well-honed strategic organism—coherent, calculated, and confident. This was not without precedent. The wars of 1965 and 1999 stand as solemn testaments to Pakistan's capacity to withstand and repulse an adversary vastly superior in numerical strength.

India's encounter this time was with a foe that wielded speed, surprise, and tactical sophistication with unsettling dexterity. In military parlance, it was an exhibition of "shocking operational finesse"—a manoeuvre that caught not only Delhi but Tel Aviv and their allies off balance. It echoed the strategic surprise deployed by Egypt and Syria in the 1973 Yom Kippur War—a calculated defiance against superior forces.

In this recent clash, the Pakistani military exhibited what often resides only in the abstract of military doctrine—an execution of textbook brilliance. Though lacking numerical superiority, the force displayed a theatre-wide presence, jolting Indian expectations. This strategic resonance birthed internal repercussions too, resculpting public and political narratives.

General Asim Munir, once vilified amid the haze of political tumult, emerged as a national icon, a figure forged in the fire of operational success. Under his command, Pakistan not only thwarted hostile incursions but advanced its diplomatic message with precision and poise.

In this geopolitical theatre, China's doctrine—predicated not on conquest, but calibrated assertion—stood in silent harmony. Eschewing direct confrontation, China prefers to project strength through its allies. In this calculus, Pakistan has become its most potent strategic asset. The implications of this episode echo far beyond the confines of Delhi and Islamabad. Already engaged in icy contestation

with India in the mists of Ladakh, China views Pakistan's military agility as corroborative testimony in its dossier of deterrence.

Whether confronting Taiwan's American-backed aspirations or asserting naval supremacy in the South China Sea, China now emerges as a "military-technological power"—and Pakistan's example serves as both shield and sword in this broader campaign.

China's regional ambitions, seeking to translate imperial reverie into geopolitical reality, find fortification in Pakistan's martial posture. Amidst simmering tensions with India in Galwan and Ladakh, the Pakistani response—resolute, seasoned, and swift—offered Beijing not merely reassurance, but elevation: a strategic partner whose capacity lends substance to Chinese ascendancy. In the shifting sands of global power, Pakistan's defiant resolve undergirds the hypothesis that Indian military supremacy in South Asia is now but a shadow of a bygone illusion.

From the Belt and Road Initiative to CPEC, China's corridors of commerce are slowly transforming into corridors of calibrated control. In this recent engagement, Pakistan's alertness has handed China a defensive "Claymore"—a weapon not forged in aggression but activated in deterrence. It sends an unequivocal signal to both Delhi and Washington: Asia is no longer unipolar.

It is the same triangle that framed the 1971 overture between the United States, China, and Pakistan, when Henry Kissinger traversed the diplomatic tightrope via Islamabad. The configuration remains; the costumes have changed. Thus, this clash is not an isolated border flare-up—it is a mirror held to the evolving theatre of global alignment.

India, having long adopted a policy of diplomatic distance from Pakistan, now finds itself reluctantly drawn back into the vortex, compelled to answer in direct and discomfiting terms. This is a strategic miscalculation with echoes of the Nehruvian lapse in 1962, when China's blitzkrieg compelled India into hasty alliances and defensive diplomacy.

In politics, words are weapons, and narratives are missiles—targeting not terrain but hearts and minds. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi invoked "Sindoor" in fevered oratory—his chosen metaphor to arouse the nationalist deity—Pakistan took to the global stage with composure, reminding the world that it is Delhi which marches the region to the brink.

Modi's rhetorical flourish—"My veins run with Sindoor... eat in peace or face my bullet"—was not mere campaign bombast. It was a slap across the fragile face of nuclear security in South Asia, weaponising faith for votes and inflaming the very fuse he ought to defuse. But history is neither forgetful nor forgiving. It has chronicled such bluster before—and has consigned its authors to the shadows.

Such incendiary, Bazaari language (Morally depraved language)—laced with threat, stripped of statesmanship—is not only a violation of diplomatic etiquette, but a defiance of the very spirit of the United Nations Charter.

In an already volatile region, such rhetoric is not simply provocative—it is perilous. The global press, diplomatic circuits, and peace-seeking nations are left aghast. That a nuclear-armed leader should serenade war in such cavalier tones is not merely concerning—it is profoundly alarming. A Dirge of Diplomacy or the Drumbeat of Dominion?

Embers of Hatred in the Furnace of Rhetoric

History, though replete with defiant oratory and emboldened declarations, seldom bears witness to the transformation of political stagecraft into a theatre of personal vengeance. Even Indira Gandhi—whose rhetoric in 1971 brimmed with resolve amidst the crucible of East Pakistan—maintained, despite her severity, a discernible restraint from descending into the perilous vocabulary of incitement. By contrast, the discourse now issuing from the lips of Narendra Modi has unmoored itself from statesmanlike decorum and cast anchor in the turbulent seas of *Hindutva*, egoism, and visceral hate.

Modi's invocations, now cloaked in messianic fervour and uttered with the theatrical cadence of a demagogue, have resurrected the ghost of Gujarat—a sobriquet he bears not as a badge of honour but a scar of infamy. His infamy, earned during the pogroms of 2002, lingers as a dark blot upon India's democratic fabric, and his recent utterances—echoing with bullets and blood—signal a drift toward fanaticism with apocalyptic overtones.

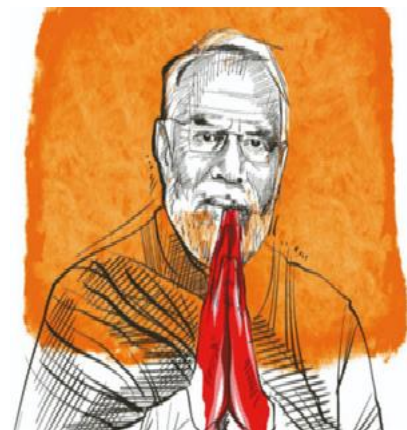
His threats, couched as they are in electioneering zeal, betray a mind wherein nuclear brinkmanship and personal megalomania converge. It is not merely a failure of diplomacy, but a harbinger of danger to the global order itself. That such incendiary rhetoric may issue from the high office of a nuclear state demands not only censure but alarm. One does not wave the atomic sceptre in jest.

Amidst this crescendo of nationalist jingoism, India's domestic political actors have sounded a discordant note. The Indian National Congress, no longer mute in the shadow of BJP's dominance, has decried the collapse of India's diplomatic edifice—once a pillar of global admiration—now reduced to the rubble of impulsivity and belligerence. Their critique unearths a truth often shrouded in patriotic banners: that foreign policy failures are but reflections of a deeper rot within.

The events of 2002 cast a long shadow; once again, India finds itself beleaguered not by enemy arms alone but by the demons of its own creation. History, it seems, is destined to revisit Delhi with a grim reminder that moral erosion precedes strategic collapse.

Pakistan and India, both custodians of nuclear arsenals, now stand upon a precipice. The ghosts of Kargil loom large. Then, as now, it required the sober intercession of the international community to draw the swords back into their sheaths. But who shall play the peacemaker now, as clouds gather again over the subcontinent?

This is no mere clash of iron and fire. The aerial dogfights between French Rafales and Chinese J-10Cs symbolise more than martial posturing—they represent an ideological schism: East versus West, dependency versus sovereignty, automation versus audacity. From



the skies, the cacophony of airstrikes may sound alike, but beneath lies a tale of diverging destinies. The Indo-French alliance, shrouded in commercial pomp, finds itself rattled not by superior firepower but by unexpected resistance. For in the gales of war, it is not always the most expensive blade that cuts deepest.

When Israeli-made Harop kamikaze drones—symbols of military precision and technological supremacy—fell like dead moths into Pakistani soil, the illusion of invincibility crumbled. Pakistan not only intercepted and downed scores of these “ghost drones,” but astonishingly managed to jam and capture several intact—transforming once-feared spectres of destruction into trophies of triumph.

The Israeli military-industrial complex, long emboldened by its own mythos, received a wound not just to its weaponry, but to its pride. For these drones, touted as harbingers of fourth-generation warfare—where enemies are unseen, and machines whisper the dirges of destruction—had been humbled.

This theatre of modern conflict, where men cede the stage to machines and stealth replaces valour, now plays out over the subcontinent. The rogue path of BrahMos missiles, the incursion of unmanned predators, the contest of jamming technologies—all form the chessboard of future warfare, where each piece is coded and each move digitally ordained.

In the realm of military science, the battle is no longer measured merely by gunfire, but by electromagnetic footprints and satellite whispers. NATO pioneered this doctrine in the deserts of Iraq in 1991; today, South Asia adapts and adopts.

It was during the famed Balakot skirmish that the Pakistan Air Force carved its name afresh in aerial history. With clinical precision, it felled Indian jets and defended its skies with poise and professionalism. Independent observers, satellite evidence, and international reportage corroborated the toll. That humiliation was but a prelude to what has now unfolded.

Modi’s propagandist euphoria—replete with boasts of Lahore’s capture and Karachi’s fall, with imagined arrests of generals and ministers—was torn asunder by the retaliatory sweep of Pakistani airpower. The illusions, conjured through a pliant media, were shattered like brittle glass. Rafales, once brandished as symbols of air superiority, were consigned to their fiery grave on Indian soil.

The debacle was so undeniable that even Modi’s staunchest allies—Israel and the United States—were compelled to intervene. So desperate was the Indian overture that appeals were made to Washington, and pressure exerted upon Paris. Only then did Dassault, the French aircraft manufacturer, reluctantly admit to the catastrophic loss of its aircraft. In war, truth is often the first casualty—but sometimes, reality breaks through even the thickest fog of lies.

The Last Echoes Before the Storm: A Churchillian Reflection on the South Asian Skies

In the veiled theatre of nocturnal combat, where silence is rent by supersonic howls and destinies are shaped not in parliaments but in the firmament, the subcontinent bore witness—once again—to a spectacle both unprecedented and ominous. On that charged evening of May the 6th, as the world slumbered in uneasy ignorance, over a hundred fighter aircraft from India and Pakistan took

to the skies, composing what Air Vice Marshal Aurangzeb of the Pakistan Air Force described as “*a beyond visual range engagement the likes of which aviation history has never recorded.*”

It was a clash not merely of machines, but of militaries, of doctrines, and—more grimly—of national narratives. Forty Pakistani aircraft—JF-17s, F-16s, and J-10Cs—stood in calculated formation against seventy Indian warplanes, including the much-vaunted Rafales. In a battlefield no broader than the heavens and no deeper than human resolve, the rules of engagement were rewritten mid-flight. According to Aurangzeb, India’s deployment of weaponry was met with a surgical counterstrike, and while the Pakistani arsenal included surface-to-air kills, the nature of ordnance such as the Chinese-manufactured PL-15 was tactfully left undisclosed.

In the theatre of geopolitical symbolism, this was not mere aerial choreography. Pakistan’s restraint—engaging decisively yet deliberately avoiding escalation—spoke volumes. “India once claimed,” said the Air Vice Marshal, “that if they had Rafales during Balakot, the outcome would have differed. So, we gave the Rafales their moment—and buried them in their own skies.”

Three Rafale jets were reportedly downed near Bhatinda, Jammu, and Srinagar, while additional losses included MiG-29s and Su-30s. In an era dominated by propaganda, where truth is often garbed in nationalist theatrics, the evidence—satellite imagery, independent analysts, and leaked cockpit footage—stood as stubborn sentinels against India’s orchestrated silence. Even the Indian Air Chief, in an unusually candid admission, acknowledged “some losses under review”—a phrase heavy with reluctant truth.

And so, the ghost of Balakot loomed large. Then, as now, the myth of Indian aerial supremacy was undone by Pakistan’s precision and poise. The legend of M. M. Alam, whose 1965 heroics are etched in the marble of martial history, found its modern echo. Western defence publications, such as *Jane’s Defence Weekly* and *The New York Times*, begrudgingly confirmed: the Pakistan Air Force had not merely defended airspace—it had reclaimed strategic altitude. But the battle in the skies is never untethered from the battle on the ground.

The United States, that hesitant guardian of global equilibrium, once again finds itself playing both fireman and arms dealer. While Washington vetoes UN resolutions curbing Israeli aggression, it supplies India with advanced satellite data, strategic weaponry, and unspoken support under the doctrine of “strategic containment of China.” In this great geopolitical ledger, Israel too sees profit: flooding Indian arsenals with high-tech munitions while drawing closer to Pakistan’s borders than ever before.

Thus, the echoes of the Cold War resound anew. The same playbook once used to arm Pakistan as a bulwark against Soviet encroachment now re-emerges—only this time with India cast as the West’s regional proxy. Yet the price may be steep. For each Rafale sold and each drone launched, the subcontinent inches closer to an irreversible polarity. If Washington persists in casting India as its Asian rampart, it should not feign surprise when Pakistan steps fully into Beijing’s strategic embrace.

And here lies the crux of our age: will South Asia learn from its annals of agony?

Or will it, like some cursed oracle, repeat its tragedies with poetic precision—each skirmish a stanza in the elegy of peace? For in these lands, where saints once preached harmony and poets painted unity with ink drawn from the soul, the new anthem threatens to be composed in the dissonance of missiles and the dirges of martyrs.

History teaches us that nations are not merely made by their armies, but by their ability to rise above them. True strength, as Burke might remind us, lies not in the clenched fist but in the calibrated voice of reason. Diplomacy is not the art of concession but of civilised defiance. And leadership is not he who strikes first, but he who knows when not to strike at all.

This region, so often bled, may yet bloom—if its leaders would choose dialogue over doctrine, civility over supremacy, and the ink of treaties over the blood of innocents.

Let the camps of enmity be folded away, and the lamps of peace lit anew. For when blood stains the vermilion, even the purest prayer is refused. The choice remains ours. The question no longer is, “Who will win the war?” but rather, “Who will dare to prevent it?”

—Let wisdom, not wrath, author the next chapter of this land’s destiny.

But why do countless peace-lovers like me fear that the hopes attached to ridding this beautiful world of the infamous enemies of peace are dying? But the question is, what message will we leave for our future generations?

Friday 19 December 2025

Threat, Silence, and the Verdict of History

Power, Hubris, and Moral Decline

There are regions on the political horizon of the world that seem condemned by fate to be tested at every turning of history. South Asia is one such land—a terrain where borders are no longer mere cartographic lines but living metaphors of ideologies, creeds, and a blood-stained chronicle of collective emotions. In such a theatre, when the head of a state—openly partisan, ideologically inflamed, and vested not only with supreme executive authority but also with a nuclear arsenal—publicly threatens to “gun down” millions of Pakistani citizens from a political platform, the matter ceases to be one of ethics or diplomacy alone. It becomes a question that strikes at the conscience of human civilisation itself: international law, at the moral legitimacy of global institutions, and at the very architecture of world order.

This recent utterance by Narendra Modi, echoed from the soil of Gujarat, is not merely an election slogan shouted into the wind. It is the manifestation of an ideological frenzy—one that stands ashamed before the mirror of its own history yet seeks survival by incessantly provoking imagined enemies beyond its borders. Such provocations can no longer be dismissed with irony or laughter, for they amount to a conscious attempt to gamble with the future of hundreds of millions of human beings living under the shadow of two nuclear-armed states.

When, at a public rally in Gujarat, the Indian Prime Minister threatened the citizens of Pakistan with annihilation by bullets, he did more than violate the elementary norms of international diplomatic conduct. He exposed a psychological landscape that is actively invested in erasing the very possibility of peace in the region. This threat—standing in stark defiance of morality and human rights—does not merely signify a belligerent temperament; it lays bare the internal political condition of India, where aggression is increasingly being commodified as electoral capital. Such a statement, fundamentally hostile to universal human values, articulates the worldview of a mind enthralled by division and hostility, and therefore poses a grave danger to regional stability and global security alike.

In truth, behind this violent rhetoric lies a wounded conscience, driving its bearer towards the darker arts of political deceit. Reduced to bluster and bombast in pursuit of votes, the Indian leadership now confronts a reality that the world has already begun to recognise: that in the land where nationalist arrogance roars within parliamentary halls, and where power in New Delhi sits draped in the garments of pride and entitlement, the much-vaunted Rafale aircraft—upon which the nation’s treasury squandered both clay and gold—fell ignominiously from the skies, reduced to fire and wreckage before the resolute Pakistani pilots who bore the storm with iron resolve.

When the French manufacturer acknowledged the loss of three such aircraft, a profound silence descended upon the ramparts of Delhi’s pride—like a black standard unfurled not upon the Red Fort of Agra, but within the collective psyche of a wounded state, where tears replaced triumph.

The same Air Marshal A. K. Bharti, whose words once thundered like gathering storms, now found himself offering the pallid consolation that “losses are normal in war”—as though defeat could be

wrapped in the silk of semantics, as though bleeding could be concealed with a handkerchief of words. Yet history possesses a sharper gaze: it sees the wound, it hears the suppressed scream.

The Pakistani falcons, whose flight remained within their own sovereign skies, yet whose steel-tipped resolve carved through hostile airspace, were not merely an exhibition of tactical skill. They stood as the embodied wisdom of Sino-Pak strategic coordination. This victory was not solely a testament to Pakistan's courage; it was an unspoken declaration of China's commercial foresight and military acumen.

Another cause behind Modi's fire-breathing rhetoric lies in the embers of a ceasefire where Chinese statecraft quietly placed a spark. While India's gaze remained fixed westward upon Pakistan, Beijing altered the nomenclature of twenty-seven locations in Arunachal Pradesh into Chinese and Tibetan names—sending a message as old as power itself: *maps are not made on paper alone; they are engraved in minds, claims, and the force of will*. This was no linguistic exercise, but a literary proclamation of sovereignty. By the time India turned eastward, the mountains bore unfamiliar names, valleys had grown estranged, and the map was no longer entirely its own.

India today finds itself hemmed in by three walls on three fronts—China, Pakistan, and Nepal—three tectonic plates of tension within which it remains trapped like a nation dreaming under illusion. Nepal, small though it may be, has cracked the fortress of Indian arrogance through sheer self-respect. Pakistan is no longer merely a military reality but an intellectual and strategic force; China, a civilisation whose strength is cultural as much as it is martial. It is as though a fragile moth has wandered into the lairs of three lions, mistaking them for passing clouds of the night. Such, indeed, is the present condition of a defeated Modi.

The backdrop to this statement is a region fraught with complexity and strain—where aerial skirmishes, border tensions, and psychological warfare persist between India and Pakistan. The recent destruction of French-built Rafale jets, facilitated by Pakistan's military strategy and Sino-Pak cooperation, has carried India's military and political predicament to an unprecedented threshold.

Modi's threat emerges from this very context: a moment where India's attempt to parade its military might like a crown jewel has collapsed into humiliation on the global stage, while simultaneously exposing profound disarray and instability within its domestic and foreign policy calculus.

This aggressive rhetoric arises in a region where tensions are at their zenith, where the echoes of missiles and dogfights have recently been heard across contested skies. India's prior silence was not born of restraint, but of shock—Modi had not anticipated such a decisive response from Pakistan. His latest speech has torn away the veil from that silence, revealing an unvarnished narrative of aggression. This contradiction—between silence and threat—constitutes one of the oldest tragedies in international politics. Is silence truly the emblem of victory, or merely the curtain drawn over defeat?

In global affairs, silence is often mistaken for wisdom and patience. Yet history teaches that wisdom succeeds only when it is timely, proportionate, and fruitful. If an adversary trespasses your borders and you cannot even muster a verbal response, such silence is not prudence—it is cowardice.

Before this statement, India repeatedly chose silence in the face of Chinese military advances along disputed borders—a silence that signified not strategic foresight but fear and uncertainty. In contrast, Pakistan consolidated its position through calibrated military action and diplomatic engagement, while China translated its territorial claims into tangible realities, reshaping the political geometry of the region.

History has taught us time and again that wisdom lies in discerning the moment and responding in a manner that leads towards victory. Diplomatic silence may be portrayed as strength, but when it degenerates into paralysis and incompetence before an adversary, it ceases to be courage and becomes nothing more than timidity.

India's muted response to Chinese incursions stands as evidence that such silence is rooted in weakness and a poverty of strategy. Meanwhile, Indian media and military circles—ever eager to issue bellicose proclamations against Pakistan—remain conspicuously mute on China, thereby laying bare their intellectual confusion and strategic incoherence.

At this juncture, the Qur'anic reminder resonates with enduring relevance:

وَلَا تَهِنُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَنْتُمْ الْأَعْلَوْنَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

"So do not weaken, nor grieve; and you shall prevail if you are true in faith." (Āl 'Imrān 3:139)

And elsewhere:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ

(Ar-Ra'd 13:11)

"Indeed, God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves."

These verses speak not merely to faith, but to the immutable laws of history: that arrogance invites decline, that bluster cannot conceal weakness, and that power divorced from moral restraint ultimately devours itself.

Within the architecture of Indian political thought and strategic conduct, one discerns the lingering hues of ancient expediencies—most conspicuously the shadow of Chanakya's doctrine. It is a worldview in

which power is instantly venerated, bowed to, and sanctified, while weakness is subjected to relentless scrutiny and, when expedient, ruthlessly broken. Operating under this principle, India's civilisational imagination accommodates a pantheon of innumerable deities—rats and serpents among them—yet when these gods falter, their own worshippers do not hesitate to shatter them without remorse. It is for this reason that India's religious and political landscape appears perpetually contradictory and entangled: a land of millions of gods, yet one where devotees stand ever ready to revolt against their own idols.

Narendra Modi's recourse to religious rituals and ceremonial worship in defence of the Rafale aircraft—despite their manifest failure—reveals precisely this opportunistic impulse: a posture of submission before the gods of power, masking a profound inner frailty. The spectacle of worshipping Rafale fighter jets and broadcasting these rituals to the global media even after their operational humiliation, reflects the deep-seated contradiction within Indian society—swaying uneasily between strength and vulnerability, reason and superstition, intellect and ignorance.

Modi's sectarian and aggressive pronouncements not only poison relations with Pakistan but also amplify the spectre of instability across South Asia as a whole. In contrast, the restraint and strategic composure demonstrated by Pakistan and China point towards a mature doctrine of statecraft—one that is quietly recalibrating the balance of power in the broader Asian theatre. On the one hand, this approach is reshaping regional equilibrium; on the other, it is steadily isolating India on political and diplomatic fronts. Through his threats, Modi is not merely antagonising neighbours—he is progressively estranging India from a world that increasingly demands peace, cooperation, and collective economic progress. The damage to India's global credibility is palpable, at a moment when international collaboration has become not a luxury, but a necessity.

The threat to “gun down” Pakistani civilians constitute not only a grave violation of moral, legal, and diplomatic norms, but also an alarming indictment of the contemporary human rights climate. Such declarations provoke deep unease among peace-oriented societies worldwide and heighten the risk of a humanitarian catastrophe in an already volatile region.

Modi's speech places India's strategic judgment under a searching light. Is this aggression truly an emblem of wisdom—or of folly? Is it strategy, or merely the unguarded expression of anger born of weakness? History teaches that wisdom is never confined to rhetoric alone; it must manifest in practical solutions and lay the foundations for durable peace.

Pakistan and China, by contrast, have adopted a strategy that is powerful precisely because it is restrained—one that secures victories not only through the thunder of artillery but across political, economic, and psychological domains. It is this very strategy that has elevated Sino-Pak relations into a central pillar of peace and stability in the region.



Amidst this escalating tension, Israel's role introduces a new and exceedingly delicate dimension. According to credible reports, Israeli military specialists stationed in India were operating Harop drones and became casualties of Pakistani missile strikes. This revelation transforms the conflict from a bilateral Indo-Pak confrontation into a chapter of international military chess, wherein the United States, Israel, and India align on one side, while Pakistan, China, and peace-oriented forces across the region stand on the other.

With the exposure of Israeli operators and the circumstances of the attack, a critical question arises: has Israel now become a direct party to this conflict? This is perhaps the most sensitive and consequential aspect of the entire crisis. Reliable sources indicate that India had acquired Harop loitering munitions from Israel, and that dozens of Israeli military experts were deployed at Indian bases to operate them. A Pakistani retaliatory strike reportedly targeted one such base, where Israeli operators were present, leading to credible reports of their deaths.

Unofficial accounts suggest that the bodies of these Israeli operatives were quietly transported from India to Israel in sealed coffins. Both governments sought to suppress the story. When Pakistan determined that Israel's direct involvement constituted sufficient grounds for retaliation—a right firmly anchored in international law—the calculus of global power shifted. It was precisely at this

junction that the United States, initially presenting itself as “disengaged,” suddenly became active in pursuing a ceasefire.

Thus, the conflict ceased to be viewed merely as an Indo-Pak dispute; it began to be recognised as the opening phase of a proxy confrontation among major military powers—one whose continuation threatened even American strategic interests. Preventing its escalation became, for Washington, a matter of self-preservation.

President Trump initially attempted to assume the posture of an ostensibly neutral mediator. Yet his silence—indeed, his indifference—towards Modi’s subsequent incendiary statements raises troubling questions about the credibility of American mediation. If the United States truly aspires to peace, will it condemn Modi’s threat? And if it remains silent, does that silence not amount to tacit protection of India?

Is it true that under the cover of a ceasefire, Washington sought to shield India and Israel from further military humiliation? According to diplomatic sources and several defence analysts, Indian air power and

Israeli technology had suffered severe losses prior to the ceasefire, giving rise to fears that Pakistan might respond not only to Indian aggression but also to Israel’s involvement. In such circumstances, American intervention appears motivated less by reconciliation than by a desire to spare its allies further disgrace.

Had the Trump administration been genuinely impartial, it would have expressed clear disapproval of Modi’s rhetoric and undertaken tangible diplomatic and defence-related measures. Instead, its silence has deepened global mistrust in American policy, particularly across the Muslim world, where the perception is increasingly entrenched that the rhetoric of “peace” merely disguises a strategy of protecting preferred allies. This, in itself, serves as evidence that the ceasefire was designed to obscure the military setbacks of India and Israel alike.

Now, as Modi once again returns to the language of threats, an urgent question presses itself upon the region: are we on the brink of another war? Will Israel once more seek to intervene in South Asia through India? And will the United States again attempt to rescue its allies under the guise of “mediation”? If Washington persists in silence after Modi’s latest threat, doubt will harden into certainty—that the mediation was never about peace, but about shielding India from deeper humiliation.

The United Nations and international human rights organisations—whose office walls are adorned with lofty proclamations of humanity—have responded to Modi’s statements with either silence or passive observation, like characters in a novel who do not speak, but merely watch. Yet Article 2(4) of the UN Charter unequivocally obliges states to refrain from the threat or use of force against other nations. What is at stake here is moral courage—and history bears witness to the fact that speaking truth to power has never been the forte of the faint-hearted.

If these realities are brought before the world in their full and unvarnished truth, the moment will not merely expose Modi but will also lift the veil from Israeli militarism and American complicity

through silence. Delay, however, risks allowing Israeli involvement to open an entirely new front—beyond the capacity of any power to contain.

When an adversary issues open threats and the world remains mute, silence ceases to be wisdom; it becomes the silent accomplice of injustice, cloaked in the garb of prudence. Pakistan, which has consistently advocated peace and articulated its principled stance with diplomatic dignity, now confronts a defining question: will the international community find the resolve to take notice of Modi's threats?

At such a moment, the Qur'anic admonition acquires renewed moral force:

وَلَا تَرْكَبُوا إِلَى الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا فَتَمَسَّكُمُ النَّارُ

"And incline not toward those who commit injustice, lest the Fire should touch you." (Hūd 11:113)

And again:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِهِ صَفًّا كَانَهُمْ بُنْيَانٌ مَرْصُوصٌ

"Indeed, God loves those who stand firm in His cause, as though they were a solid structure, joined together." (As-Şaff 61:4)

These verses speak beyond faith alone; they articulate the enduring grammar of history: that injustice thrives on silence, that power without moral restraint corrodes itself, and that dignity—when defended

with patience and resolve—outlives the loudest threats.

The open threat issued by Narendra Modi to "gun down" Pakistani civilians constitute a flagrant violation of international law, the Charter of the United Nations, and the most elementary standards of fundamental human rights. This is not the expression of political disagreement; it is the unambiguous proclamation of racial and state-sponsored terror by a nuclear-armed state against the civilian population of another. Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter explicitly prohibits any state from threatening the use of force against another. Likewise, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Geneva Conventions classify such statements as incitement, provocation, and conduct falling within the orbit of war crimes.

The pressing question, however, remains: will the community of nations take any meaningful action? Experience teaches us that when such belligerent pronouncements emanate from a major trading or defence partner—India being closely aligned with the United States, Israel, and several European powers—the so-called "global conscience" often succumbs to expediency. Yet avenues remain open. The matter can be raised at an emergency session of the United Nations Security Council. Human rights organisations may issue investigative reports. The European Parliament may table resolutions. The International Court of Justice may be petitioned to recognise such rhetoric as war incitement. For all this to materialise, however, Pakistani diplomacy, media, and civil society must act swiftly, cohesively, and with resolve—so that global public opinion is awakened to the dangers of Modi's martial obsession. International media must frame these statements for what they are: deliberate provocations toward war. Above all, internal political stability, national unity, and social cohesion

must be strengthened, for it is unity alone that renders every threat, every assault, every stratagem ineffectual.

Modi's recent pronouncements are not the empty bombast of electoral rallies; they form part of a mental and ideological architecture designed to upend regional peace. If the world genuinely cherishes stability in South Asia, it must take cognisance of this incitement. Otherwise, should these two nuclear-armed states drift toward war, the fuel will not be South Asia alone—the conflagration may well engulf the wider world.

Pakistan must raise Modi's statements with full diplomatic force before the United Nations, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the European Union, and the global media. Simultaneously, the concealed alignment between the United States, Israel, and India must be exposed, so that the world may recognise that what is being marketed as "peace mediation" is, in truth, an attempt to draw a veil over potential war crimes.

The path forward demands wisdom, restraint, and adherence to diplomatic norms rather than aggression and hatred. True political leadership lies in de-escalation, in keeping the doors of dialogue open, and in seeking collective solutions for the welfare of the region. The art of statesmanship is not measured by the volume of threats, but by the durability of peace secured.

Modi's incendiary words may momentarily inflame nationalist passions, yet history will remember them either as a symbol of transient power or as a rainbow that vanishes in the aftermath of a storm. Silence is golden only when it signifies strength; otherwise, it is the harbinger of decline—perilous to both dignity and security.

Accordingly:

The international community must hold India diplomatically and morally accountable, condemning such statements in the United Nations and other global forums, and adopting a collective strategy for the

promotion of peace.

The world now faces a crucial test: to caution the Indian leadership against future incendiary rhetoric and to insist upon genuine efforts to preserve regional stability.

Confidence-building measures among regional states must be accelerated, with dialogue prioritised as the principal instrument for resolving disputes and establishing lasting peace.

Positive initiatives must be undertaken to enhance trust among India, Pakistan, and China.

The strategic model of Pakistan and China—rooted in restraint, patience, and calculated diplomacy—should be studied and emulated to enable political stability and economic progress across the region. Broader engagement with the international community should be strengthened to underpin regional stability.

India must accord priority to dialogue with Pakistan and China if a durable path to peace is to be opened.

Educational and media programmes should be designed to foster peace and tolerance among populations, thereby diminishing the atmosphere of hatred and aggression.

Once again, it bears repeating: Modi's statements are not mere electoral rhetoric; they represent an ideological blueprint that threatens to overturn the peace of an entire region. If the world truly values stability, it must confront this provocation. Otherwise, a conflict between two nuclear powers will not be confined to South Asia—it will endanger the global order itself.

Pakistan must therefore continue to present Modi's threats robustly before the United Nations, the OIC, the European Union, and the international press, exposing the covert alignment of the United States, Israel, and India, and demonstrating that this is not mediation for peace, but an attempt to conceal culpability for potential war crimes.

At this juncture, the Qur'anic warning speaks with timeless clarity:

وَاتَّقُوا فِتْنَةً لَا تُصِيبَنَّ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْكُمْ خَاصَّةً

"And fear a trial which will not strike only those among you who have done wrong." (Al-Anfāl 8:25)

And finally, a parable of wisdom:

When time finds its voice, it turns nations into history;

those who ignore its call are reduced to cautionary tales.

Pakistan and China recognised the moment—

and he who recognises the moment becomes master of the age.

Sunday 21 December 2025

From Rūmī's Love to Iqbāl's Khudī

A Journey of Spiritual Awakening

Human history, when reduced to a mere register of empires, wars, and political upheavals, loses its moral resonance. Properly understood, however, it is something far more demanding: a continuous record of the human spirit's attempt to transcend its own limitations. Rising from dust and aspiring towards the infinite, this quest has found expression at different moments in different idioms—sometimes as love, sometimes as selfhood, and sometimes as a synthesis of both.

The subject before us today belongs firmly to this deeper register of history. It is not an exercise in reverence for the past, nor a decorative homage to two towering figures of Islamic thought. It is, rather, an inquiry into the intellectual unease of the present and the direction of the future. Though articulated through the names of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī and Muhammad Iqbāl, its true subject is the condition of the modern Muslim mind—its anxieties, its fractures, and its unrealised possibilities.

This is not a gathering convened for momentary emotional uplift, nor an indulgence in civilisational nostalgia. It is, at its core, an act of intellectual self-examination. The question it poses is both simple and unsettling: what became of that inner vitality of Muslim thought which once emerged from love and matured into a confident sense of self?

The answer is neither sentimental nor merely literary. It lies in the sustained intellectual relationship between Rūmī's conception of *ʿishq*—love as a cosmic and moral principle—and Iqbāl's formulation of *khudī*, selfhood as disciplined moral agency. This relationship is not one of imitation but of evolution: a continuity of thought that carries the human being from inward awakening to historical responsibility.

One of the most illuminating chapters in this continuum begins in thirteenth-century Konya, where love appeared not as private ecstasy but as a universal law of being, and culminates in the twentieth-century subcontinent, where selfhood was articulated as a response to political subjugation and intellectual stagnation. Between these two moments lies a journey that is at once mystical, historical, and profoundly political.

It is a journey that moves from the quiet streets of Konya to the contested intellectual terrain of South Asia, absorbing along the way mystical insight, historical consciousness, Islamic theology, and literary refinement. In this synthesis, love, knowledge, history, power, and civilisation cease to be separate categories; they converge into a single, living argument. To speak of this journey, then, is not to recount an episode of the past but to confront a question of enduring relevance.

The contemporary Muslim predicament is marked by a peculiar duality. On one side stands an aggressive materialism that strips life of moral depth; on the other, an emotive religiosity that often lacks intellectual coherence. Rūmī and Iqbāl gesture towards a third possibility—one that neither retreats from the world nor surrenders uncritically to it. Their path is grounded in love and selfhood, not as opposites, but as mutually sustaining principles.

Such a path does not encourage withdrawal, nor does it glorify conflict. It cultivates balance, purpose, and moral intentionality. It insists that inward transformation and outward responsibility are inseparable.

History, if approached merely as a catalogue of events, remains inert—informative perhaps, but incapable of guidance. Read instead as the continuity of ideas, as the narrative of the soul's search for meaning, history becomes animate. Each century assumes a moral character; each generation inherits both a burden and a choice. Within this living continuum, Rūmī and Iqbāl stand as two luminous markers. Separated by six centuries, they nevertheless confront the same essential problem: how is the human being to recognise his true nature?

Rūmī directs the seeker inward, urging the discovery of a spring of love within the apparent barrenness of the self. Iqbāl, inheriting this insight, demonstrates how that spring may be channelled into *khudī*—a disciplined selfhood capable of nourishing culture, ethics, and political life.

The enduring appeal of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī lies in precisely this universality. He resists easy classification. Neither poet alone nor mystic alone, he is better understood as a teacher of love who regarded the inner life as the proper starting point of all transformation. For Rūmī, love is not an emotional excess; it is a metaphysical principle. It is the force that transmutes the base into the noble and draws the human being towards completion.

To read the *Mathnawī* is to encounter a voice that seems less concerned with recounting history than with addressing the human condition itself. Love, Rūmī insists, is a fire that consumes without annihilating—a force that strips away illusion while preserving life. It is through this fire that the individual is led from self-forgetfulness to divine awareness.

The Qur'ān gestures towards this inner dignity of the human being in words of striking metaphysical clarity:

وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي

Wa nafakhtu fīhi min rūḥī

“And I breathed into him of My Spirit.” (*Qur'ān* 15:29)

This verse underwrites Rūmī's vision: the human being, bearing within himself a divine trust, is called not merely to exist but to respond.

It is therefore unsurprising that Konya continues to attract seekers from across cultures and continents. Rūmī's tomb functions less as a monument and more as a moral space—a quiet academy where inherited divisions of creed, language, and ethnicity lose their urgency. One leaves with the recognition that true devotion is measured not by outward conformity but by inward humility.

For Iqbāl, Konya became more than a place; it evolved into a symbol. It represented a spiritual centre from which thought could regain universality. In his imaginative geography, the light of love emanating from Rūmī illuminates the path of *khudī*, guiding it away from both nihilism and narcissism.

Konya, in this sense, is not geography but metaphor. It signifies the possibility that when love finds its centre, borders dissolve; when thought bows before truth, ego gives way to responsibility. The

bowed head at Rūmī's resting place is not an act of submission to the past, but a recognition that the culmination of thought lies not in self-assertion, but in moral clarity.

From this centre, the journey continues—unfinished, demanding, and urgently relevant. The passage from Rūmī's love to Iqbāl's selfhood is not a closed chapter of intellectual history. It is an open question, addressed anew to every generation willing to think seriously about the relationship between the inner life and the fate of civilisation.

From Historical Crisis to Intellectual Renewal

In Rūmī's age, the Muslim world was beset by political fragmentation and intellectual inertia. The reverberations of the Crusades, the looming terror of Mongol invasions, and the suffocating weight of religious formalism had together narrowed the horizons of spiritual life. Faith had hardened into ritual; learning had congealed into repetition. It was against this background of paralysis that Rūmī placed love at the very centre of existence, using it as a force to rupture stagnation and restore inward vitality.

In Iqbāl's time, the crisis assumed a different, though no less debilitating, form. Colonial domination, intellectual subservience, and civilisational inferiority had paralysed the Muslim mind. Where Rūmī confronted ritualised religion, Iqbāl confronted colonised consciousness. And just as Rūmī broke his age's inertia through love, Iqbāl sought to shatter modern stagnation through the call of *khudī*—selfhood.

It is often suggested that Rūmī's love and Iqbāl's selfhood stand in opposition to one another. The truth is precisely the reverse. Love gives selfhood its purpose, and selfhood gives love its direction. Selfhood without love degenerates into ego; love without selfhood dissolves into unanchored emotion. Together, they form a balanced Islamic personality—at once inwardly illuminated and outwardly responsible.

If Rūmī may be described as the poet of love, Iqbāl must be recognised as its philosopher. Iqbāl loved Rūmī deeply, but he did not imitate him. Instead, he lit his own lamp of selfhood from Rūmī's flame. For Iqbāl, the end of love was not annihilation (*fanā'*), but continuity (*baqā'*)—a form of spiritual endurance that propels the human being towards action, courage, and creative engagement with the world.

It was in this sense that Iqbāl referred to Rūmī as his *murshid-e-ma'navī*, his spiritual guide:

Pīr-e Rūmī khāk rā iksīr kard

Az ghubāram jalwah-hā ta'mīr kard

"The Master of Rūm transformed dust into alchemy;
From my very ashes, he fashioned new forms of radiance."

This is not a gesture of sentimental devotion; it is the articulation of an intellectual lineage. Rūmī bequeathed love to Iqbāl, and Iqbāl recast that love as selfhood, transforming it into a call for purposeful action addressed to the Muslim community.

For Iqbāl, *khudī* denotes the inner power of the human being—the capacity that renders him not a slave of destiny, but its architect. It is through selfhood that the individual acquires a sense of moral

responsibility. Here, Iqbāl's mysticism certainly connects with Rūmī's, but it also advances beyond it. Rūmī is the poet of love; Iqbāl is its combatant.

Iqbāl's conception of selfhood is emphatically not a celebration of narcissism. It is, rather, an ethic of responsibility. It is the self that bows before God yet refuses to submit before falsehood. It is the self that restores to the human being his true identity—the identity of God's vicegerent on earth.

In this synthesis, Iqbāl appears simultaneously as mystic and reformer, poet and philosopher. His verse carries both intellectual gravity and historical dignity, while its deeper resonance is unmistakably Islamic. Selfhood, in his thought, is not a psychological abstraction but a comprehensive theory of the human being—one that situates man as an active agent within the cosmos.

This is where Iqbāl parts company with forms of mysticism that sever the human being from action. His ideal human being prostrates in prayer and struggles in the world; he supplicates and he plans; he trusts in God and he acts with resolve. In this harmony of devotion and endeavour lies the distinctive power of Iqbāl's vision.

Though centuries separate Rūmī and Iqbāl, the spiritual dialogue between them has never ceased. Rūmī's love, transfigured through Iqbāl's selfhood, gives birth to a renewed civilisational spirit. Their conversation teaches a lasting lesson: love without consciousness is mere emotion, and consciousness without love is barren rationalism.

For Rūmī, love is never a private episode; it is a comprehensive philosophy of life. He places love at the centre of knowledge, ethics, politics, and worship alike. Knowledge that fails to illuminate the heart, he regards as a burden; worship that does not bind one human being to another, he dismisses as empty form.

The *Mathnawī* is therefore not simply a work of poetry, but an intellectual document—one that elucidates the relationship between the inner self, society, and the cosmos. Rūmī's human being is not static; he is dynamic, perpetually becoming, breaking, and renewing himself. Love is the fuel of this creative process.

In Rūmī's vision, love is not a subjective sentiment but a law of the universe. It is the force that draws the inanimate towards life, life towards consciousness, and consciousness towards humanity. His *Mathnawī* is not merely verse; it is a science of the soul. Rūmī insists that the true homeland of the human being is the soul itself, and that love is the language of that homeland. This is why his words retain their freshness across centuries. His love reconciles human beings to one another and, ultimately, to God.

As Rūmī himself declares:

Mā dil andar rāh-e jān andākhtīm
Ghulghulah andar jahān andākhtīm



*Mā ze Qur'ān barguzīdam maghz rā
Ustukhwān pīsh-e sagān andākhtīm*

In plain terms, Rūmī states that he extracted the very essence of the Qur'ān and poured it into the *Mathnawī*, leaving the husk for those content with appearances alone. This, indeed, is the secret of the enduring vitality of his work. It is for this reason that the *Mathnawī* has been honoured above other poetic compositions, and why Jāmī famously observed:

*Mathnawī-ye ma'navī-ye Mawlawī
Hast Qur'ān dar zabān-e Pahlavī*
“The spiritual Mathnawī of Mawlānā
Is the Qur'ān in the Persian tongue.”

Yet, despite this profound devotion, Iqbāl is never a mere echo of Rūmī. He loves Rūmī, but he does not dissolve into him. He translates love into selfhood, fully aware that ecstasy alone cannot awaken a community. Consciousness, action, and purpose are indispensable. It is for this reason that Iqbāl repeatedly addresses Rūmī in his poetry—not as a relic of the past, but as a living interlocutor in a dialogue that spans centuries.

Finally, no account of Rūmī would be complete without reference to Shams of Tabriz. The arrival of Shams in Rūmī's life was not a meeting; it was an earthquake. Shams was more than a person—he was a condition, a blaze of love. He set Rūmī's frozen learning into motion, shattered his intellectual complacency, and ignited a storm within his soul that carried him from the silence of the madrasa into the dance of love.

Shams, Awakening, and the Moral Imperative of Thought

Shams transformed Rūmī's learning into love and transmuted scholastic knowledge into experiential insight. He taught Rūmī that God is not merely to be studied, but to be lived. He questioned inherited certainties, challenged intellectual complacency, and made Rūmī realise that truth does not dwell in guarded cloisters, but in hearts that burn.

It was at this decisive moment that fire entered Rūmī's pen. His verse acquired a heat that continues, even now, to warm the cold interiors of the human soul.

Here lies a profound intellectual lesson: every great movement of thought requires its own Shams—someone willing to ask unsettling questions, someone capable of shattering the comfortable shell of prevailing ideas. Without such a catalyst, knowledge remains inert, and tradition ossifies into reverence without renewal.

Iqbāl's conception of *khudī* is not confined to individual moral reform. It is simultaneously a political consciousness and a civilisational prescription. His central argument is uncompromising: spiritual weakness gives birth to political servitude. When hearts are free, nations follow suit. Subjugated peoples, Iqbāl insists, are enslaved first in thought before they are conquered in territory. It is for this reason that he places such relentless emphasis on education, philosophy, and religious renewal.

Here we encounter Iqbāl's acute sense of history—the conviction that nations are not forged by slogans, but by ideas.

Iqbāl did not merely adopt Rūmī as a spiritual guide; he embraced him as an intellectual model. For Iqbāl, Rūmī represents a form of Sufism that rescues love from passive ecstasy and anchors it in purpose. This is why he reveres Rūmī as his guide while simultaneously rejecting blind imitation. Iqbāl knew that his true struggle was with the Muslim of the subcontinent—resigned to fate, addicted to imitation, and intimidated by foreign dominance. Accordingly, he recast Rūmī’s love within the mould of selfhood and forged from it a coherent ideological programme.

It is for this very reason that one of the great contemporary Islamic thinkers has likened Rūmī’s love, Iqbāl’s selfhood, and collective consciousness to links in a single chain. This is not mysticism as escape, but mysticism as responsibility; not worship as withdrawal, but worship as the reconstruction of life. Selfhood, if it fails to translate into a collective order, remains limited in effect.

The concealed majesty of Rūmī’s *Mathnawī*, the intellectual dignity of Iqbāl’s thought, and the trajectory of their shared spiritual journey together constitute a mode of expression that is not merely heard but felt.

Modern man, entangled in machines yet severed from himself, stands in desperate need of this balance. Rūmī calls him back to the heart; Iqbāl summons him to action. It is precisely this equilibrium that our age lacks most acutely.

Throughout this journey, the Urdu language itself emerges not merely as a vehicle of expression, but as an intellectual tradition in its own right. Our civilisation teaches us that thought, when stripped of refinement, degenerates into extremism—and that the dignity of language is, in truth, the dignity of thought itself.

Distinguished listeners,

Rūmī’s love and Iqbāl’s selfhood are, in essence, two aspects of the same reality. One ignites the heart; the other forges character. When these two converge, the individual transcends individuality and enters history.

If there is a single lesson to be drawn from today’s reflection, it is this: transform love into selfhood, and dissolve selfhood into the pleasure of God. This is the journey of spiritual awakening—from Konya to our own hearts.

When the thought of Rūmī and Iqbāl is clothed in prose, their style reveals itself almost instinctively: the same grandeur of expression, the same dignity of tone, the same dialogue with history. Their purpose was never the mere transmission of information, but the awakening of consciousness.

O people of thought and learning,

This conversation does not end here. The real question is this: what do we become after reading Rūmī, and what do we do after understanding Iqbāl? If love does not awaken compassion within us, and selfhood does not stir responsibility, then all of this remains an academic exercise. Living thought must culminate in action, and blessed action must be illuminated by love.

Today's intellectual gathering is not concluding with words alone; it is issuing an invitation—to move from the heart into the arena of responsibility. If Rūmī has softened our hearts, and Iqbāl has awakened our moral courage, then this journey has succeeded.

Selfhood without love is blind; love without selfhood is directionless. When the two unite, the human being becomes a confidant of the Divine.

O Allah of insight,

Grant us hearts that burn with Rūmī's fire, and minds illuminated by Iqbāl's selfhood.

Deliver us from intellectual servitude.

Endow our language with truth, our thought with balance, and our action with purpose.

Do not consign us to the margins of history; grant us a place within its living text.

Amen, O Lord of the worlds.

O Sustainer, kindle within our hearts the fire of Rūmī, grant our thought the selfhood of Iqbāl, bestow truth upon our speech, sincerity upon our action, and insight upon our community—so that we may become not spectators of history, but its architects.

Ameen, Ya Rub of all creations.

Wednesday 24 Decem 2025

Libya's Shadow and Pakistan's Choice: Arms, Law, and Geopolitics

Power, Arms, and Libya: Pakistan at the Crossroads

Libya: A Tragedy, an Accord, and the Trembling Chessboard of Global Politics

The military history of Libya has once more been inscribed upon the sombre margins of tragedy, as though fate itself had dipped its quill in ink darker than night. The nation's Chief of General Staff, General Muhammad Ali Ahmad al-Haddad, together with several senior commanders, perished in an air disaster that has shaken the already fragile edifice of the Libyan state. For nearly a decade and a half, Libya has been ensnared in a labyrinth of political disarray, military fragmentation, and persistent international intervention. Since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi's regime in 2011, power has ceased to repose in a single sovereign centre, and parallel structures of authority have emerged in the east and west, like twin shadows cast by a broken sun. Against this unstable backdrop, the recent air crash — together with the defence pact with Pakistan — assumes an extraordinary significance.

According to initial reports, General Muhammad Ali Ahmad al-Haddad was travelling aboard a Falcon-50 jet. Barely sixteen minutes after take-off, a request for an emergency landing was transmitted; moments later, the aircraft vanished from the radar, as if history itself had closed the page upon it. This was not merely the death of an individual; it marked the obliteration of an entire circle of Libya's military command. On that ill-fated flight journeyed not just one general, but an entire chapter of Libyan military leadership. Among those accompanying him were the Commander of the Land Forces, Lieutenant General Futuri Garibel; the head of the Military Manufacturing Corporation, Brigadier General Mahmoud al-Qattawi; the Adviser to the Chief of General Staff, Muhammad al-Aswi Diab; and the General Staff's photographer, Muhammad Umar Ahmad Mahqib. These were not names alone; they were vertebrae in the backbone of Libya's military structure. A loss of this magnitude inevitably carves an immediate vacuum in any state's martial order and governance.

General al-Haddad had served as Libya's Chief of General Staff for more than five years. His persona symbolised discipline, institutional loyalty, and the dignity of the uniform; he was widely regarded as a comparatively non-political soldier. Although his early life remains veiled behind the curtain of obscurity, it is well-acknowledged that he served in various capacities within the Libyan armed forces prior to the 2011 rebellion. He played a conspicuous role in nurturing military and strategic relations with Türkiye — ties that were gradually shaping the trajectory of Libya's new defence orientation.

His most prominent contribution lay in widening the arc of military and technical cooperation with Türkiye, which became a principal pillar of Western Libya's security strategy. Thus, this calamity was not merely the result of a technical malfunction; it was, in a deeper sense, a symbolic moment within the long procession of history. The Libya once ruled, with iron centrality, by Muammar Gaddafi since 1969 was swept away in the winds of the Arab Spring in 2011. NATO-backed interventions shattered the bricks of Tripoli and splintered the nation into rival centres of authority — a division that has etched itself upon Libya's destiny to this day.

Gaddafi's forty-two-year rule (1969–2011) fashioned Libya into a powerful yet highly centralised state. The Arab Spring, assisted by external intervention, broke that central pillar; yet no stable national structure arose in its stead. Consequently, the country has remained vulnerable to civil strife, armed factions, and the unrelenting tug-of-war of foreign influence.

The Falcon-50 in question, produced in 1988, was not Libyan state property; it had been leased from an Africa-based company registered in Malta. This fact lays bare Libya's growing reliance on private contracting within sensitive military logistics — a trend that inevitably provokes questions of transparency, accountability, and national security.

Turkish authorities reported that the wreckage was discovered in a rural area nearly 105 kilometres from Ankara, scattered across a span of two kilometres — a grim testament to the ferocity of the crash and suggestive of catastrophic technical failure. It was as though the pride of power had been cast down and shattered upon the earth.

The Prime Minister of Libya's internationally recognised Government of National Unity, Abdul Hamid Dbeibah, described the tragedy as a "great loss to the nation". In his words, Libya had lost those who had served the state with loyalty and integrity — a statement resonant not merely with condolence, but with the sombre echo of national continuity and unity. At a juncture when Libya is already beset by institutional fragility, this message carried the weight of both lament and resolve.

This disaster unfolded just as another development was circling the horizon of international politics: the defence agreement between Pakistan and Libya, valued at over four billion US dollars. This was no ordinary commercial transaction; it represented a fresh angle in the geometry of global power.

Only two days prior to the accident, news emerged of the defence accord between the two countries — among the largest defence export arrangements in Pakistan's history, and a potential gateway to enhanced Pakistani military presence in North Africa. Under the agreement, reported to span two and a half years, Pakistan is to supply Libya with land, naval, and air defence equipment — including multi-role JF-17 fighter aircraft and Super Mushshak trainer planes. These very aircraft, produced through Pak-China collaboration, have become emblematic of low-cost yet versatile combat capability. The final number of JF-17 units, however, remains shrouded in ambiguity.

According to four Pakistani officials, the accord ranks among the most substantial defence export deals in Pakistan's history, finalised in Benghazi between Pakistan's Chief of the Army Staff, Field Marshal Asim Munir, and the Libyan National Army's Deputy Commander-in-Chief, Saddam Khalifa Haftar. The venue itself — Benghazi, in eastern Libya — serves as a signal that Pakistan has, in practical terms, forged direct military channels with Eastern Libya.

Owing to the sensitivity of the matter, Pakistani officials declined to reveal their identities, while both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence opted for a strategic silence. That silence was not without reason, for since 2011 Libya has been subject to a United Nations arms embargo. Although in December 2024 UN experts described this embargo as "ineffective", legal and ethical questions remain suspended in the air like unanswered echoes. This posture signifies that the matter is not merely commercial; it is profoundly strategic.

At this juncture, the Qur'anic warning seems poignantly apposite:

﴿وَتِلْكَ الْأَيَّامُ نُدَاوِلُهَا بَيْنَ النَّاسِ﴾

“And such are the days We alternate among mankind.” (Surah Āl-‘Imrān 3:140)

History, it appears, continues its solemn rotation — exalting some, humbling others — while nations stand upon a trembling chessboard, their pieces vulnerable to both fortune and folly.

Since 2011, Libya has been subject to a United Nations arms embargo, under which any transfer of military equipment requires prior UN authorisation. In December 2024, UN experts described this embargo as “ineffective”; nevertheless, its legal validity still formally endures. The official media of the Libyan National Army (LNA) has confirmed defence cooperation with Pakistan, encompassing the sale of weapons, joint training programmes, and military preparedness. Haftar termed it the inception of “a new phase of strategic military cooperation” with Pakistan.

According to a UN panel, several foreign states — despite the embargo — continue to provide training and assistance to both eastern and western Libya. In this context, Pakistan maintains that it has violated no restrictions. On the other hand, the government of Abdul Hamid Dbeibah in western Libya enjoys United Nations recognition, while Haftar’s LNA controls the east and south of the country, including the major oil fields. This division raises searching questions about the legal and moral standing of defence agreements — a tale of two powers, one nation, and an unending crisis. The LNA’s media channels reiterated confirmation of defence cooperation with Pakistan, while Haftar once again declared that a “new strategic phase” had commenced, involving arms sales, joint training, and military preparedness.

Pakistani officials argue that the agreement does not infringe the UN embargo, and that Pakistan is by no means the only state engaged in defence cooperation with Libya. In their view, increasing oil exports have brought Benghazi closer to the Western world, altering the diplomatic geometry of the region.

For several years, Pakistan has pursued a deliberate strategy of expanding defence exports and consolidating its footing in global arms markets. Its defence industry now spans aircraft manufacturing, armoured vehicles, weapons systems, and naval construction. Decades of counter-insurgency experience, growing self-reliance in defence production, and the Air Force’s performance during clashes with India in May have all become assets in Pakistan’s defence diplomacy and marketing. According to Field Marshal Asim Munir, Pakistan’s leadership cited the Air Force’s performance in those engagements as illustrative of its modern capabilities — a display that thrust Pakistan’s contemporary military competence onto the world stage. The confidence thus accrued is now translating into defence exports.

Pakistan is not only advancing strategic defence partnership with China; it is simultaneously widening security ties with the Gulf states — particularly Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The defence agreement concluded with Saudi Arabia in September 2025 represents another link in this growing chain, positioning Pakistan as a regional security partner of consequence.

Pakistan presents the JF-17 as a cost-effective, multi-role fighter — a strategic product that offers training, maintenance, and operational autonomy outside the Western supply chain. This very

feature renders it especially attractive to developing nations. The agreement with Libya may significantly expand Pakistan's influence in North Africa, where global powers are arrayed in competition over oil, security, and political leverage.



Defence ties with the Gulf are deepening further; Pakistan is extending cooperation with both Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The September 2025 agreement with Saudi Arabia stands as a telling example of this trend, portraying Pakistan as an emerging pillar of regional security architecture.

Yet an unavoidable question arises: will the global arms cartels regard this deal as a challenge to their long-entrenched dominance? History bears austere witness that whenever the balance of power is disturbed, the shadows of intrigue lengthen. The aircraft that vanished from the radar may, therefore, not have represented merely an accident; it may have traced upon the horizon of world politics a line revealing the intricate nexus of power, interest, and history. In international affairs, it is far from inconceivable that major arms deals invite political pressure, legal entanglements, or indirect resistance. History is replete with such precedents, narratives of conspiracy, and illustrative analogies.

Pakistan's emerging role in North Africa is thus unmistakable. The agreement with Libya signifies an attempt to establish firm footing in a region where global and regional powers vie for influence over oil, security, and geopolitics. This development may pose a potential challenge to the traditional arms manufacturers who have long dominated African markets.

The Libyan military tragedy and the Pakistan–Libya defence agreement have together raised new questions concerning regional security, the politics of global arms, and the practical relevance of UN sanctions. For Pakistan, the agreement constitutes both an economic and strategic opportunity; yet it simultaneously necessitates unwavering vigilance with regard to legal transparency, diplomatic equilibrium, and the long-term regional consequences.

Pakistan's defence industry is, for the first time, emerging as a visible and direct strategic actor in North Africa. However, Libya's internal divisions, the vested interests of international arms monopolies, and the continued — though weakened — UN embargo render this trajectory particularly delicate.

For decision-makers, the central challenge lies in maintaining a judicious balance between economic gain and international legal obligations; ensuring that defence exports do not become the harbinger of diplomatic isolation; and presenting Pakistan as a responsible, reliable, and principled security partner.

It is only prudent to assume that Pakistan's defence institutions are diligently shaping their policies in the light of this evolving situation. Yet within these circumstances, attention must be devoted to certain aspects of legal clarity and documentary safeguards.

First, Pakistan must ensure that at every stage of defence agreements, legal opinions relating to UN arms restrictions are preserved in written form, so that its position is not weakened before any future international forum. Although the embargo has been declared “ineffective” by some experts, Pakistan should nevertheless maintain discreet channels of communication — backdoor diplomacy — with relevant UN bodies, in order to pre-empt potential disputes.

Second, to insulate agreements from political volatility, defence cooperation should be institution-based rather than personality-based. Linking arrangements to enduring institutions rather than transient factions will ensure that any internal political changes within Libya do not render the agreements void or inert.

At such a moment, one is reminded of the Qur’anic admonition:

(فَاعْتَبِرُوا يَا أُولِيَ الْأَبْصَارِ)

“So take heed, O people of insight.” (Surah al-Hashr 59:2)

For history does not merely narrate — it summons the discerning to reflection, prudence, and responsibility.

Thirdly, while Pakistan may, out of strategic necessity, cultivate avenues of cooperation with the Libyan National Army in the East, it must, in the same measured breath, preserve a diplomatic equipoise with the United Nations-recognised government in Western Libya, lest it be branded as the partisan ally of one belligerent against another. Prudence counsels balance; wisdom demands restraint.

Fourthly, defence exports ought not to be reduced to the mere vending of armaments. Rather, the architecture of engagement should encompass capacity-building in its fuller sense—training, maintenance, and technical assistance—thus transforming transactions into partnerships and contracts into long-term strategic relationships.

Fifthly, the JF-17 should not be showcased merely as an aircraft but projected as a strategic emblem of sovereign ingenuity. The recent skirmishes between Pakistan and India—wherein these very aircraft were employed with consummate professionalism—have left many in the international community struck with astonishment at the élan and discipline of Pakistan’s military aviators. It is therefore imperative that such platforms, along with other defence materiel, be presented to the world as symbols of affordable self-reliance and technological confidence.

Sixthly, Pakistan’s policy regarding Libya must remain attuned, through discreet consultation, to the diplomatic sensibilities of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, in order to avoid becoming ensnared in the cross-currents of regional rivalries.

Seventhly, Pakistan must enunciate an explicit **National Arms Export Policy Framework**, wherein human rights, internal stability, and the dictates of international law are not mere rhetorical ornaments but formal criteria governing state policy.

Eighthly, a strategic communication plan should be devised so that the global media and influential think tanks may perceive and present Pakistan as a responsible actor—law-abiding, stability-seeking, and conscious of its obligations within the community of nations.

Ninthly, the likelihood of non-state pressure and the leverage of powerful international arms cartels must not be underestimated. A vigilant legal team, an agile diplomatic network, and reliable commercial partners should be kept pre-emptively engaged to forestall coercion and to navigate turbulent waters with steady hand and clear conscience.

These timely measures notwithstanding, our gaze must turn with equal earnestness toward a sober assessment of risks. We may have to confront not only the interpretive ambiguities of United Nations sanctions and the necessity of explicit legal cover, but also diplomatic headwinds—criticism from Western powers or human-rights constituencies. To meet these challenges, proactive narrative-building and carefully prepared diplomatic clarification are not optional luxuries; they are strategic necessities.

It is foreseeable that regime change within Libya will be invoked to brandish political anxieties and to sabotage any prospective agreements with Pakistan. There will be clamour that weaponry may fall into non-state hands; selective moral outrage will be paraded as universal principle. Yet it is known—indeed too well known—what provenance much of the weaponry in global conflicts has borne. We need not travel far for illustration: the modern arsenal discovered in the hands of extremists emerging from Afghanistan stands as stark testimony.

Financial architecture, too, is seldom neutral. International financial institutions—often subject geopolitical pressures may first seek suspension of agreements, and failing that, resort to delaying payments, thus inflicting extraordinary commercial injury. It is therefore incumbent upon Pakistan to adopt phased delivery schedules and robust financial guarantees to shield such agreements from deliberate attrition.

The lessons of history admonish us that adversaries will again endeavour to link Pakistan's name with instability. Our institutions must, even now, craft and carry a compelling narrative of responsibility and state maturity, ready to meet proxy politics with principled neutrality and multidimensional diplomacy. Preparation must precede contest.

The Libyan tragedy and any prospective defence agreement are not mere episodes—no accidental footnotes to history. They are emblematic of twenty-first-century politics of armaments of contested sovereignty, and of shifting global power. For Pakistan, they constitute both an opportunity and a trial. Should we proceed with prudence, legal scruple, and diplomatic balance, this moment may anchor Pakistan as a responsible global defence partner; mishandled, it may prove a misstep upon the uneven terrain of world politics.

In such matters, the Qur'anic counsel resounds with particular resonance:

(وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا)

"And thus We have made you a community justly balanced." (Al-Baqarah 2:143)

And again:

(وَلَا تَبْخَسُوا النَّاسَ أَشْيَاءَهُمْ وَلَا تَعْنُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ)

"Do not diminish what rightfully belongs to people, nor roam the earth sowing corruption."

(ash-Shu'arā' 26:183)

Between power and principle, between opportunity and responsibility, lies the narrow bridge of balance—and upon that bridge nations are tested.

Friday 26th December 2025

Courts of the Heart and the Tribunal of Time

Shadows of Tension, the Call of Brotherhood

When restlessness takes up residence in the inner chambers of the heart, when the streets of our cities reverberate with the cry of lamentation, and when furrows of care deepen upon the brow of the Muslim ummah, history does not sit silent; it finds a voice and speaks, at times as a whisper of conscience, at times as a clarion call. Today, the rising tension between Bangladesh and India is not merely another chapter in the ledger of international politics; it is a tale woven of wounded hearts, searing memories, and treaties that lie scattered like torn leaves in the wind.

This is the very soil that once hummed with songs of fraternity and common cause; yet now the dust of rancour has dulled the music of that fellowship. The innocent blood unjustly spilt, the disquiet that hangs heavy in diplomatic corridors, the trembling hearts of minorities, and the sleight of hand of political conjurors—all impress upon us the inescapable truth that when justice departs, it is not the earth that trembles first, but the human heart that quakes.

The Qur'ān reminds us:

﴿وَاَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا﴾

“And hold fast, all of you together, to the rope of God, and be not divided.”

Yet alas, the politics of our age has loosened its grip upon that saving cord, choosing instead to clutch the thorny thickets of discord.

The purpose of this report is not to fan the embers of hatred, but to knock gently—indeed insistently—upon the doors of the collective conscience:

Where did we stumble? When did we lose our way? And when shall we once again seek the shade of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah, and return to the fashioning of just and equitable societies?

The recent unrest in Bangladesh is not an isolated episode; it is the outgrowth of grievances long incubated, of mutual suspicions carefully tended, and of apprehensions that have matured over years. Protests, disturbances, diplomatic remonstrations and reciprocal accusations have rendered the already fragile thread of relations between the two countries more delicate still. It would seem that the caravan of past companionship has wearied upon the road, and that a new political wind has set the lamp of friendship flickering. The question inevitably presents itself: is this but a passing mist, or shall it harden into a permanent gulf?

It is for this reason that the recent violent demonstrations in Bangladesh have deepened the pre-existing tension between the two states. This exchange of accusations did not begin at the dawn of time yet today matters have reached such a pitch that both neighbours summon each other's diplomats to register protest and issue stern public statements. One cannot help but ask: those who once walked shoulder to shoulder in the shade of comradeship—will they ever again stand side by side at some decisive turning of history?

The death of Depo Chandra not only shocked human sensibility but shook to the core an already fragile sectarian equilibrium. His killing poured yet more powder into the air, and its echo could be heard in the strident reactions of hard-line Hindu quarters. Conversely, the murder of Usman Hadi

arrived laden with political symbolism and layered questions. The violent demonstrations that followed his death had already spread a feverish unease from city to city. Whether the reports of the alleged assassin's flight abroad be true or unfounded, they sowed seeds of anger and distrust within the public mind. At that very moment, the social pulse betrayed that emotional turbulence had outstripped the measured cadence of the state's official narrative. Allegations surfaced that the supposed assailant was linked to the Awami League and had fled to India; the police may deny it, but when the river of emotion rises in spate, the boat of reason grows perilously light.

In this bitter atmosphere, the suspension of visa services became, as it were, a new wall raised between two hearts. Objections were voiced regarding the security of diplomatic missions on both sides, and the summoning of high commissioners became emblematic of the prevailing unease. The suspension of visas is never a mere administrative decision; it breaks the bridges that allow people to meet and lives to intertwine. For students, traders, patients and families, it erects a psychological barrier more formidable than any physical fence. The calling in of diplomats is no longer a matter of formal phrase-making; it signifies a bitterness that now weighs heavily upon the nerves of both governments. One senses that on the chessboard of diplomacy the soft pieces are being withdrawn, and the hard moves now dominate the game.

Anti-Indian sentiment in Bangladesh is no new sapling; it is an old tree putting forth new branches. During Sheikh Hasina's extended tenure in power, allegations of Indian overreach had already been quietly gathering in certain circles. Such sentiments are not a momentary spasm but the product of a long historical continuum. The politics of the post-1971 era, questions of borders and river waters, the balance of trade, and suspicions of political interference have kept the emotional climate damp with resentment. Her period in office was, by some, portrayed as overly inclined towards India, and thus the impression took root that the passion for national sovereignty had been muffled.

Her subsequent removal from office and refuge in India further fanned these emotions. The failure to secure her return, despite repeated requests from Dhaka, left troubling questions in the public mind and added fresh fuel to the fire of suspicion. The matter may well reside within the legal and diplomatic domain, yet in the court of public sentiment verdicts are often written in a different ink. The voice of youth is the heartbeat of a nation's inner life. When the tongue becomes flame and the heart a live ember, political moderation retires from the field. Anti-Indian speeches and slogans are but the outward form of a resentment long suppressed beneath the courtesies of political discourse. After the killing of Usman Hadi, the heated rhetoric of certain young leaders further inflamed the atmosphere. When language becomes fire, ears burn and reason withdraws to the shadows.

Here the Qur'ān once again counsels balance and justice:

(يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لِلَّهِ)

"O you who believe, be steadfast in upholding justice, bearing witness for God."

For it is only when justice stands firm that nations are steadied, hearts are reconciled, and history turns its face from tumult towards tranquillity.

The crowds gathering outside the High Commissions are not mere congregations of bodies; they are emotion given collective form. From Dhaka to Chittagong, protests and incidents of stone-throwing have been reported in the vicinity of Indian missions. The cycle of pelting stones followed by arrests and subsequent releases bears witness to the fact that state institutions themselves appear, to some

extent, on the defensive before this tidal swell of sentiment. The rallies on both sides of the border have become a mirror of something deeper—the clash of narratives now waged in the open. From Dhaka to Chittagong the pattern was repeated: protest, confrontation, arrest, release; and the phrase “unjust demonstrations” crept into statements on both sides. Processions emerged across the frontier, while in the air the dark birds of mistrust circled ominously.

Mistrust is that silent termite which hollows out even the strongest of bonds from within. The analyses of former diplomats point unerringly to this inner decay. International norms demand that diplomatic missions be treated as sacred trusts; yet when passions gain the upper hand, even sacred trusts appear imperilled.

According to one former diplomat, such mutual suspicion has scarcely been witnessed before. The golden principle of international relations is plain: the protection of diplomatic missions is a foremost responsibility—and it is this very principle that now stands in the crucible of trial.

“To bind a man to a tree and set him alight”—the phrase alone chills the human soul. The incident not only heightened anxiety among Hindu communities, but raised grave questions about state authority, the rule of law, and the security of minority rights. Social media, heedless of borders, carried the tragedy in moments to the doors of the world’s conscience.

The tragic death of the Hindu employee, Das, the harrowing spectacle of his being tied to a tree and burned, and the widespread circulation of the video—all of this fanned the flames of anger higher and higher. The incident has posed anew the question of minority protection. At the same time, various claims and counter-claims surfaced, pointing in different directions—claims which must be tested upon the touchstone of responsible investigation and proper judicial process.



The statement of the head of the interim government may well be a candle of hope, yet history’s chronicler reminds us that statements alone do not suffice. Law derives its dignity not from force, but from justice. Eyes now watch to see how this promise is translated from word into deed. The interim head, Muhammad Yunus, stated unequivocally that in the “new Bangladesh” there is no room for such violence. The pledge of the supremacy of law will carry weight only when the scales of justice are seen to balance equally on both sides.

Arrests, no doubt, have been made; yet the central question lingers still—do minorities *feel* secure? The true ornament of a democratic society lies in this: that its weakest are the safest. When they tremble, the prestige of the state itself is wounded. Despite the arrest of several suspects in the killing of Das, the enduring question remains whether the dread in the hearts of minorities has eased. Is this violence but a passing frenzy, or does it speak of a deeper social disquiet?

According to certain narratives, suspicions have been voiced of the involvement of religiously extremist elements, with reports of attacks upon newspapers and cultural institutions. This brings once more to life the question: which facet of society is represented by those who strike at pen and culture? Attacks upon the press and cultural bodies signify that there exists within society a faction

that would answer difference not with dialogue, but with force. It is here that the great heritage of civility, tolerance and urbanity is placed upon trial.

Civil society is the social soul of the state. That soul has declared, in tones impossible to ignore, that the interim administration appears to have faltered in restoring order. This voice of society is not merely a complaint; it is an invitation towards reform. The protests of civil society grew into dignified reproach: that the interim authorities failed to secure peace and order. The torch held in the hand of the state seemed to flicker in an uncertain wind.

International observers have rightly noted that the media may either fan the flames or pour water upon them. When a report clothes itself in prejudice, it fills the eyes of society with smoke. Responsible reporting is therefore now not merely desirable; it is imperative. Some researchers further drew attention to the fact that certain Indian media outlets have presented Bangladesh's situation in a manner likely to deepen sectarian perceptions. At the same time it has become abundantly clear that the stability of Bangladesh is intimately interwoven with the security of the entire region.

Elections can be creative; they can also be destructive. The approach of the 12 February polls has imparted a new gravity to the political atmosphere. The challenge before the interim leadership is to prepare a climate of tranquillity before the nation proceeds to the ballot. The election of 12 February may thus prove not merely a transfer of power, but a decisive line between stability and unrest. The true test of the interim government will be to quench the fires of violence and secure a peaceful environment for the exercise of the franchise.

Here, one is reminded of the Qur'ānic admonition:

﴿وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَاٰنُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ ٓأَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا ۚ اعْدِلُوا هُوَ أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ﴾

"Let not the hatred of a people incite you to depart from justice. Be just; that is nearer to piety."

For nations, like men, are judged in the end not by the loudness of their passions, but by the firmness of their justice.

The absence of the Awami League has rearranged the political chessboard in an altogether new fashion. With its withdrawal from participation, the prospects of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party appear comparatively bright; yet religious political forces, too, may emerge as a formidable challenge, rendering the political equation more intricate still. Politics, after all, does not flow like a straight river; it meanders, it coils. The chess game of statecraft seldom lays all its cards upon the table at once.

Policymakers in India do not regard this situation as a matter merely external to themselves; they see it as inextricably bound to their own internal security. The wise remind us that when a neighbour's house is ablaze, one does not sit as a bystander; one seeks water. Within India's political and strategic circles, the present state of affairs is being weighed as a major strategic challenge. Former diplomats concur that the time has come to acknowledge ground realities and build anew the foundations of trust—for neighbours are meant not to be walls but sheltering trees.

Whatever the electoral outcome, the destination ought to be one and the same: peace, respect and mutual confidence. The soil of politics is rendered barren by accusation and counter-accusation; through dialogue it becomes fertile again. What is needed today is that the region's leaders descend

from the lofty towers of ego to sit upon the plain floor of reason and justice. Voices from India speak of a readiness to engage in dialogue with whichever government emerges from the polls; yet a sober note is also heard—that the blaze of mistrust will not be extinguished by a single statement or decision. What is most urgently required is not a barrage of allegations, but the lighting of lamps of prudence, patience, justice and moderation.

History teaches us that whether borders are drawn upon the earth or upon the human heart, they may be crossed only by dialogue, justice and mutual respect. The chapter of relations between Bangladesh and India has not yet been closed; the pen is still in motion, and the ink is still wet. It remains to be seen whether the coming lines shall be scented with reconciliation or darkened by the dust of suspicion.

These events are not mere news items; they are lines being written upon the pages of history. The days ahead will decide whether those lines are inscribed in tears or in smiles. Choice lies with humankind—judgement rests with the tribunal of time.

History stands with tears in its eyes, and time clasps in its palm a single question: will man once again become truly human? Whether Bangladesh or India—these fragments of earth are but a trial for us; the real frontiers are built and broken within the heart. The innocent Usman Hadi—every drop of his blood has, as it were, reached the heavens and summoned the balance of justice.

Islam teaches us:

﴿إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ﴾

“Indeed, the believers are but brothers.”

Yet we have let this brotherhood be lost somewhere amid the clamour of political slogans. The need of the hour is that rulers and ruled alike, intellectuals and leaders together, look within their own consciences and renew this covenant—that whatever the form of injustice, whatever its colour, and within whichever frontier it occurs, we shall stand against it. Hand upon heart, we must ask: did we truly regard Usman Hadi as our brother, as a part of our own being; and if so, how fully did we, as a state, raise our voice against his unjust killing?

We must recognise that before diplomatic relations are repaired, the hearts must first be mended. The tents of hatred must be uprooted and those of justice pitched in their place. Politics must exchange the cloak of vengeance for the mantle of service. Yet so long as, across the border, a government is guided by an exclusivist Hindutva ideology, represented by the RSS and led by Mr Modi, the attainment of peace in this region risks becoming little more than a dream. It is therefore essential that the Muslim world, across all its platforms, unitedly identify this peril and seek to bridle such sectarian extremism.

Our prayer is simple yet profound:

O Lord of the worlds,

Where hatred has taken up residence, install love;

Where injustice has camped, cause the sun of equity to rise;

And grant to the Muslims of this region the insight

To leave the thorny paths of division and walk the highway of brotherhood and faith.

In the final reckoning, the decision does not belong to politicians alone—
it belongs to conscience and to the court of God.

Tuesday 30th December 2025

The Eclipse of Strategy and the Rise of Fate

When Power Forgets Wisdom

When nations make their moves upon the chequered board of history, there come moments when destiny itself becomes a pawn and plays its own inscrutable game. The tale of India's withdrawal from the Ayni Air Base in Tajikistan stands as one such turn of fate — a question suspended between strategy and destiny, between the arrogance of power and the irony of consequence.

As history inscribes new lines upon its ageless parchment, the designs of men are often erased by the invisible hand of fate. The saga of Ayni — India's solitary military outpost beyond its borders — tells a story where politics outwitted militarism, and geography humbled strategy.

Once, amid the lofty valleys of Tajikistan, Ayni was regarded as a proud emblem of Delhi's ascent into the heart of Central Asia. Today, that same air base is remembered as a monument to the Modi government's most grievous strategic failure. Within the corridors of Delhi, clamour abounds; the Opposition calls it a diplomatic debacle, a retreat masked in rhetoric, while defence analysts deem it the inevitable wage of miscalculation.

This is one of those hours when political design collapses under the weight of time, and the conceit of power turns to dust between one's fingers — when history itself seems to whisper that eternal truth:

(تُؤْتِي الْمُلْكَ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتَنْزِعُ الْمُلْكَ مِمَّنْ تَشَاءُ)

"Thou grantest dominion to whom Thou wilt, and Thou withdrawest it from whom Thou wilt." — *Āl 'Imrān* 3:26

There are decisions that, long after the ink of policy has dried, remain etched upon the conscience of nations. The evacuation of the Ayni Air Base is one such indelible mark — a lapse that Delhi's own critics now call a strategic undoing. It was once the outpost from which India unfurled its banner over the Central Asian horizon. Yet, when time turned its tide, the lamp of design flickered and went out.

(وَمَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ)

"And ye will not, save that God willeth." — *Al-Insān* 76:30

Nearly twenty-five years ago, India had planted its solitary flag of military presence upon Tajik soil — a base conceived not merely as a fortress of flight, but as a citadel of influence. Nestled at the crossroads of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and China, this was geography turned to strategy, and strategy elevated to diplomacy. From its runways, India sought not only air routes, but a symbolic ascendancy over the heart of Asia.

For two decades Delhi poured some ten million dollars into the base's renewal — reconstructing Soviet-era remains into a modern bastion with a vast runway, fuel depots, and a tower of command. It was the architectural metaphor of ambition: the fortress from which India might proclaim its aerial eminence. Yet the enterprise that began in the high skies of Tajikistan ended, in melancholy fashion, upon the horizon of disillusion.

The loss was not merely military, but psychological — a fracture in the mirror of India's regional self-confidence. For Ayni had come to symbolise more than power; it embodied the belief that geography could be mastered by intent. But history, that relentless tutor, has once more reminded man that *hubris is no substitute for insight*.

Tajikistan, lying between Afghanistan, China, and Pakistan, was never merely a nation; it was the linchpin of a delicate geopolitical triangle. From there, India had sought to encircle Pakistan in a web of regional influence. Yet the episode has shown that geography is not drawn upon maps alone — it pulses within the politics of nations.

When news broke that India had vacated the base, Delhi's political heartland was thrown into agitation. Congress leaders branded the act a strategic failure; their lament carried the tone not merely of opposition but of wounded national pride. For twenty years, the state had invested, built, and adorned the base — a Soviet relic reborn in Indian hands — yet, despite the millions spent and the policy papers written, the outcome was ignominious.

Reports suggest that Tajikistan had long signalled its intent for India's gradual withdrawal, yet Delhi persisted in its delusions. In the end, despite every stratagem, the retreat was unceremonious. To defence observers, it was a diplomatic blow and a military surrender in equal measure — the penalty of overreach dressed in the robes of formality.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Randhir Jaiswal declared that India's bilateral agreement with Tajikistan had "simply run its course." The phrasing was elegant — a diplomatic veil laid gently over a bruised reality. But to the discerning ear, it was less a conclusion than an epitaph.

Ayni had once stood not only as an air base but as a monument to a moment in history. In the early 2000s, India established a hospital there to aid the Northern Alliance — a gesture born of the first Taliban ascendance. It was in that same region that Ahmad Shah Massoud, mortally wounded two days before the tragedy of 9/11, was brought to his end — pronounced dead by an Indian doctor. Thus, upon that austere soil, India had opened its chapter in Central Asia. Time, however, in its inexorable turning, has closed it.

When the news of Ayni's closure broke, the Opposition in Delhi sharpened its criticism. To them, it was more than a policy lapse — it was a national humiliation. Analysts like Rahul Bedi called it the offspring of neglect, while Sanjeev Srivastava reminded readers that Ayni was born in the crucible of anti-Taliban strategy — a project that once carried the pride of purpose, now reduced to a parable of decay.

Thus ends, for now, the story of Ayni: a relic of ambition, undone by time, pride, and providence. History, it seems, has once again whispered across the mountains of Tajikistan that ancient warning — that **power without balance is but splendour poised upon sand**.

After the cataclysm of 9/11, when the United States toppled the Taliban regime, the chessboard of Central Asia was redrawn. Power shifted across Afghanistan's rugged frontiers, and India, ever alert to opportunity, moved swiftly to consolidate its presence. Yet when the Taliban returned to power

in 2021, the foundations of Delhi's entire edifice of policy — built upon the sands of anti-Taliban strategy — crumbled into futility.

Today, in a striking reversal, channels between New Delhi and Kabul stand open once more. The recent visit of Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi to India is emblematic of this new alignment — a gesture that would have been unthinkable a decade ago.



Congress leaders have reminded the nation that Ayni's location once offered India an unblinking eye upon the entire region. From there, Delhi's gaze could stretch from Afghanistan's passes to the high plains of Central Asia. It was this vantage that inspired grand designs of expanded influence — but the wheel of time has turned, and those dreams now lie in shards, like shattered glass scattered upon the map of ambition.

﴿وَتِلْكَ الْأَيَّامُ نُدَاوِلُهَا بَيْنَ النَّاسِ﴾

"These are the days We alternate among mankind." — Āl 'Imrān 3:140

Thus, the revolving days of history have compelled India to sit upon the ashes of its own design. Four years ago, Tajikistan had gently intimated that Delhi might begin winding down its operations. Despite negotiations, monetary overtures, and diplomatic persistence, India was at length compelled to depart — an outcome defence analysts have called a grave diplomatic wound, casting long shadows upon the nation's strategic prestige.

In April, the Taliban government's condemnation of an attack in Kashmir's Pahalgam marked a subtle yet significant shift — a calculated tone of civility replacing enmity. Muttaqi's week-long sojourn in India testifies to a change of heart on both sides: a nation that once likened the Taliban to bloodstained beasts now extends a hand of pragmatic cooperation. Such are the capricious turns of politics, which can transfigure foes into partners and friends into wary strangers.

Reports suggest that India has offered the Taliban financial and technical assistance to construct a dam on the Kabul River — a project whose downstream implications would tighten Pakistan's water supply. In the same breath that it lost Ayni, Delhi sought to rewrite its strategic playbook. But, as ever, the reshuffling of pieces on the board cannot alter the will of fate.

Analyst Rahul Bedi reminds us that Ayni was a joint endeavour of the Indian Air Force and the Border Roads Organisation — institutions long regarded as the backbone of the nation's defence architecture. Yet, through political neglect, that spine was allowed to bend. Sources intimate that both Moscow and Beijing exerted pressure upon Dushanbe to reclaim the base, declining India's offers of investment. Thus the decision was not merely Tajik, but emblematic of a new Asian order. Power's axis has shifted: no longer does Delhi set the rhythm; the region now breathes to the measured cadence of Moscow and Beijing.

Bedi observed, pointedly, that this was not an air force failure but a failure of government — a dereliction of will. It is such lapses, born not of weakness but of complacency, that steer nations toward the poverty of purpose.

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ﴾

“Indeed, God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves.” — Al-Ra’d 13:11

Where once the roar of Indian jets echoed through the valleys of Tajikistan, silence now reigns — a silence that speaks of vanished ambition. The dream of a Central Asian presence has been consumed by the delicate intrigues of diplomacy and the failures of political foresight.

﴿فَاعْتَبِرُوا يَا أُولِيَ الْأَبْصَارِ﴾

“So take heed, O you of insight.” — Al-Hashr 59:2

India’s outreach to Central Asia faltered not for lack of aspiration, but for want of wisdom. The Modi government, so swift to exalt economic ties, displayed an equal haste in neglecting strategic prudence. The closure of Ayni is not merely the shuttering of a base, but the extinction of an idea — a failure both intellectual and strategic.

It is a mirror held up to India’s foreign policy, reflecting an enduring truth: that power rests not in armament alone, but in the triad of confidence, balance, and foresight. Over the silent mountains of Tajikistan there lingers a question, haunting yet necessary: was this merely the fall of a fortress — or the funeral of a dream?

The decline of Ayni marks more than a military withdrawal; it signifies the waning of a vision. Delhi’s silence today carries the murmur of history, whispering that the pride of power is ever the prelude to the fall of reason.

Global strategists already call it the first tremor in the unravelling of India’s foreign policy equilibrium; the Opposition, more bluntly, names it the greatest strategic blunder of the Modi era.

﴿فَسَيَعْلَمُ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا أَيَّ مُنْقَلَبٍ يَنْقَلِبُونَ﴾

“And soon shall the wrongdoers know to what end they shall return.” — Ash-Shu’arā’ 26:227

From the hushed valleys of Tajikistan there arises a solemn reminder: that power inclines always toward those who place discernment above pride, wisdom above might. The demise of Ayni is not merely a military episode, but a moral parable — a warning inscribed upon the wind that arrogance cannot endure the weight of its own conceit.

﴿وَلَا تَفْرَحُوا بِمَا آتَاكُمُ اللَّهُ﴾

“Exult not in what God has given you.” — Al-Hadīd 57:23

India’s strategic undoing thus stands as a lesson writ large upon the map of fate: that nations endure only when their action is tempered by intellect, their ambition by humility, and their policy by vision. Wisdom must accompany will; prudence must walk with power. Yet, alas, in the intoxication of authority, Prime Minister Modi appears to have mistaken dominion for destiny — and in doing so, has set the sun of his imagined “Akhand Bharat” upon the distant waters of the Indian Ocean.

Friday, January 2, 2026

Conspiracies in the Skies, Destinies on the Earth

Flights of Power, Decrees of Fate

When one turns the brittle pages of history, it becomes abundantly clear that the heavens do not always pour down rain alone; at times, they cast down leadership itself. Whenever those aircraft that once bestrode the skies are brought to ruin, it is not merely metal that is shattered; the sinews of nations, too, are broken in spirit. Amidst the mangled wreckage, it is not only bodies that are discovered; unfinished dreams, abandoned designs, and hopes reduced to shards lie scattered like silent witnesses.

One bitter verity of contemporary politics is this: the great powers and the modern empires of influence, in the relentless pursuit of their own interests, often tread paths upon which morality, humanity, and law refuse to accompany them. The record of history bears eloquent testimony that whenever the leadership of the so-called Third World has dared to speak of sovereignty, economic emancipation, or national dignity, the clouds of conspiracy have gathered thick and low upon their horizons. Somewhere the event is designated an “accident”, elsewhere a “technical malfunction” is invoked as explanation; yet the question refuses burial: are these happenings mere coincidence, or are they the silent moves upon the global chessboard of power—moves committed to files but never entrusted to tongues?

These aerial tragedies have, with startling regularity, singled out the political and military leadership of Asia, Africa, and the Muslim world. Time and again, the nations of the Global South have walked through the valley of this grief—now a president, now a commander-in-chief, now an entire cohort of leadership departing together. The consequence, alas, has been drearily familiar: disorder, uncertainty, enfeebled governments, and a people bowed beneath the weight of broken backs.

The contemporary Third World lives on, scarred yet unvanquished by these wounds. It knows full well that its fragile economies, its debt-laden structures, and its fractured politics are made the laboratories in which global powers test their designs. And yet, within this very world, a tremor of awakening is rising. Nations have begun to ask questions; they are rereading history with new eyes and striving to take their destinies into their own hands rather than leaving them to the bases and chancelleries of others.

This study is, therefore, not merely an anthology of disasters; it is a chronicle of those moments when what fell from the sky was not only aircraft but sometimes history itself.

Throughout the long chronicle of mankind, the triangular relationship between power, leadership, and death has stirred an abiding fascination. Leadership is ordinarily nurtured upon the earth; yet, in striking numbers, its end has been consigned to the winds above. Air travel—emblem of modern civilisation—has, on occasion, become the theatre of history’s most lethal turns. The present dissertation examines those tragedies in which heads of state, commanders of armies, eminent rulers, and senior public leaders perished in the wake of aviation disasters.

This inquiry is not a mere catalogue of wrecks; it seeks rather to present a comparative analysis of

their historical contexts, the technical and meteorological dimensions, the political repercussions they unleashed, and the conspiracy narratives they inevitably engendered.

On the cold morning of 23 December 2025, the skies over Türkiye witnessed a calamity that startled the discerning mind and struck the hearts of the Muslim world and the people of Libya alike. General Muhammad al-Haddad, Chief of the General Staff of the Government of National Unity, lost his life in an air crash. Fate overtook him in mid-flight; the journey ceased to be earthly and became one of eternity. **The wind of destiny turned his passage into a final voyage.** At such moments one is reminded of the Qur'ānic truth:

(كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ)

"Every soul shall taste death."

The aircraft, bound from Ankara to Tripoli, had scarcely begun its colloquy with the heavens when communication lines were severed. Moments later, some 105 kilometres from Ankara, the mute soil of a quiet village gathered the scattered debris into its bosom as though bearing witness that those who had departed would not return to this world again.

This was not the passing of a solitary man; it was the departure of a caravan of leadership. A single commander was not alone aboard that fateful flight; several lamps of guidance burned together there. Lieutenant-General al-Fitori, Chief of Staff of Libya's land forces; Brigadier-General Mahmoud al-Qatawi, head of the Military Manufacturing Authority; and Muhammad al-Aswi Diab, adviser to the Chief of the General Staff—all were passengers upon that doomed aircraft, and all answered the summons of death with steadfastness.

The tragedy did not stand in isolation; it rapped upon the windows of memory and awakened the sorrowful chronicles of the past—those moments when eminent political and military figures were handed to fate amidst the clouds. The abrupt loss of communication after take-off, the crash site scarcely over a hundred kilometres distant from Ankara, the widespread debris indicating catastrophic explosion, the simultaneous demise of key civil-military leadership—these elements combined to further unsettle Libya's already fragile political equilibrium, disrupt its chains of decision-making, and draw intensified international scrutiny.

In May 2024, Iran's President, Ebrahim Raisi, too, departed this transient world in the aftermath of an aviation disaster. His helicopter crashed in mountainous terrain near the border with Azerbaijan, claiming also the lives of the Foreign Minister and accompanying officials. They were returning from the inauguration of a joint dam. National mourning spread across the land; the continuity of leadership suffered a jolt; elements of conspiracy infiltrated public discourse; the region responded with alacrity. The episode rekindled debates on the inherent precariousness of political leadership. Their intended destination was Tabriz; Providence had ordained another. Though official inquiries attributed the crash to dense fog, discerning observers and senior officials spoke of clear skies—leaving, as so often in history, a question suspended in the air.

And, above all, there echoes the Qur'ānic reminder which history itself seems to utter:

(إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ)

"Indeed, we belong to God, and to Him is our return."

Critics, peering through the rubble of fact and conjecture alike, pointed towards technical failings

and lifted the curtain upon the darker alcoves of global politics. In the agora of public discourse, lamps of suspicion were lit; rumours walked with unhurried confidence. Accusations arose that truths had been muffled, that realities had been discreetly swept beneath official carpets. The event ceased to be mere “news”; it hardened into an enigma.

In August 2023, near Moscow, an aircraft fell from the sky, taking with it Yevgeny Prigozhin and ten of his companions. The very man who had commanded a formidable host of mercenaries in the war in Ukraine, and who—only months before—had startled the world by raising the banner of rebellion against President Putin, now vanished into the smoking wreckage. Ten companions, a single catastrophic end; accident or deliberate downing—who was to say? The sphinx-like silence of the state invited a global debate on power, its uses, and its inescapable consequences.

The annals of Pakistan, too, bear witness beneath the skies of Bahawalpur. In 1988, the military president, General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, perished in an air crash. Alongside him were the United States Ambassador, Arnold Raphael, and several of Pakistan’s most senior military officers. The sky of Bahawalpur, once tranquil, now became custodian of a grievous testimony.

International media outlets offered a profusion of theories; the gates of conjecture were flung wide. A hint of missile attack, the suggestion of foreign hands, the whisper of a global conspiracy—such interpretations abounded. Yet the pen of history wrote no definitive conclusion; the veil of truth has never been entirely lifted.

Ijaz-ul-Haq spoke of explosive materials secreted in crates of mangoes; yet this allegation never passed from suspicion into certainty, and history refused to confer upon it the dignity of established fact.

General Mirza Aslam Beg, in his memoirs *Iqtidar ki Majbooriyan* (“Constraints of Power”), recounted that day’s chilling narrative: an inspection from the air, smoke rising from below, the aircraft descending, and then the resolute decision not to proceed to the crash site but to return directly to Rawalpindi. For there are decisions, he implied, that are not scripted upon the ground but written in the grand ledger of destiny.

On 13 August 1988, upon the plains of Bahawalpur, there occurred that tragic moment which became simultaneously a political, military, and national turning point. In a purported air crash, Pakistan’s President, General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, the Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, General Akhtar Abdul Rahman, and the American Ambassador, Arnold Lewis Raphael—together with nearly thirty souls—passed from time into eternity. This was not merely the death of individuals; it signified the closing of an entire chapter. Layers of inquiry, the subsequent stages of investigation, the story of the Al-Khalid tank trials, the background of military decision-making, the demands of constitutional propriety, and the inscrutable aura surrounding the tragedy—all seem etched upon the tablets of history.

The calamity befell Pakistan at a moment when its military trajectory stood at a crossroads and the map of regional politics was being redrawn. The echo of the crash travelled beyond its borders; the entire country was swathed in mourning, and the chessboard of power was rearranged anew.

Despite investigations, questions clung like shadows: accident or design? Was there an unseen hand behind the curtain? The knot has never been fully untied. State institutions sought the causes; reports were written with admirable diligence—yet, like a persistent tremor beneath the earth, the anxiety remained. International media, too, mulled various possibilities: mechanical failure here, tangled webs of conspiracy there. But history chose silence over verdict; it preserved the questions and withheld the answers.

The tragedy unfolded at a time when the trials of the Al-Khalid tank were underway, and the military leadership had gathered in Bahawalpur against that backdrop. The journey, undertaken in that context, metamorphosed into an eternal voyage. The Al-Khalid tank represented a joint endeavour of China and Pakistan, with the American M1 Abrams commonly perceived as its rival. Threads of power, technology, and geopolitics were entwined in intricate knots.

India, too, dreamt of forging its own armour, yet its endeavours faltered; the lesson emerged that isolation yields only sterility, while collaboration and prudence serve as the true rungs to success. Industry does not stand alone; wisdom, experience, and partnership are its pillars.

Pakistani and Chinese experts, weaving together diverse strands of technology from multiple nations, produced a tank that was more than a machine—it was the emblem of a nation's resolve.

At such crossroads of fate and power, one is reminded of the Qur'ānic admonition:

﴿وَمَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ مَّاذَا تَكْسِبُ غَدًا وَمَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ بِأَيِّ أَرْضٍ تَمُوتُ﴾

"No soul knows what it will earn tomorrow, nor does any soul know in which land it shall die."

Pakistani engineers, with patience, craft, and an almost monastic deliberation, gathered diverse strands of foreign technology and, through prudent adaptation, fashioned the Al-Khalid tank. It was not merely a contrivance of iron and steel; it was a living testament to national resolve. It carved its own path through difficulty; it stood, not as a machine alone, but as the emblem of a people's steadfast will.

General Akhtar Abdul Rahman protested that he had not been included in the first group of passengers. The answer returned with bureaucratic composure: it is a principle of prudence that all senior officials do not travel upon the same aircraft. Yet destiny is seldom impressed by human protocols; its own statutes operate at loftier levels. In the end, he too boarded the very flight from which none would return.

On 17 August, when General Zia-ul-Haq arrived in Bahawalpur, General Aslam Beg was already awaiting him. Military commanders and foreign dignitaries formed part of the retinue. None realised that what appeared to be a reception was, in truth, the prelude to a farewell—an unwritten valediction upon which eternity had already inscribed its seal. The author himself, in an extended interview with General Beg—still available in the modern marketplace of social media—posed many of the questions that had fermented in public minds; their answers may yet be heard there.

At the Tamewali Firing Range, the Al-Khalid and the M1 tanks were brought into direct comparison. The Al-Khalid prevailed, as if the labours of the nation had been vindicated. The joy of success had scarcely settled in the mind when a dark monsoon of tragedy rolled in; the voices of triumph were stilled. After the trials, the party set out once more for Bahawalpur. Prayers were said; routine

engagements continued; the airport beckoned; life moved with the nonchalance of habit—yet somewhere, at the unseen margin of time, destiny had already written its decree.

Before departure, Zia-ul-Haq smiled and uttered his final words: “Why do you not come along as well?” Only later did the profundity of that simple invitation reveal itself as a silent farewell. It proved the last summons to earthly travel. He boarded the aircraft—and the narrative of history changed direction. Moments later, communication with “Pakistan One” fell abruptly silent. Radios died; a nameless fear rose like mist within the heart—fear that precedes the echo of catastrophe. Smoke was seen rising at a distance. On approaching, the truth revealed itself: the C-130 lay destroyed; flames conversed with the very sky. There was wreckage—then fire—then silence. Human forms had become ash; and a chapter of history quietly closed.



General Aslam Beg resolved that power must pass in accordance with the Constitution. Conscience spoke; his steps obeyed. It was the decisive hour: to grasp authority, or to surrender it to lawful order? He remembered a father’s counsel and concluded that sovereignty is a trust of the people. Thus, in his own words, he chose fidelity over ambition.

Accordingly, in obedience to constitutional requirement, authority was transferred to the Chairman of the Senate, Ghulam Ishaq Khan. At ten that night, the nation was addressed; within mere hours the machinery of state refashioned itself, and constitutional process was revived.

The violence of the crash rendered identification agonisingly difficult. Whatever fragments of mortal remains could be gathered were laid to rest with reverence as sacred trust. Subsequent medical reports failed to establish the presence of any definitive chemical agent. Yet doubts lingered like embers beneath ash—at times cold, at times glowing faintly into life.

Military Intelligence, the Inter-Services Intelligence, and the Air Force each conducted inquiries; reports were duly submitted within three weeks. Yet truth never showed its entire face; it glanced from behind the curtain and withdrew. After that, history closed the docket; politics opened its next chapter. The C-130, as an Air Force asset, fell under its responsibility; protocols were strict and security thorough—yet accidents bow neither to rule nor routine; they merely await their moment.

The inquiries yielded no conclusive evidence of gas or toxic chemicals. The silence of the pilot, the absence of any SOS signal, the sudden loss of control—these sustained the spectre of conspiracy, while proof remained stubbornly out of reach. At times, silence itself becomes the most troubling question, and so suspicion never wholly died.

Commissions were constituted under both Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif—the Bandyal Commission and later the Shafi-ur-Rahman Commission—yet every road circled back to the same verdict: accident. Perhaps history deemed it fit that the final judgment be deferred to another tribunal altogether. For the Qur’ān reminds us:

(فَيَوْمَئِذٍ لَا يُسْأَلُ عَنْ ذَنْبِهِ إِنْسٌ وَلَا جَانٌّ)

“On that Day, neither man nor jinn shall need to be questioned about his sin.”

The narrative now turns towards Jordan. In February 1977, Queen Alia Al-Hussein—the consort of King Hussein—perished in a helicopter crash. The tragedy shook not only the royal household but several pillars of the state; the Minister of Health and other dignitaries were also lost—a whole caravan extinguished. Fate seemed to proclaim that calamity does not halt at palace gates; royal walls are no rampart against decree. Forty days later, the airport at Amman was named in her honour—an emblem of national remembrance, a covenant to remember, a tribute cast in stone and iron.

And over all these episodes there hovers the eternal declaration:

﴿مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ﴾

“No calamity befalls save by the leave of Allah.”

In April 1966, Iraq’s President ‘Abd al-Salām ‘Ārif likewise met his end in a helicopter crash near Basra. In the immediate aftermath his brother, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ‘Ārif, assumed the reins of office—his tenure brief, his shadow soon receding. Many a thoughtful observer deemed the tragedy mysterious, and history, once again, left its questions suspended in the air, knocking still upon the door of inquiry. Such episodes have shaped, directly and decisively, the political temper of the region.

These are not mere references in a chronicle; they are the ill-fated lamps of history—burning dimly, half-veiled, their truths elusive, perhaps destined to remain forever beyond the full gaze of the world. Each lamp teaches us that power is transitory, flight is finite, and the end is certain; that even those who soar in the boundless skies remain beholden to a single gesture of destiny. Power, pomp, and princely splendour can be scattered to the winds in the twinkling of an eye.

Here the timeless proclamation resounds:

﴿كُلُّ مَنْ عَلَيْهَا فَانٍ﴾

“All that is upon it shall perish.”

In most air disasters, certain elements are habitually at work: inclement weather—fog, dust-storms, blizzards; mechanical failure—engines giving way, hydraulic collapse, electronic malfunction; human error—want of training or want of vigilance. Yet, when the manifest includes heads of state, intelligence chiefs, or military commanders, another factor insinuates itself: political interest. Hence investigators, in prudence, seldom close the door between accident and design.

Where the leader of a nation, the custodian of its security, or the commander of its arms falls from the sky, the event refuses to remain a mere mishap. Questions arise and abide. Who stood to gain? Did the safety cordons fail? Was this nature’s blind strike, or a deliberate move upon the chequered board of power? History reminds us that truth is not always preserved upon official parchment; sometimes it lies interred with the dead.

From such inquiries a few sober verities emerge. The death of leadership can bend the arc of national destiny; air disasters have marked turning points in modern politics; and despite the advance of science, certain riddles remain unresolved. At the zenith of power, human frailty whispers its limits, and the great judgments of history seem to be written, as it were, also in the heavens.

From the skies over Bahawalpur to the runways of Amman—from Queen Alia of Jordan to President ‘Abd al-Salām ‘Ārif of Iraq—each catastrophe reiterates the same austere lesson: that authority, might and magnificence are but like flight itself—glorious yet fragile; a single gust, and the splendour

is in shards. Whether the subject be military strategy, the diadems of politics, or that immutable law of human fate, the record stands preserved in the very sequence you provided.

Surveyed together, these episodes compose a sombre tableau: twisted wreckage of aircraft, plumes of black smoke, mothers in lament, silent sentry-posts, and the chill of dread drifting through the corridors of power. These are not merely doleful accidents; they are the very bends in the river of history that altered national destinies, redrew political maps, and diverted the current of time itself. It is equally true that global hegemonies have long sought to keep the balance of power within their grasp—by open war, by economic strangulation, by the re-ordering of governments, and at times by those enigmatic “accidents” whose truth has never fully stepped into the light. Leaders across the developing world who spoke of sovereignty, ownership of resources, or independence from the world’s economic regimes have too often paid in isolation, in tragedy—or in what the record calls an accident.

These are not fanciful tales; they are the painful truths that lie buried—and yet alive—in the breast of history. But the reverse of the picture must also be seen: shattered nations do not always perish; they rise as well. The so-called Third World now stands with its wounds uncovered; after long ages of servitude, the whirlpools of intrigue and the tempests of disaster, its youth are awakening, its thinkers are taking up the pen, and its people proclaiming their right to self-determination. The road is perilous; nevertheless, history bears witness that nations which wept—and walked on—arrived at last.

If on one side these air catastrophes bereft nations of their leaders, on the other they taught a sterner lesson: that freedom exacts a price; that the road to sovereignty is strewn with dangers; and that to confront imperial power is often to have one’s fate inscribed as “an accident”. Yet history does not halt at disaster—it merely turns the page.

Today, the peoples of the developing world mourn their fallen leaders, and from that very remembrance draw their courage. Perhaps the dawn that is to come shall be born of these tears; and when flights once again trace their arcs across the sky, they may become not omens of fear but heralds of freedom.

The unifying spirit of these singular tragedies reminds us that history is not a bare sequence of events but also a ledger of admonitions. Leaders depart, but leave behind their questions: Whose power? Whose mandate? And to what end?

The tale of these air disasters gently but insistently teaches that the aircraft of national destiny does not only fly through the clouds; it travels also across the firmament of principles and of hearts. This essay is, in essence, the chronicle of the tenuous bond between human destiny and temporal power. The flights may be long, but they are never eternal; authority may be exalted, but it is never imperishable.

By the waning days of the second decade of November, the reflective sessions of the Global Iqbal Conference were still in full sway in Quetta Baluchistan. The halls hummed with dialogue, the minds of scholars and thinkers pressed forward, alive with ideas. Amidst this fervour, the honourable Hafiz

Tahir—former Secretary, recently designated OSD—insisted, with unyielding warmth and hospitality, that I visit his official residence. That very residence where today he spends, in quiet dignity, the remaining days of the sentence that his unwavering integrity has earned. There was a solemnity there, an almost palpable silence, a muted protest; it seemed as though the walls themselves bore witness that, at times, the gravest cost of truth is solitude, and the heaviest burden, a moral sentence imposed by conscience.

Yet it was a humble plaque, fastened to the outer door, that truly seized my heart. Upon it, a Qur'anic verse shone with stark simplicity:

﴿وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا مَتَاعُ الْغُرُورِ﴾

"And the life of this world is nothing but the merchandise of delusion."

I lingered before it, as though the words were not etched upon stone but upon the very fibers of my soul. How I longed, in that moment, for us to do more than merely read—to immerse ourselves within its depths, to hold our lives to its mirror, and to discern what constitutes true recompense, and what the ultimate reward might be. A shiver ran through me as I realised, perhaps for the first time, the profound truth that only by such reckoning could we understand the true measure of loss—and of success.

Aerial disasters, shattered leadership, fractured kingdoms, toppled thrones—all bear witness to this singular reality. Power, fame, authority—all are at the mercy of a fleeting gust. And in the stillness of that revelation, the heart whispered:

"If only we might enter fully into this message from our Lord, weigh ourselves by its measure, and recognise that the supreme flight is not of wings, but of the soul; and all else, all worldly pursuits, are but the glitter of illusion."

In that quiet, another verse resonated with solemn clarity:

﴿كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ﴾

"Every soul shall taste death."

And with it, the truth became undeniable: the leaders who fall in the corridors of history, the aircraft that shatter across the skies—they are enduring reminders that flights, however ambitious, are never eternal; that no crown, no office, no glory withstands the quiet, inescapable decree of fate.

Let this stand, then, as the final reflection: the loftiest journeys may be long, yet they are finite; the mightiest power may ascend, yet it is never immortal. And in this, perhaps, lies the ultimate lesson for all who dare to soar that the only true flight is the flight of the soul, and the only enduring measure is the moral compass by which we navigate the fleeting splendours of this world.

Sunday, January 4, 2026

China's Quiet Advance

The Triumph of Silence

There are moments when Time itself turns upon its hinges, yet those seated upon the high thrones of power seem singularly unable to discern the tremor beneath their very feet. Nations live by dreams, but history is inscribed in the full wakefulness of conscience. The march of history has quickened; destinies are no longer written solely upon the smoke-blackened fields of battle, but in the rhetoric of military doctrines, the deft manoeuvres of diplomacy, and the subtle cartography of geopolitics. Nations are not judged by the clamour of their slogans, but by the gravity of their deeds; and when people trumpet only words, yet fall silent when summoned to action, history inevitably puts to them a stern question: were you merely vendors of empty cries, or artisans of purposeful achievement?

وَتِلْكَ الْأَيَّامُ نُدَاوِلُهَا بَيْنَ النَّاسِ

"These are the days which We alternate among mankind." (Qur'an 3:140)

Between the two great states of the Subcontinent—Pakistan and India—the recent aerial skirmish may have worn the outward cloak of a regional crisis; yet a third power, vast, inscrutable, and patient—China—quietly secured advantage in a fashion that compels serious historical and geo-strategic reflection. To an inattentive eye the contest appeared bilateral; but to those whose eyes are open and whose judgement has not slumbered, it was a decisive etching upon the geo-strategic canvas of Asia—and the true architect of that image, one must ask, was it Islamabad or Beijing?

This was not the familiar, overheated exchange between two nuclear neighbours. It was, rather, the proving ground of China's military industry, an assertion of impassioned nationalism, and an exercise in diplomatic craft—demonstrating to Asia and, indeed, to the wider world where a "steel-clad friend" stands in the nascent alignment of global power. When the Indian Army, so bellicose in its rhetoric against Pakistan, wraps itself in a shroud of silence upon the icy heights where Chinese shadows lengthen, the question is not merely why it is silent, but whether that silence is, in truth, the veil of defeat.

This essay contends, in the light of these clashes, that the real victor—whether China or Pakistan—asserted primacy not only in matériel but in the arena of ideas and diplomacy. My endeavour herein is to delineate the strategic and historical context of the recent aerial confrontation, China's unannounced yet decisive role, the standing of Chinese defence industries in global markets, the cartographical symbolism of renaming in Arunachal Pradesh, and India's quixotic attempt to open fronts on every border at once.

The battle, though fought in the empyrean, sent its reverberations through the market squares of the world. When Pakistan launched the J-10 and JF-17 aircraft, fruits of Sino-Pakistani collaboration, these were not merely warplanes; they were flying manifestoes—testaments to a defence partnership whose confidence had outgrown parade grounds and now made its claim upon the theatre of war itself. One could almost sense that, as the Chinese Colonel Zhu Bo spoke, a fresh page of history was being signed.

For China's defence industry this engagement was nothing less than advertisement—though written not in pamphlets and prospectuses, but in the fire-traced script of combat. For the first time Chinese fighter aircraft were tested in the crucible of a real conflict; and, as Eastern wisdom has often reminded us, the line upon stone is etched only when steel is set in motion.

India christened its air operation "Operation Sundoor." Drones, missiles, and fighter aircraft were hurled into the fray. India deployed French Rafales and Russian jets; Pakistan responded vigorously with the Sino-co-produced J-10s and JF-17s. Pakistani aircraft, without crossing the frontier, loosed missiles that, according to its claims, destroyed six Indian aircraft. Delhi issued formal denials, yet the Rafale manufacturer itself acknowledged the loss of three aircraft—an admission that marked a turning point of no small historical significance. The chief executive of the company, striving perhaps to staunch reputational wounds, conceded that while they could sell aircraft, they could not sell courage. The markets, that remorseless tribunal, were unsparing; Rafale's shares faltered, while the stock of the JF-17—slayer of its French rival—rose sharply, sending an unambiguous signal to buyers across continents.

When Indian media breathes fire against Pakistan, one might think New Delhi stands on the verge of proclaiming victory from Kabul to Islamabad. Yet in Ladakh's snow-laden valleys the same voices fall mute when confronted with Chinese sentinels. Former Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran's admission—that the Indian military either will not act or cannot—was in essence a diplomatic confession of timidity. It is the same tongue that thundered against Pakistan now faltering before China. Why?

The Chinese People's Liberation Army's former Colonel Zhu Bo declared before the world's media that this air engagement served as a major showcase for China's defence industry. Never before had Beijing's platforms been tested in actual combat. Following the J-10's successful trial by fire, shares of the Chengdu Aircraft Corporation surged by some forty per cent. Victory, therefore, belonged not merely to the soldier in the cockpit, but to the live demonstration of Pakistan's courage—proof conclusive that the contest was won both on the battlefield and in the financial markets. Chinese weapons now stand poised for wider acceptance across Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America.

The Indian Air Force spokesman's remark, "Loss is part of war," was in truth an oblique confession of defeat. The government's wary silence, the international media's reporting, and the Rafale company's admissions together signalled a reality that had outgrown the fictions of narrative. Here again, China eclipsed India on the diplomatic stage—not by declamation, denunciation, or theatrical rhetoric, but by the stark eloquence of results. This reticence is, indeed, the signature of Chinese statecraft.

India's Rafales—purchased at extravagant cost—proved unequal to Pakistani missiles. Their confirmed losses plunged Delhi into a silence as heavy as mourning beneath the red sandstone of Agra Fort. The repeated refrain that "such losses are normal in war" was but a gauze placed over an unstaunched wound. The world, however, saw the blood seep through.

Pakistani aircraft did not cross the frontier, yet their missiles exacted a toll across it; this was more than a display of military skill—it was an unannounced rehearsal of Sino-Pakistani strategy. Pakistan's

triumph became China's masterclass in military marketing; the forty-per-cent surge in Chengdu's stock was no mere economic incident, but proof that modern conflict is fought not only with gunpowder, but with brands and narratives.

Let it not be forgotten that when Defence Minister Rajnath Singh himself acknowledged that significant numbers of Chinese troops had crossed the Line of Actual Control into Indian territory, it seemed as though India's geographic sovereignty had been crushed beneath glacial boots. It was not simply a border incident; it was the victory of Chinese self-assurance and the retreat of Indian claims. What was most conspicuous was not India's protest—but India's military inaction.

President Trump's offer of mediation resembled the well-meaning overture of a monarch eager to reconcile quarrelling princes; yet China dismissed it with the quiet dignity of one certain of its own poise—declaring, in effect, that it was sufficient unto itself, sovereign, self-reliant, and intellectually confident. Such composure marks those who stand upon the threshold of regional pre-eminence. The lesson for Pakistan's own leadership is clear: cast out the lingering fear of international financial institutions; as Pakistan once turned its gaze from West to East in defence procurement, so too must it liberate itself from the tutelage of borrowed anxieties.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ

"Indeed, God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves." (Qur'an 13:11)

And again:

وَأَعِدُّوا لَهُمْ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ

"Prepare against them whatever strength you can muster." (Qur'an 8:60)

Such are the admonitions of Revelation and the verdicts of history: the age belongs to those who couple resolve with restraint, courage with wisdom, and power with principle.

A few days after the ceasefire, China unveiled a new diplomatic and psychological stratagem. While India remained preoccupied with Pakistan, Beijing launched a quieter—yet intellectually decisive—offensive: twenty-seven locations in Arunachal Pradesh were rechristened in Chinese and Tibetan.

Mountains, passes, rivers, lakes, hamlets, and settlements alike were renamed. This was not merely a symbolic blow to India's geographical claims; it was a reminder to the world that maps are not only drawn upon paper, but first inscribed in the minds of those who rule. The act demonstrated that China and Pakistan are not merely emblematic powers; they advance vigorously also in the domain of soft power. The renaming was no linguistic pastime; it was a steel-tipped assertion of historic claim, executed precisely when India's military gaze was fixed westwards upon Pakistan. To the strategic triad of India–Israel–the United States, the message was clear: when you turn to the East, you shall read names upon the earth that are not your own; and when you open your atlases, even the words may elude your ownership.

Nepal, Pakistan, and China—situated upon three of India's frontiers—are each, at this hour, in various states of tension with New Delhi. One must ask: in what dream or cartographic delusion does India open simultaneous fronts on three sides? Nepal, though small in size, has asserted a diplomatic independence that has unsettled Indian policymakers; Pakistan has strengthened itself both militarily and ideologically; and China stands as a global power that has surpassed India in economic and

military spheres alike. It is as though a mosquito had strayed into the lairs of three lions, imagining itself to be a passing cloud destined merely to shower and be gone.

At first glance the skirmish seemed between India and Pakistan alone; in truth, it marked the success of a trilateral understanding between Pakistan and China. At the military level there was Pakistan's operational dexterity in the field; alongside this stood the successful combat validation of Chinese J-10 and JF-17 aircraft, amplified in the global marketplace by a remarkable rise in the shares of Chinese aviation industries. Diplomatically, psychological ascendancy was achieved by engaging India on two fronts—Pakistan and Arunachal—rendering its regional image blurred upon the world's stage; and strategically, the world was made to understand that, following Pakistan's practical demonstration, China had emerged not only as an industrial giant but as a leader in the rhetoric of war. All these dimensions point towards a single reality: China has won an undeclared conflict—without firing a shot—upon the strength of Pakistan's performance in the field.



Pakistan's military success is indisputable; yet if there is a principal beneficiary of the encounter, it is Beijing. Without discharging a rifle, expending fuel, or sacrificing soldiers, its corporate shares soared, its weapons gained practical certification, its political narrative was fortified, and new colours were added to its cartographic aspirations. This is the art of Eastern statecraft—where silence proves more potent than bullets, and the map becomes a subtler weapon than the battlefield. Little wonder the verdict of history has often been: victory belongs to those who quietly carry the day.

Wars are not won by artillery alone; behind them stand the minds that alter the temper of history. Quietly, patiently, and with an astute reading of Time's mood, Pakistan and China appear to have done precisely this. One is reminded of an arresting parable: when the hour of decision arrives, nations either preserve the moment as history—or, neglecting it, or themselves become its cautionary tale. The partnership between Pakistan and China seized the hour, lifting their narrative, their armaments, and their strategy to a higher plane. This now stands as an undeniable reality of the international landscape—and perhaps as the herald of Asia's shifting centre of gravity.

Some have called India's silence "prudence," yet history insists that prudence is timely, responsive, and crowned with success. If an adversary crosses your frontier and you cannot even protest in voice, such silence is not wisdom but fear. The media chorus that daily sings martial anthems against Pakistan fell conspicuously mute before China. The moment demands not merely to measure one's enemy, but to recognise him.

India's reticence before China is not merely geography rendered wordless; it evokes the ancient maxim associated with Kautilya—submit before the stronger power, and reserve defiance for the weaker. Hence, many spectacles have circulated in the global press: rituals performed before weapons systems, votive offerings placed before fighter aircraft, symbolic gestures of devotion in the presence of arsenals. These images speak less of faith than of the uneasy marriage between populist spectacle and strategic anxiety. The malaise is not India's alone; wherever media is captive to expediency, politics to slogans, and people to silence, the same pattern emerges.

In the snowbound valleys where Pakistan and China face the heights, cannons may not yet have spoken; but truth and history speak even through ice. And they say: you were fierce against the weak and hesitant before the powerful; bold in claim yet unversed in strategy; generous with threats to Pakistan yet deferential in silence before China.

India's martial bravado against Pakistan unsettles the region; its silence before China reveals the contrast between performative militancy and realpolitik. In these conditions, the balance of power in South Asia inclines steadily eastward—while Sino-Pakistani amity rises like a sun, casting a reshaping light upon the region's destiny.

From this analysis one truth emerges with clarity: during the recent aerial tensions of South Asia, the people of Pakistan stood as a wall of steel—setting aside political divisions and, in humility before God, achieved a manifest success under the canopy of unity. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that China presented a rare fusion of military industry, geopolitical subtlety, and diplomatic intelligence seldom witnessed in classical statecraft. The hour now calls for strengthening national cohesion, curbing political anarchy, and replacing rancour with concord. As Pakistan has reset the foundations of fraternal relations with its neighbours—embracing again its friends with sincerity—so too must it nourish the spirit enjoined in Revelation:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ

"The believers are but brothers." (Qur'an 49:10)

Thus, may unity of purpose, sobriety of politics, and the discipline of history guide the region through its present storm and toward a more considered peace.

Thursday, January 8, 2026

After Separation, the Season of Reunion

Hearts Reunited, a New Dawn Unfolds

This article is an analytical study of Bangladesh's internal politics, electoral landscape, India's changing concerns, and new emerging trends in Pak-Bangladesh relations. It not only examines the current situation but also sheds light on the possible future regional scenarios and policy options.

The history of South Asia is not a text written on a solid marble slab, it is the story of beating hearts, wet eyes, and memories scattered in the soil made of blood. The history of South Asia in particular and of Pak-India and Bangladesh in general is not just the story of borders, treaties, and power struggles, it is also a story of relationships of hearts, colors of accents, and tears of eyes. South Asian politics is once again at the crossroads of rapid change.

The emerging political landscape in Bangladesh, a key country in the region, has not only affected the dynamics of domestic power but has also had profound effects on regional balance, diplomatic priorities, and future economic and strategic relations. In these circumstances, the bilateral relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh are emerging with new intensity, where the long-standing aspirations and mutual closeness of the people of both countries seem to be taking on a new chapter. Despite the bitterness of the past and historical events, the feelings of friendship and brotherhood between the two countries at the public level have not diminished. During the days of separation, the people of both sides endured severe emotional trauma and are still well-wishers for each other today.

The two Muslim states of the subcontinent, Pakistan and Bangladesh — these are not just two countries, two bodies of one soul, these are two branches of the same tree, whose roots are rooted in the soil of common faith, civilization, harmony of languages and mutual love. These are two songs of the same melody, two hands of the same prayer. Partition drew borders, but no wall could be erected on the paths of love. The separation of 1971 divided the state map, but the heartbeats of hearts could never be separated. In the moments of this separation, not only lands were divided, dreams were also shattered, the lights dimmed in the homes of both sides; mothers cried, daughters were shocked, and a void was created in the hearts of brothers that words cannot fill.

And such silences descended in the homes of both sides that history has also written with respect and today, once again, these public sentiments are now reflected in state policies and diplomatic attitudes. History is witness that the journey of the prayers of this separation never stopped. From the waving paddy ears of Bengal to the fields of Punjab, there was only one cry—O Lord! Bring hearts closer together again. Hatred never settled in the hearts of the common people, nor did enmity take root. Be it the villages of Bangladesh or the streets of the cities of Pakistan—in the days of separation, countless eyes were moist, prayers were clasped in trembling palms, and there was only one supplication that Allah would turn this path of destiny into closeness again. Even today, the same yearning is alive in the hearts of the people that we should come closer to each other again, share each other's sorrows and be a support and strength for each other.

Today, the scene is changing. A new wind is blowing in the desert of politics, the burdens of the past

are being lightened, the walls of misunderstandings are cracking, and the old lamps of love are about to be rekindled. Today, when the politics of the region are taking new turns, old narratives are melting and the scattered pearls of relationships are starting to come into hands again, it feels as if the revolving wheel of time has taken a new turn. The lamps of love are about to be relit, and both nations are again praying the same old prayer—let us be with each other, even if the maps are different, but the hearts are one.

The people of Pakistan and Bangladesh have always prayed for each other, wished each other well, and kept the doors of their hearts open for each other. Now those long-standing prayers are starting to feel close to acceptance. The youth of both countries are seeking a new world—where the past is not a subject of hatred but a lesson, and the future becomes a highway of cooperation, brotherhood, and common development.

This article is the story of this changing weather and wave of feelings—an attempt to heal the wounds of history, a strong voice of friendship amidst the noise of politics, and the conviction that prayers for love sought in the court of Allah do not go in vain. A narrative of a history that contains politics but more love; analysis but more hope; and a desire that the two nations stand side by side, as if they were once one soul and one body, and today, hearts beat again for this unity.

It should be remembered that South Asian politics has never been stagnant. This is a river where the waves never calm down. Bangladesh stands today at a juncture where the houses of power are shaky, public anxiety is awake, the entire calculation of regional powers is being rewritten, Tariq Rahman's return has put a new move, a new game, a new question on this board. Finally, under the sky of Dhaka, the moment of resurrection arrived, which the pen and eyes had been waiting for for years. When Tariq Rahman stepped on the soil of Dhaka after seventeen years of exile, it was as if history had opened a new chapter in its book. This return was not just the return of a person, but a declaration of question against the political status quo, an indication of a shift in the center of gravity in Bangladeshi politics, and the starting point of a new calculation for the diplomacy of the region.

BNP Executive Chairman Tariq Rahman left the prison of seventeen years of self-imposed exile and stepped into the beloved homeland on December 25, 2025. The night of poverty lost in the fragrance of that soil turned into the pure voices of thousands of workers, as if a mournful evening had given birth to a morning of hope. His arrival gave the impression that the desert of migration had ended, and now the city of trials was ahead. This very return sent a wave of concern through the Delhi government—because after Sheikh Hasina, the face of India's traditional pillows has changed in Bangladesh. There, from the rooftops of the offices in Naya Paltan, the heart of the capital, his voice echoed that if God wills, we will all build the Bangladesh of our hopes together.

This was not only a political slogan, but also a promise of action, whether it is still related to the memories of the exiles or to the public's thirst. Thus, while Tariq Rahman's return to his homeland is the dawn of hope for a new political era, there is also a knock on the door of history that could prove to be a new turning point in India's unrest and South Asian politics.

After overcoming seventeen years of self-imposed exile, political cases, illness, distance from the country, and the wilderness of memories of the homeland, when Tariq Rahman stepped into Dhaka,

the public crowd made this return a metaphor for a new era. The slogans of the party workers echoed the heartbeat of hope, while waves of concern ran through the hearts of the opponents because this return is not just the return of one person, it is the return of history. Return after seventeen years — this journey from the desert of exile to the lap of the motherland, where his declaration of determination is, could also prove to be a prelude to a test.

What Tariq Rahman said at the Dhaka public meeting was not words but a promise, an intellectual narrative of the future, the weight of which was evident in his words that we will work hard, build our Bangladesh, accept the leadership of the coming leader. This explicit hope of the BNP president has turned the general elections to be held on February 12, 2026, into a historical milestone, where every intellectual tone, every political stance, and every leader's step is being seen towards the paths of democracy and stability.

Tariq Rahman said that I have a plan for the people and the country, for the development of the country and to change the destiny of the people, the details of this plan have not yet been revealed to the public; as if there is a secret, the curtain of which can only be opened by time. This phrase, as if it were the first destination of a spiritual journey, has contained two voices of hope and concern within itself. This tone points to collective leadership, moving away from personal centering, and this is the essence of democratic thought. Tariq Rahman announced his national development plan, saying that his plan is ready, but did not explain the details and the secret still remains. This ambiguity has many meanings, a political strategy to keep opposing forces unclear, a safe card for the election campaign, but of course this question remains. Is this plan for economic revival? Is it a restructuring of foreign policy? Or a balance in power structures? In the context of the February 12 elections, this silence is actually both political wisdom and a cover for policy.

Tariq Rahman said in his speech that if God wills, we will all build a Bangladesh of hopes together. This sentence was not just a crowd of slogans, but an announcement of the recognition of collective leadership. He appealed to avoid violent actions; this tone shows that politics is not just the name of power but also the name of moral responsibility. Bangladesh is in the circulation of a political climate that requires great caution to get out of.

The issue is not limited to domestic politics. Without India and Sheikh Hasina, a new conflict has emerged in the political landscape of Bangladesh. Observers say that India is going through a historic decline, because after thirteen years of Sheikh Hasina's rule, there is no suitable friend in the new scenarios. Moreover, Indian political analysts have repeatedly repeated the same thought cycle and said that there is now an anti-India wave in Bangladesh, especially the political mindset of the new generation who has not only changed the perception but also started searching for an independent identity in the fast waves of social media. This reality is like a book of political science, where each new chapter examines friendship, enmity, interest, and autonomy in a new sense.

India's anxiety is increasing with each passing day and there is also a historical narrative that without a friend, the border seems long. After Sheikh Hasina, Delhi does not see any clear friends in Dhaka. The old doors of communication seem to be closing; the real dilemma of Indian policy is who is the new leadership in Bangladesh? How to trust it? And how to shed the burden of past interference? This is the point where questions of both politics and ethics arise.

After Tariq Rahman's statement that a plan to change the destiny of the country is ready but has not been detailed. This silence has the following possibilities. The secret of strategy, the wisdom of the election campaign, keeping the opposing forces unaware, in political terminology it is called a silent announcement which is both determination and curiosity.

The new generation of Bangladesh has developed its political sensibilities without a long historical background. The history of independence in 1971 is a blank slate before them — neither old, nor studied, nor do they want to access its deeper meaning. If there is any political reaction from this new generation, it is the attraction of hostility and questions over the transparency of Indian strategy, as local observers say that this generation is taking politics beyond the limits of mere leaders and leadership speeches to a socially effective movement, where concepts and perceptions merge and new ideas are born, and they do not care about the Indian propaganda that India helped them in the creation of Bangladesh.

The question is, why is the day of the February 12 elections decisive? In fact, the February 12 general elections are not just a change of power, but a day to determine the direction of national thought. These questions will be decided on this day: who will lead? Who will have foreign policy in their hands? What will be the new alignment in South Asia? Votes will be kept in the balance of power as well as consciousness. On this day, India's interference in the internal affairs of the region, the possibilities of future reconciliation or hostility and the status quo will be decided. We are all aware of the reasons for India's displeasure with Muhammad Yunus's interim government, namely Hasina's humiliating escape from Bangladesh to India, and the demand for Hasina's return from Bangladesh is now the first demand of the people of Bangladesh. On the other hand, India is dissatisfied with the interim government, afraid of religious parties, and wary of BNP and student groups. Indian analysts even said that Jamaat-e-Islami is a nightmare for the Indian establishment.



The term itself is an admission that India fears religious identity and only pursues its own interests in the name of secularism in the region. Today, when two Muslim states — Bangladesh and Pakistan — are defining new political realities, India is left with few options. A free, fair election can be sabotaged through its infamous intelligence agency “RAW”, in which the strong roles of Jamaat-e-Islami and BNP, whose mutual relations can lead to a certain victory in the elections, and both countries can move towards peace in Pakistan and Bangladesh. In addition, India will try its best to increase tensions by going on separate paths, the consequences of which both countries may have to suffer in the future. If we look at it from the perspective of Hindutva's ego and stubbornness, it seems that perhaps India has limited its options on the international political stage, and now every decision depends on the fine lines between its political interests, moral reasoning, and regional peace, which is constantly being seen as a threat to regional peace.

Sheikh Hasina was convicted by the court, the Awami League was banned from participating in elections outside the country, her proximity to India had made her the main pillar of Delhi's policy.

Now that pillar has fallen. After this, India's policy seems like an orphan, looking for friends but no friends are available. Therefore, the chapter of Sheikh Hasina is not yet completely closed. On the other hand, the new generation and the anti-Indian atmosphere in these elections have also changed the mood of ongoing history. Pakistan, Bangladesh and India will influence these elections as a triangle of interests. The new generation of Bangladesh is not emotionally attached to the history of 1971. This young generation, captive to social media and dissatisfied with Indian attitudes, has been the cause of this revolution in Bangladesh.

When India repeatedly says that your existence is our religion, the human soul rebels. This same rebellion has become a voice on the streets, in universities, and in political debates today that the Hindu bigot can never help anyone without his own interests and we have paid a heavy price to this Hindu bigot that he has not only dominated our economy but has also made us slaves. Moreover, India did not give importance to student organizations, did not keep in touch with the youth leadership, while in Bangladesh the student wing is the political laboratory, the future leadership comes from there. If trust was not given, distrust reached its peak and India's biggest mistake was that it badly ignored student politics in comparison to Hasina Wajid and ultimately suffered its humiliating consequences. Now India's dilemma is who to support and whom to support? The question before India now is that if not Sheikh Hasina - then who? Reconciliation or competition with the BNP? How to relate to the interim government despite dislike? New Delhi's politics is today surrounded by this hesitation, and the fear is that the cunning Hindu can become a part of any aggressive action or conspiracy in this anxiety. The changing mood of the new generation has decided to give a clear message against India to the world through elections against the India wave. The new generation of Bangladesh is free from the emotions of 1971, self-aware, and has grown up on the vast canvas of social media. When they are told, "You are indebted to us," they reply, "We are independent—we are not indebted to anyone." This is the wave that has created problems for India and changed the course of Bangladeshi politics. India was slow to understand that the student wing in Bangladesh is the real political laboratory, that the youth are the leadership of tomorrow. When students were ignored, the seeds of distrust were sown. Those same seeds have now become trees.

What a strange sight that as time has changed, Delhi now finds BNP acceptable. The goodwill message with Khaleda Zia was part of this wisdom, but look at the coercion of history, Khaleda Zia has left, now the leadership is in the hands of Tariq. India is now looking for a new basis for relations, but it is too late and the atmosphere is not as favorable as before.

Hasina Wajid, a refugee in India, sentenced to death, her statements under pressure from parties can refresh the wounds of the nation and complicate future relations. This is the lesson for India. The market of statements is also the field of diplomacy, here even an ignorant word becomes an accident. The sword and dangerous edge of Sheikh Hasina's ongoing rhetoric are also increasing Indian opposition.

After fifty years, the revival of Pak-Bangladesh trade relations, military cooperation, and cultural and religious relations is coming back to the scene. If this closeness goes beyond prudence, it can change the balance of the region. India's monopoly may be a challenge. According to Indian analysts, Bangladesh's proximity to Pakistan is increasing day by day. A large number of elements are also emerging who support strong Pak-Bangla military and economic relations. This process is natural

because the bond of languages, the bond of civilization, the bond of faith and history, the fragrance of these relations remains for a long time. The situation has made the BNP a political center, a diplomatic axis, an electoral force. India is now knocking on the doors of reconciliation with it, but it is too late, the tone has changed, the atmosphere has changed. The death of Khaleda Zia has also added an emotional chapter to politics and now the leadership is in the hands of Tariq.

In such an environment of violent incidents before the elections, anti-India demonstrations, accusations of interference in each other, India itself has become an election slogan and perhaps Delhi's policies have given birth to this slogan itself, and this fruit of Indian policy is also costing India dearly.

Now the real question is, what should Pakistan do? If we learn from history, the answer is not to pour oil on the flames, but to apply ointment to the wounds, and to light the lamp of unity of the Ummah. Appropriate measures for Pakistan are the fastest and strongest diplomatic cooperation, restoration of trade corridors, educational and cultural exchanges, dignity of defense ties but with caution, a foreign policy based on mutual respect. Avoid unnecessary rhetoric and above all, create an atmosphere of mutual goodwill, not confrontational politics. The right path for Pakistan is to adopt the path of wise understanding instead of confrontation. Avoiding anti-Delhi provocations, a prompt and reasoned response to Indian propaganda, effective responses in many world languages through highly experienced people on social media, which are disseminated to the world. Dignity-based relations with Dhaka, economic cooperation is the first priority, educational and cultural exchanges, defense cooperation but with courtesy, along with politics, civilization should also be spoken because the dialogue of civilizations is older than politics. The purpose of writing practical recommendations and suggestions for the current ruling institutions is that we urgently need these measures to prevent the kind of fire that India is spreading against Pakistan every day through its social media.

Avoiding undeclared interference, activating regional cooperation organizations, promoting responsible narrative in the media, contacts with student and youth leadership, economic cooperation as the top priority, not inciting anti-India sentiments, and the wisdom of handling it. Islamic brotherhood should not be considered a political weapon, but a civilizational relationship. Wise diplomacy, avoiding undeclared interference, forming a joint economic commission, contacts with youth leadership, responsibility in media narrative, active use of OIC and SAARC platforms, and increasing establishment-civil harmony should be prepared and put into action, as time is very short.

Looking at the possible situation in the future electoral scenario, it is very important to say that if the BNP wins a clear majority, Delhi will be cautious and forced to form a new alignment in the region due to the strengthening of Tariq Rahman. If the BNP wins, Tariq Rahman will be the central figure. India will apparently adopt a cautious understanding, but for a new alignment in the region, it will certainly continue its secret operations to spread political chaos and anarchy in Bangladesh. If a coalition government is formed, it will try to increase pressure on its supporters to disrupt Pak-Bangla relations in order to bring balance to policies. If the conflict increases, both the economy and peace will be affected and India will certainly try to take advantage of this and this is its objective that political chaos, violence and anarchy continue in Bangladesh. The brightest possibility is that Bangladesh is moving towards a new social contract where the new generation will decide who it will stand with. And the most likely is that the new generation will determine its own direction and the wheel of history will turn on a new path.

Today, Bangladesh is going to enter a new chapter in its bilateral relations with Pakistan, its love, military and trade ties. In this political scenario, Pakistan should strengthen the historical and cultural milestone between the two Muslim states, formulate a common strategy to deal with India's political intrigues and interferences, and establish a strong civil-military coordination that promotes regional security and development. This is the time when the principles of political independence, foreign policy, and multipolar cooperation need to be adopted as a new era — otherwise, those forces that are walking on the paths of selfishness and greed can throw the peace of this region into turmoil.

This report is not just based on news and politics, but it is a new wave in the river of history, an important attempt to bring the currents of history and politics into an intellectual balance. The return of Tariq Rahman, the circulation of the political climate in Bangladesh, India's dilemma policy, and Pak-Bangla relations — all are tied into a thought-provoking thread that is not only a echo of the past but can also become a source of insight for future generations. In this context, this report is a literary, historical, cultural and political analysis — in which facts and interpretations are woven into a philosophical, research and spiritual harmony so that the interpretation does not remain merely literal but creates a new literary impression and political understanding. This story is not just a struggle for power; it is an awakening of political consciousness. It also contains a game of power, the pain of civilization and the hope of the nation. Remember, when nations learn to light the lamps of their own destiny, then history does not become an obstacle in their path, but a guide. When nations draw lessons from the past, awareness from the present, and hope from the future, then the era becomes theirs.

The current situation bears witness to the fact that the elections and political changes in Bangladesh will not be just an internal matter of one country but will affect the political balance of the entire South Asia. The closeness, economic cooperation, and feelings of friendship at the public level in the relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh have laid the foundation for a new diplomatic phase. The historical, religious, and cultural ties between the two countries have provided a favorable environment to further strengthen this relationship. Wise decisions at the state level, balanced strategies at the diplomatic level, and feelings of goodwill at the public level—these three elements will determine the direction of Pak-Bangladesh relations in the coming years. If both countries demonstrate responsibility and foresight, vast possibilities for cooperation, trade, security, and development can arise in the region.

In the end, the matter ends when the journey began. This story comes to a point where the relationship between hearts and the heartbeat speak louder than the calculations of reason. The cultural and spiritual closeness of Pakistan and Bangladesh is not a temporary state, it is a truth rooted in the depths of history. Despite the separation, our faith has not changed, nor have our prayers for each other diminished. The people of both countries have seen suffering and suffered deprivation, but in a corner of their hearts, they have always kept alive the feeling that we belong to each other. The relationship between Pakistan and Bangladesh is not broken by the mistakes of the past, nor shattered by the conflicts of politics—that relationship is one of faith, one of civilization, one of shared tears and shared prayers. We may have been separated, but we can never become strangers. Time has testified that hearts recognize their own, no matter how many borders are erected between them.

Today, when new lights are shining on the political horizon of Bangladesh and signs of change are visible. The lamps of love and goodwill are burning again in the hearts of Pakistan, as if someone has slowly cast a shadow after the harsh sun of history. The bitterness of the past is now becoming a lesson, the shadows of enmity are felt to be receding, and the gentle breeze of brotherhood is touching the hearts. As the region moves towards a new electoral and diplomatic scenario, another welcome reality is also emerging — a new chapter of warmth is about to be written in the relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The desire has reawakened the people of both sides to reduce the distance, put aside the grudges, and move forward on the journey of love and cooperation. This is a sentiment that is stronger than state policies, because it is born in the hearts of nations and grows there. If both nations move forward with prudence, sincerity and mutual respect, not only will misunderstandings be removed, but a new era of peace, trade, politics and cultural harmony in South Asia can begin. The coming era can bring them the tidings of new loves, new agreements and new achievements. Perhaps the time is not far when the people of Bangladesh and Pakistan will again be able to say with full confidence: We are not separated - we were only tested.

This is the time to forget bitter memories and lay the foundation for a common future - a future in which there are no walls of hostility, but bridges of trust; in which there are no slogans of hatred, but the voice of brotherhood; and in which the prayers of the people can be heard saying only: We were one, we are one, and we will live together as brothers.

In this context, it would not be out of place to say that the closeness, brotherhood and mutual respect in the hearts of the people of Pakistan and Bangladesh can become the real foundation of future diplomatic policies. This is the spirit that survived despite the separation and which is once again becoming a means of bringing the two countries closer.

This is not the end, but the prelude to a new covenant of friendship. History is turning, prayers are being answered, and hearts are flowing towards each other again. This article is a written expression of that desire, that dream and that prayer. The river of history had once separated us, but now it seems that the tides are turning. Perhaps the time is not far when the two nations will be able to come closer again and say that the distances were only in maps, but the hearts were never separated.

Saturday, January 10, 2026

Diplomacy, Power, and the Conscience of Nations

The Long Shadow of War, the First Light of Peace

When the heavy hand of history drew the fateful line of partition upon the brow of the Subcontinent, it inscribed upon the tablets of destiny not merely new borders, but an unending contest of memory and meaning. Scattered across those hastily fashioned frontiers lay abandoned dreams, unfinished tales and blood-stained remembrances which still sigh through the corridors of collective memory, echoing from generation to generation. The relationship between Pakistan and India is not merely an affair between two nation-states; it is that epic chapter of the shared Indo-Pak past in which grief and pride, lament and hope, all jostle for expression in equal measure.

Today, as new moves are played upon the chequerboard of global politics — now upon the carpeted rooms of Washington, now within the echoing halls of Beijing — one has the uneasy sense that the wounds of the Subcontinent have not yet healed; it is merely the dressing that is changed from time to time. Voices raised in the name of arbitration arrive at times clad in the garb of sympathy, at times bearing the mine of hegemony, and at times speaking in the harsh accents of power.

Yet the question stands, stubborn and undismissed:

Is the destiny of nations written upon the plush carpets of conferences,

or does it rather spring from the fortitude of those hearts that are alive to the burden of their history and the gravity of their responsibilities?

This essay is a modest attempt to untie the knots of that long and tangled narrative—

where words are not mere descriptions but the very pulse of an age;

where the dry analysis of politics is not devoid of emotional moisture;

and where history is not only a chronicle of what has been, but a hand knocking upon the door of the future.

The politics of South Asia has ever been a compound of strategic rivalries, national narratives, historical disputes and the pervasive influence of global powers. The contest between Pakistan and India—above all the question of Kashmir—has remained not merely the axis of their foreign policies, but also a point of abiding fascination for the world's great powers. Thus, when the President of the United States, Donald Trump, laid claim to a mediatory role, and thereafter China voiced sentiments of a similar nature, the matter ceased to be a mere play of diplomatic vocabulary and struck instead at the very nerve of regional equilibrium and national sovereignty.

This study seeks to explore the political and diplomatic ramifications of such pronouncements, and to underscore that the present wave of “mediation” is not solely an expression of goodwill; it is likewise a symptom of new alignments that are silently re-drawing the global map of power.

If President Trump's earlier assertions of brokering peace between India and Pakistan had already tied a knot upon the political chessboard for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, then the echo of a similar claim issuing from the tranquil valleys of China served only to tighten that knot. The Chinese Foreign Minister's remark—that Beijing had played a mediatory role in easing tensions between the two neighbours in May—sent a fresh tremor through the diplomatic atmosphere. History once again

whispered in the corridors of power that South Asian politics is not merely the demarcation of boundaries on a map, but a chess-game of interests in which every move harbours multiple meanings.

Trump's claim of mediation was in effect a declaration that the United States wished to retain its relevance in the South Asian dispute. It is equally true that although India has officially rejected such claims, the silence of Prime Minister Modi was widely read—both internationally and within India itself—as a tacit acknowledgement rather than outright denial.

China's subsequent assertion has now placed the Modi government upon another uncomfortable perch. It makes plain that a new axis of power is gradually crystallising in the region. The statement that China had helped lower tensions between Pakistan and India did not merely ignite a fresh debate at the diplomatic level; it also stirred the still waters of India's domestic politics.

South Asia has thus moved beyond the narrow confines of "bilateralism". India has repeatedly maintained that all issues relating to Pakistan and Kashmir are bilateral and that third-party intervention is unacceptable. The great powers, however, weave their webs of interest beneath the veil of mediation. China's claim challenges this long-standing position and becomes a domestic political liability for New Delhi, for it furnishes the opposition with an arsenal of questions, sows doubt about governmental policy and invites scrutiny of diplomatic transparency.

For India the challenge is stark: how to preserve the rhetoric of bilateralism when the world refuses to speak its language? Hence China's statement triggered not only international conversation, but internal tremors as well.

No sooner had Beijing's claim surfaced than voices in India's opposition grew louder. The Congress Party demanded clarification; the Ministry of External Affairs maintained a telling silence; and thereby three concurrent moves were made upon the political chessboard at once: mounting calls for transparency, a testing of the national security narrative, and public debate over the direction of foreign policy. Thus, is demonstrated a larger truth of democratic life: foreign policy is not forged only in sealed diplomatic chambers; it is also answerable before the court of public opinion.

In the wake of China's assertion, questions multiplied within India's political forums. The Congress Party sought explanation, and the silence of the Ministry deepened the matter, transforming it from a mere political point-scoring exercise into a question of national strategy. Upon the lips of the opposition trembled the sentiment that **silence, too, on occasion, becomes a form of admission**. Two matters emerge with clarity: the opposition raises questions, and the Foreign Office remains silent. The reasons for such reticence may be many—perhaps the government does not wish to prolong the controversy; perhaps an outright denial may strain relations with China; perhaps an admission would undermine its own professed policy. Hence the moment affords the opposition a fertile political opportunity: to demand transparent answers, to invoke national security, and to subject foreign policy to critical light.

The objection raised by Congress leader Jairam Ramesh is, at its heart, a question of principle. He rightly suggested that if China's claim of mediation is indeed correct, it constitutes not merely a

repudiation of previous official positions but risks turning a profoundly sensitive chapter of national security into a faint, ironic smile—and in the realm of national security one does not permit the luxury of careless laughter; there every word is placed upon the razor’s edge.

Where the currents of history appear to turn upon unseen tides, one is reminded of the Qur’anic declaration:

﴿وَتِلْكَ الْأَيَّامُ نُدَاوِلُهَا بَيْنَ النَّاسِ﴾

“And such are the days: We alternate them among mankind.” (Qur’an 3:140)

And when questions of national resolve arise, another verse seems to speak with solemn pertinence:

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ﴾

Indeed, God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves.”

(Qur’an 13:11)

These verses capture the inner moral dimension of statecraft, reminding nations that diplomacy, however intricate, ultimately rests upon the character, courage and conscience of peoples.

Within the remarks of Jairam Ramesh lie three unspoken propositions. First, that the Chinese assertion stands at variance with India’s avowed official position; second, that the public has not been taken fully into confidence; and third, that matters of national security ought never to be converted into mere counters upon the board of partisan politics. His central contention may be stated thus: if mediation has indeed taken place, what remains of India’s long-proclaimed doctrine of strict bilateralism? Let the people be told. And if mediation has not taken place, why then does China advance such a claim? If it has not, let there be categorical denial. To allow the Chinese assertion to linger uncontradicted is to imperil the credibility of the State’s own position. Here the issue of sovereignty stands at the very heart of the debate. For any nation, acceptance or rejection of mediation is not a trifling diplomatic gesture; it is inseparably bound to national dignity. China’s declaration is thus perceived as a test of that dignity.

In the same vein, Asaduddin Owaisi, President of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen, raised—with his characteristic candour—a pointed question: how can China, on the one hand, pour weapons into Pakistan and thereby tilt the scales of military balance, and on the other, appear upon the stage as an impartial arbiter? Such conduct, he suggested, is akin to the traveller who sets the forest ablaze and then proclaims himself the herald of life-giving rain. Both roles cannot be worn by the same actor.

Owaisi’s argument may be framed thus: he queries China’s double posture of partner and mediator, reminding Prime Minister Modi that Beijing is one of Pakistan’s principal arms suppliers and a party to sensitive defence cooperation. A power that equips one disputant, strengthens its military sinews, and collaborates in strategic operations cannot plausibly claim the mantle of neutrality. Moreover, in several border disputes, China itself stands as an interested party vis-à-vis India. The claim of mediation by such a state inevitably casts shadows upon its alleged impartiality. Can a disputant simultaneously act as “disinterested mediator”? It is at this very juncture that politics, ethics and strategic interest intermingle in so intricate a braid.

The broader question arises: does China’s present narrative foreshadow the emergence of a global mediator? In its address, Beijing underscored its involvement in issues ranging from the Iranian

nuclear file and the Myanmar crisis to the Palestinian Israeli conflict and the Cambodia–Thailand tension. This was not mere information; it was a declaration of power. China evidently seeks recognition not only as an economic colossus and military force, but as a diplomatic arbiter as well.

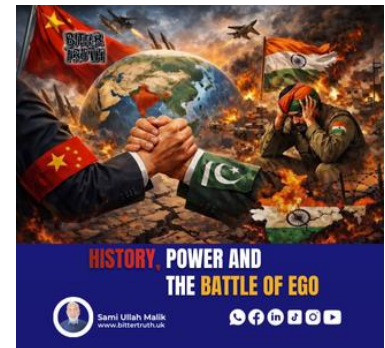
At an international symposium, Foreign Minister Wang Yi listed the India–Pakistan tension among the world’s “hotspot” conflicts, stressing that China is already engaged across multiple theatres of dispute and that South Asia is part of that expanding remit. The implication was unmistakable: Beijing aspires to shape outcomes, not merely to observe them. The message resonated beyond the region—that China no longer contentedly answers to the title of “regional power” but claims a seat at the high table of global statecraft. In the great assembly of nations, the signal was clear: the axis of Asian politics is shifting, and Beijing is no longer a spectator but a protagonist.

Wang Yi’s remarks suggested a world traversing fresh tempests—regional wars multiplying, balances of power in a state of ceaseless flux. He proposed “fairness and balance” as the balm for these wounds. The words are elegant; yet history, stern tutor that she is, reminds us that between the deserts of rhetoric and the oasis of meaning there must fall the rain of action. His portrait of China as a force for equilibrium and a solver of root causes invites, inevitably, scrutiny: critics argue that in certain theatres Beijing has been itself a party to disputes and elsewhere has not hesitated to wield economic pressure.

Indian columnist Sushant Singh has observed that China’s statement achieves several objectives at once. It places Pakistan and India together in the same dock, installs China as the region’s new “supreme mediator”, and simultaneously lends retrospective heft to President Trump’s earlier claim. Beneath the apparently temperate tone lies the steely reminder that the lamp of sovereignty burns brightest when fed by its own oil; it flickers when made dependent on the breath of others. Meanwhile, Indian journalism and intellectual circles have reacted with alacrity. Analysts highlight that China is aligning Pakistan and India upon one plane, reinforcing American claims, and drawing India’s sovereignty into question. The response itself is proof that mediation is not a mere diplomatic posture; it reaches into the foundations of national narrative. These are not idle words; behind statements lie signals, and behind signals strategic consequences — often of formidable gravity.

Owaisi has also contended that by placing both nations upon a single line, China seeks acknowledgment as the region’s paramount power. The question is thus posed: was this tacit understanding reached when the Prime Minister visited China? The query is not solely of diplomatic complexion; it invites a glance into the mirror of intention.

His second question cuts deeper still: does China now intend to prove itself a great power? The point is weighty. Beijing is enlarging its influence across South Asia; it enjoys intimate ties with Pakistan; it confronts continuing border disputes with India. In such a context, any declaration of mediation may itself constitute an assertion of power, a signal that decisions in the region will be taken beneath Beijing’s shadow. Owaisi’s concern is plain: has the Modi government, at any level, consented to such a role? If not, why then do this persistent silence?



In such moments, when sovereignty, intention and responsibility converge, the Qur'ān's admonition sounds with grave clarity:

﴿وَلَا تَهِنُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَنْتُمْ الْأَعْلَوْنَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ﴾

"Do not lose heart and do not grieve; you shall be uppermost, if you are true in faith."

(Qur'an 3:139)

And concerning neutrality and justice, one recalls:

﴿كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَى أَنْفُسِكُمْ﴾

"Be steadfast in justice, bearing witness for God, even if it be against yourselves."

(Qur'an 4:135)

These verses do not merely adorn the page; they summon states and statesmen alike to weigh power in the scales of conscience.

Although no formal repudiation was issued, official "sources" intimated that China had played no role; and thus, by the alchemy of attribution, the media conveyed that Beijing's claim to mediation was to be rejected. No mediation occurred, they maintained; the issue was resolved bilaterally, through direct communication between the Directors-General of Military Operations. This, they added, was wholly consistent with India's long-standing policy—there is no room for a third party. Two points therefore stand out: India does not intend to abandon the doctrine of bilateralism, and the inclusion of an external actor is perceived, at the level of policy, as a palpable threat.

According to India Today, government sources clarified that the resolution of the May crisis owed nothing to the intercession of any foreign power. The same statement underlined that the two DGMO offices conducted direct talks, agreed themselves upon a ceasefire, and brought matters to a decisive close. The implication was unmistakable: while the world may adorn itself with the jewels of mediation, the definitive verdict is delivered at the table where hard realities sit. Three conclusions emerge: military-to-military channels remain effective; confidence-building at the operational level precedes diplomacy in the abstract; and the need for external actors correspondingly diminishes.

In those days tensions rose, appeals for restraint were voiced, a ceasefire ensued, mediation was claimed; and the net effect was that, owing to Prime Minister Modi's culpable silence, the diplomatic advantage slid towards China, India found itself on the defensive, and the Opposition sharpened its questions.

At the press briefing of 13 May it was again affirmed that the date, hour and terms of the ceasefire had all been agreed through direct military contact. The conclusion was clear: the ceasefire was not the product of external pressure; neither China nor the United States could claim a determinative role; India had adhered to its position. Once more it became evident that in South Asia the hinge of conflict resolution is mutual confidence between the two principals—sometimes turbulent as a stormed river, sometimes gentle as a murmuring brook.

Events between 7 and 10 May cast fresh queries upon China's role. On the 7th, Beijing called for restraint. Restraint was urged; a ceasefire followed; a claim of mediation was made—small wonder that observers linked these strands. The Opposition pressed the issue; China reaped diplomatic advantage. History's lesson is constant: when calls for restraint are wrapped in the silk of interest, their meanings subtly change.

Thus, the sum of these events is clear. South Asian politics is no longer a mere cartographer's exercise; it is a chessboard upon which great powers play move upon insinuating move. The dispute between Pakistan and India is not only a quarrel of neighbours; it is an examination in history, identity, sovereignty and political maturity. The central question is not mediation as such; it is this: when do nations learn to rely, not upon borrowed crutches, but upon the inner strength of their own wisdom and judgement? That is the call of time, the demand of history, and the high road to national dignity.

By asserting its role as mediator, China sought to augment its diplomatic weight; India reiterated its doctrine of bilateralism; the Opposition pressed the government; Pakistan remained, though in the background, a principal party; and the global balance of power turned upon a new hinge. The essential question remains: shall the problems of South Asia be solved by outside intermediaries, or is the true path that of dialogue, confidence-building, and political maturity? The question remains open; time, history and the insight of nations will answer it.

The entire episode is emblematic of a deeper truth: South Asia has become a strategic laboratory for global powers. The conflicts of Pakistan and India are enlisted in the narratives of others. Mediation is seldom pure benevolence; it is often the strategy of power. The real issue is not who mediates; the real question is whether the people of the region will find the courage to solve their problems themselves. When inner wisdom awakes and political maturity is born, the need for external mediation, like a spent echo, dies of itself.

It is therefore imperative that a just order of peace and security be fashioned—one capable of lifting millions from the grip of poverty. This is possible only when the world's peace-loving forces are made aware of the dangers implicit in the aggressive designs of the RSS-inspired Hindutva project in India: how, in pursuit of power, such a project may become a grave threat to global peace. To avert that danger, there must be an enduring and purposeful mechanism of dialogue between Pakistan and India; the principles of ceasefire must be transparently monitored; parliamentary trust must replace megaphone diplomacy; and instead of global mediation, a regional model of conversation must be built.

In the end, one truth stands before us with head unbowed: the peoples who dwell on either side of the Subcontinent's divide are separated by borders, not by the intimacies of feeling. The palaces of power change; mediation claims rise and fall; but the true test of nations lies not in who speaks for them, but in when they learn to speak for themselves. China or America—every great power brings its own interest with it, and history attests that in the marketplace of power, the coin of pity seldom circulates. The truest power is that which awakens in the hearts of peoples, handing them the lamps of dignity, wisdom and prudence. The soil of the Subcontinent has witnessed much blood, but it has also seen lamps of patience, forgiveness and courage that refuse to be extinguished.

Should Pakistan and India resolve their differences in the fragrance of dialogue, future generations may hear not the drums of war but the flute of peace. In the long night of history, the first line of dawn appears for those who find the courage to stand upon their own feet rather than upon the borrowed strength of others.

This, then, is the burden and the music of the present essay: that amid the clamour of mediation, the inner voice of conscience be recognised; that beyond borders, the common heartbeat of humanity be heard; and that perhaps—just perhaps—upon the courtyard of history the first bud of peace may open, and the morning of the Subcontinent become in truth a **morning of hope**.

In such reflections one is reminded of the Qur'ānic counsel:

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ﴾

"Indeed, God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves." (Qur'an 13:11)

And concerning reconciliation:

﴿وَإِنْ جَنَحُوا لِلسَّلَامِ فَاجْنَحْ لَهَا﴾

"And if they incline to peace, then you too incline towards it." (Qur'an 8:61)

Wednesday, January 14, 2026

Pakistan and the Rewriting of the Strategic Map

Arms Do Not Save Nations—Order Does

The international order of our age stands once more at that familiar, disquieting bend in the road where power speaks with the full weight of coin, and principle is quietly relegated to the shelves of forgotten volumes. Those imperial manuals of conduct which history had pronounced defunct appear now to have been dusted down, revised, and re-issued under new titles and fresh jargon. The recent American action in Venezuela is not a mere local episode; it is a rising cloud on the horizon of world politics, behind which are concealed many questions yet unasked, and answers yet unoffered.

The unbridled use of force, the re-reading of the Monroe Doctrine, new precedents of military intervention, the eloquent silence of international bodies, and the pitiable helplessness of smaller states—these together compose the grim tableau of our time, wherein peace assumes the frailty of a dream and justice the rarity of a precious relic. History has proved, again and again, that when great powers begin to regard themselves as standing above law, the destinies of weaker nations are inscribed not in parliaments but upon battlefields.

It is in this sombre context that the present essay seeks to examine the Venezuelan events, to understand the American deployment of power, to assess the global reaction thereto, and in particular to ask: what tremors shall travel through the besieged and subjugated corners of the globe, and towards which compass-point does the world order now appear to be moving?

President Donald Trump's tone, following military action in Venezuela, breathed fresh life into the two-century-old Monroe Doctrine, clothing it in modern garments yet preserving its ancient spirit. The American President's direct resort to force against Venezuela may, on the surface, be construed as an action against a single state; in truth, it is a declaration to the world at large. It is a tacit message to China, Russia and other formidable yet authoritarian regimes that the lexicon of power has not, after all, been revised. The pages of history record that whenever imperial powers proclaimed themselves arbiters of the world's conscience, a fresh imbalance in the order of nations duly ensued. The question, therefore, presses hard upon us: has Mr Trump merely struck at Venezuela, or has he traced new lines upon the political map of the world?

Is this operation a confined incident, or the first footprint upon a path meant equally for powers such as China and Russia? History observes that when ideas speak under the shadow of power, they cease to be mere sentences; they become signposts of destiny.

The arrest of President Nicolás Maduro and his confinement in an American prison stands as the very embodiment of a sombre proposition: that when power becomes the law, justice is escorted to the rear. Mr Trump's pronouncements—"we shall run Venezuela"—sent tremors through the world of diplomacy; they intimated not merely bravado but the dawn of a new age of audacity. His indication that ground troops might, if needed, be deployed heralds the return of an era in which power proves itself not by rhetoric but by the cold demonstration of action. The ready compliance of smaller states, the hesitant acquiescence of their leaders, testify to a diminishing capacity to refuse, and to an enlarging shadow of compulsion.

Here the central question rises in stern simplicity: may a distant power rule a nation by remote control? This is not merely an analytical query; it is an examination set by history itself. Can objectives be attained by military pressure alone, without understanding the temperament of local societies? The historic reply has been voiced repeatedly in the negative. Governments may indeed be overthrown by force; hearts may not. Indigenous resistance, subterranean psychology, the quickened consciousness of nationhood—these are the imponderables that cast any “government at a distance” into chronic instability. American thinking may answer “yes”, yet the realities on the ground answer otherwise: nations are governed not by control but by consent—and consent remains the rarest jewel in the treasury of time.

Think tanks had warned us in advance: abrupt deposal may turn the avenues of the state into colliding alleyways of faction and feud. When power outgrows institutions, authority ceases to be politics and becomes a tug-of-war for dominance. Power vacuums are never left vacant; where governments fall, weapons speak, and groups contend for supremacy. If the chroniclers of the state fall silent, the story is seized by the gun.

The removal of Maduro was publicly paraded as the effective demonstration of American military might. Not a single American soldier fell, and the declared aim was achieved—or so the narrative runs. But history interjects: is this victory? Is the mere absence of casualties the measure of moral triumph? Does the sovereignty of nations weigh for nothing in the scales of judgement? Within Venezuela, some circles perhaps displayed jubilation; beyond its borders, unease broadened like a widening gyre. The ultimate consequences stand veiled for the moment behind the long curtains of time.

At Mr. Trump’s press conference, the tone was unmistakably that of the victor. Yet the annals of history inscribe repeatedly that while governments may be changed by force, societies rarely are. Iraq and Afghanistan remain living testaments to the sombre truth that nation-building does not spring ready-made from the loins of military conquest; the battle that follows victory is often the harder war. From Baghdad to Kabul the examples knock loudly at the door of conscience: arms may win the field, but they seldom win the peace.

The experience of the past three decades cries aloud that the gun may clear a path, but it does not confer a destination. Nations refuse to accept decrees imposed from without; they pronounce their verdicts in the court of time—and time is captive to no master. Iraq of 2003 still bleeds as an unhealed wound. The ignominious withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan after two decades reminds the world that when the palaces of power are built on sand, the first wind is sufficient to bring them low. History is not mute; it surveys the present in the mirror of the past.

At such moments one is reminded of the Qur’anic proclamation concerning the true seat of power and its transience in human hands:

﴿قُلِ اللَّهُمَّ مَالِكُ الْمُلْكِ تُؤْتِي الْمُلْكَ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتَنْزِعُ الْمُلْكَ مِمَّنْ تَشَاءُ وَتُعِزُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتُذِلُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ ۚ بِيَدِكَ الْخَيْرُ ۖ إِنَّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ﴾

“Say, O Allah, Lord of Sovereignty: You bestow dominion on whom You will and You remove dominion from whom You will; You exalt whom You will and abase whom You will. In Your hand is all good; surely You are powerful over all things.”

And again, that another majestic reminder:

﴿وَقُلْ جَاءَ الْحَقُّ وَزَهَقَ الْبَاطِلُ إِنَّ الْبَاطِلَ كَانَ زَهُوقًا﴾

“And say: Truth has come, and falsehood has vanished away; verily falsehood is ever bound to vanish.”

These verses stand, not as mere adornments, but as moral milestones: power is lent, not owned; history judges, and truth outlives the thunder of arms.

In 1823, the sentence uttered by President Monroe was given a new cadence by Donald Trump. His assertion that “we have gone far beyond the Monroe Doctrine” was not a casual remark; it was a fresh line carved upon the political map of the Western Hemisphere. “We have left it behind” — the phrase itself intimates that the age of mere non-interference has yielded to an unabashed proclamation of supremacy. To declare the Western world as “our sphere” is not merely a slogan; it is a new ordinance in global politics. The message admits of no ambiguity: the United States will brook no challenge to its geographical pre-eminence.

A threat to the President of Colombia, a pointed remark regarding Mexico, a warning to Haiti — these are not words; they are the moving shadows of policy. When power refuses to converse, the lamp of diplomacy grows dim, anxieties deepen, and the final act of the drama — as history so often records — is nothing less than the ruin of nations. In Haiti, change of government occurred beneath the shadow of the gun. Few bullets were fired, but many tears were shed. Thirty years have passed, yet prosperity remains in debt. The example stands as a silent admonition to Venezuela.

Cuba has long been a thorn embedded in the American psyche. Its socialist heritage and the geographical importance of the Caribbean have made it a permanent target; Mr Rubio’s familial associations render the question all the more sensitive.

In Mr Trump’s tone there was warning, there was boastfulness, and there was resolve. Past interventions have turned entire regions into laboratories of experiment, yet the results stagger still like wounded soldiers upon a broken field. Haiti illustrates a truth writ large across history’s pages: governments may be changed — nations may not.

Mr Trump studiously avoided the word “democracy”. He expressed confidence neither in María Corina Machado nor in González; as though the verdict were not to be rendered by the people, but by power itself. Hence arises the question: has democracy been reduced to a mere rallying cry? Venezuela’s leadership, the very question of democracy, the transfer of power or the survival of the system — these are questions whose answers have been crushed beneath the mountains of might.

No foreign power triumphs without fissures within. It was domestic hands that smoothed the path against Maduro. Yet that very fact is a source of humiliation for honourable generals who could not offer resistance — and history has left the question hanging in the air. The financial stakes of regime supporters, armed militias, Colombian guerrillas, networks of corruption and the raw strength of paramilitary forces — all form the tinder that may burst into flame at any moment. When the struggle for power seizes weapons, the future of the state becomes a question mark.

Maduro is confined, yet Chávez’s system endures, roots and all. The entangled interests of military and political elites, militias and armed groups proclaim openly: the game is not over; the game has, in truth, just begun.

Whether we speak of Venezuela's oil and mineral wealth or the treasure sleeping beneath Greenland's ice, great powers are seldom tied merely to land — they are bound to that which lies beneath it. The signals of world politics indicate that both North and South stand now within the same arc of attention. Fear is no longer confined to the Global South. Arctic ice melts swiftly, and beneath it dormant riches stir restlessly. American attentions fixed upon Greenland betray this unspoken covetousness.

International law was once the world's hope; today the danger grows of a reversion to the law of the jungle. When great powers weigh law upon the scales of preference and aversion, the court stands silent before history, and international statutes shatter like a broken mirror — whose fragments, even if gathered, will not form a whole.

The Maduro operation has rendered urgent the question: is international law a mere textbook expression, or does it indeed possess enforceable authority? When the strong begin to reinterpret law to suit their will, justice becomes a dream for weaker nations. European powers know full well that the act is a flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations, and yet they remain silent; whether out of interest or fear — history faithfully records their silence too.

After Maduro's meeting with Chinese diplomats, Beijing's strong condemnation signalled the formation of new alignments. The cinders of the Cold War glow anew. Mr Trump's action has delivered an open message and a fresh precedent: if America may, then may not China in Taiwan? May not Russia in Ukraine? Though China has voiced disapproval, the world asks: if this path is now trodden, what remains to prevent Taiwan, Ukraine and other regions from being devoured by the same logic? A line has been crossed; every power will now claim the right of its own interpretation. Senator Mark Warner has articulated this fear: that each nation will advance its own reading, and the world will slide from order to disorder.

These are not mere news items; they are the preface to the coming years. It is being inscribed upon the brow of history that the axis of power is shifting, and the world trembles. Radars were silenced, commanders mute, flight leaders recalled, defence systems disabled, anti-aircraft guns stilled — this was not merely technology at work; it was the footprint of treachery within. The lamps were extinguished from inside. History reminds us: whether Abbottabad or Tehran — where the door is opened from within, the visitor without need not knock for long. Power seldom collapses from the outside; more often it crumbles from within. Where command fractures, states are shown to be walls of sand.

External conspiracies abound, yet the largest breach is always inward. History bears witness: Rome, the Ottoman Caliphate, the Soviet Union — all fell more through internal weakness than external attack. Modern American power faltered in Somalia before popular resistance, in Afghanistan before the betrayal of local allies, in Iran before discipline and counter-measures. The lesson is stark: the strength of institutions and unity of the nation outweigh the brute force of arms.



It is this fundamental truth that stands before Pakistan with the weight of commandment: the protection of the chain of command is the first and greatest defence.

What, then, is the “chain of command”? Where is the decision made? To whom is the order conveyed? Who carries it into execution? To mislead the leadership, to distort information, to delay decisions, to fracture command — and to suppress, with iron hand, all elements engaged in such sabotage — this is the foremost duty of the state, for here lies its most vulnerable point. In modern warfare the primary target is not missiles, nor tanks, nor airbases, but the brain that makes decisions — the nervous system of the state, the command-and-control centres. Thus, the lesson for Pakistan is imperative: harmony among intelligence agencies, cohesion between civil and military authority, resilience against disinformation warfare across media and social platforms, trust within the military leadership, and firm prevention of internal traitors, leakers and facilitators.

If the chain of command stands secure, the enemy cannot prevail, no matter how dazzling his technology.

At such a point one recalls the Qur’anic warning against inner decay:

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ﴾

“Surely God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves.”

And likewise:

﴿وَلِلَّهِ عَاقِبَةُ الْأُمُورِ﴾

“And unto God belongs the final outcome of all matters.”

These are not merely verses but verdicts: nations fall not merely by the blows of others, but by the frailty of their own spirit.

It has now become painfully evident to the nations of the so-called Third World that wars are no longer fought merely upon cartographic frontiers. The battlelines today run through currencies under siege, through the fevered jungles of social media disinformation, through the proxy wars of political polarisation. Treaties have grown frail; the United Nations stands enfeebled; and the great powers, with practised indifference, consult little save their own advantage. Hence it is inevitable that the states of the developing world will look onward—indeed must look onward—towards nuclear deterrence, strategic technologies, ballistic shields, and defensive alliances commensurate with the perils of their age.

Against this gathering backdrop, China, Russia and Pakistan are emerging as potential poles of a new constellation—possible centres of alignment for those nations that seek to secure the sinews of their defence in an unforgiving world. Pakistan, already a nuclear power, seasoned by war and endowed with a strategic geography of consequence, occupies a pivotal station in this evolving theatre. It is for this reason that, following the defence accord with Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states increasingly seek security partnership with Islamabad. The causes are manifest: the unresolved tension betwixt Israel and Iran; waning confidence in American constancy; and the growing conviction that sovereign defence is no longer a luxury but a necessity writ large.

The central lesson for Pakistan is stern yet simple: weapons alone do not suffice. What is needed in the last resort is secure and vigilant leadership, a resilient and unbroken chain of command, national cohesion and inner stability of the most rigorous kind. If treachery finds no purchase within, then no leviathan of power—however dazzling its armoury—can bring a people to their knees. States are not

shattered by cannon fire; they disintegrate when the links of discipline corrode. When the chain of command snaps, military strength turns to a house of sand. The ultimate truth is unambiguous: it is not merely arms but order that sustains the State. Break the command, and armies—though mighty—are undone; preserve the order, and even the seemingly weak prevail with honour.

Pakistan, Turkey, Iran—these examples stand before us in unblinking clarity. The secret of dignity and survival lies hidden within that discipline of command and trust between institutions and the people they serve.

Venezuela has taught the same chastening lesson—and it speaks to Pakistan and to the wider world alike: the security of nations is not measured in gun barrels alone, but in loyalty, cohesion, and an unbroken chain of command. Put in the plainest English: a State is more often broken from within than conquered from without; therefore, Pakistan's foremost duty is to safeguard the strength and integrity of its command structure.

The world now stands at a turning of the road. Claims of power, the entanglements of ideology, and the lure of mineral wealth have once again set history in motion. Politics is no longer the sport of rhetoric alone; it has become a contest of nerves, of economies, of technologies, and of domestic unity. History is not forever silent; it records its judgments and, in its own sovereign hour, it speaks them aloud. Those who today appear mighty may tomorrow find themselves arraigned at the bar of time. True power is that alone which endures the balance of justice.

The annals of history attest that the success of external aggression has not always depended upon explosives, bombardment, or the wizardry of technology; more often there has lurked the dagger thrust from within. Whether one surveys the recent pages of Venezuela or leafs back through older volumes, the verdict is constant: where internal ranks did not rupture, even a military colossus such as the United States—despite all its technological grandeur—could not secure triumph, and its chronicles remain strewn with episodes of humiliation.

Be it the American forces mired in Somalia, the weary withdrawal from Afghanistan's broken valleys, or the failed venture in Tehran—each episode inscribes the same conclusion: no external power is irresistible so long as the inner wall of a nation stands firm. Where the chain of command holds, where national resolve lies awake, and where the bond between institutions and the people is rooted in trust, even mountains of technology are rendered as shifting sand.

At this juncture another sobering reflection arises. When smaller nations observe that international law has grown pliant to the will of the powerful, there germinates within them a compelling resolve—that survival demands self-reliance and strategic autonomy in defence. It is therefore no fancy to foresee that many states of the developing world may yoke their conception of security to nuclear and strategic capability, looking towards China, Russia, or Pakistan—countries seasoned already in the disciplines of defence—for guidance and partnership. Pakistan's defence cooperation with Saudi Arabia, and the mounting interest of other Arab states, mirrors this changing global temper.

Yet this chapter of history teaches a deeper truth still: the ultimate strength of nations resides not in armaments but in honest leadership, national unity and the durable trust between their institutions.

A people fractured within require only a push from without; a people inwardly steadfast are bowed by no tempest, however fierce. Time keeps its verdicts under seal—but history even now proclaims that the foundations of security are laid less in arsenals than in unity; that the first rampart of defence is the internal discipline of the State itself.

Here the eternal words of the Qur'ān stand as both admonition and solace:

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ﴾

"Indeed, God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves."

And again:

﴿وَأَعِدُّوا لَهُمْ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ﴾

"And prepare against them whatever force you are able to muster."

In these twin beacons resides the balance of moral fibre and material preparedness—the marriage of inner reform with outward strength. It is this union of discipline, unity, and just purpose that fashions nations capable not merely of surviving history, but of shaping it.

Sunday, January 18, 2026

History Calls to Account

Power on Trial

History is never mute; it writes incessantly with the ticking of the pen, and at the appointed hour its judgements are unveiled before the nations. Today, history once more turns the leaf of its vast chronicle, and the world finds itself at a juncture where competing claims to power, the webs of ideology and the clash of regional interests have shaken to the core the delicate balance of global peace and security.

World politics resembles a mighty river whose swelling currents scatter before them the colours of power and influence. Time and again, the annals of history remind us that the chargers of power which gallop triumphantly beyond their borders are often undone by the fissures within their own walls. No nation-state, however formidable it may appear, can stand secure unless it is girded by inner cohesion, resolute leadership and disciplined order. Power is never merely a matter of battalions and armaments; without internal concord and national unity, it remains transient, brittle, and ultimately evanescent.

True strength is not confined to the physical or the military; it is woven with faith, wisdom and reason. In this backdrop, the recent initiatives of President Donald Trump have stirred a fresh tempest in international politics, whose first tremors have been felt in Venezuela and may yet reverberate across other lands. According to reports, in early 2006 President Trump undertook a dramatic and contentious military operation in Venezuela, detaining Nicolás Maduro and casting into harsh relief the new perils of foreign intervention within American foreign policy. This was no mere regional episode; it was a thundercloud gathering upon the firmament of world affairs, pregnant with danger and laden with grave questions about the use of power, the international order, the law of nations, and the destinies of other states yet to be named.

It is a sobering reminder that might, if divorced from prudence, leadership and inner order, is but a house of cards. As the Qur'an enjoins:

﴿وَأَعِدُّوا لَهُمْ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ وَمِنْ رِبَاطِ الْخَيْلِ تُرْهِبُونَ بِهِ عَدُوَّ اللَّهِ وَعَدُوَّكُمْ﴾ (الأنفال: 60)

And prepare against them whatever force you can command, and lines of steeds of war, whereby you may strike terror into the enemy of God and your enemy.

Yet the same sacred text teaches us that the foundations of endurance lie within the moral and civic fabric of a people:

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ﴾ (الرعد: 11)

Indeed, God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves.

Trump's venture emerged at a moment when, having failed to secure the Nobel Peace Prize in 2025, he sought to restore his international standing. It revealed that he had embraced the very hard-line doctrines against which he had once campaigned, provoking fears that other countries might in due course become the targets of similar designs and casting a pall of anxiety and uncertainty across the global community.

In early January 2026, the arrest of Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro in a controversial military operation served, ostensibly, as an intervention in the domestic affairs of a sovereign state, but in substance it amounted to a warning to the world at large. It signalled that the foreign policy of the Trump administration had turned once again towards the iron hand. The repercussions of this operation rippled outward, generating apprehension especially in Colombia, Cuba and Greenland, where the spectre of becoming the next target loomed large. Colombia's relations were already strained; President Gustavo Petro had been branded an illegitimate leader of the narcotics trade, under the shadow of a threatened intervention. Cuba, too, found itself caught between contradictory pronouncements: declared a failure on one hand and, on the other, told it would collapse of its own accord, though not without hints of prior intent. Such rhetoric sowed a harvest of uncertainty in the soil of international affairs.

After Venezuela, American foreign policy appeared to cast its gaze towards Colombia, Cuba and beyond. Threats, intimations of military action and economic pressure combined into a single, unmistakable message: that great powers can no longer ignore the resistance of local populations, the constraints of law, or the boundaries of ethical obligation. The Venezuelan episode rekindled the old American desire to absorb Greenland, a notion firmly rebuffed by the Danish Prime Minister, Mette Frederiksen. Britain and France, too, rejected the proposal. The British Prime Minister, Sir Keir Starmer, affirmed that the destiny of Greenland rests with its own people and with Denmark, and that Britain stands with Copenhagen in this regard. France reiterated an ancient principle of international life: borders are not playthings to be altered by force of arms.

Greenland's Prime Minister, Jens Nielsen, spoke with unmistakable clarity: enough was enough; further pressure would not be endured, and any negotiations must proceed through proper channels and in the spirit of mutual respect. Such statements recall to us a cardinal truth—that international law and the sovereignty of states, even in the shadow of military might, possess prior claim and higher dignity. Where the centres of power fail to restrain themselves within the confines of order and law, their undertakings become fleeting, unstable and fraught with peril. Declarations of grandeur, when set against the will of local peoples and the dictates of justice, breed not stability but crisis, not tranquillity but danger to the peace of the world.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, declared the American action against Venezuela to be a violation of international law, urging all parties to honour the Charter of the United Nations, to embark upon comprehensive and democratic dialogue, and to permit every section of society a voice in determining its future. He emphasised that the preservation of peace and security requires respect for the sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of states, and that both the threat and use of force must be renounced.

His stance casts a sharp light on a fundamental reality: that global peace is not secured by saber-rattling or coercion but by law, transparency and inner concord. As the Qur'an reminds us of the ebb and flow of human fortune:

(وَتِلْكَ الْأَيَّامُ نُدَاوِلُهَا بَيْنَ النَّاسِ) (آل عمران: 140)

And such are the days which We alternate among mankind.

Thus does history, with a steady hand, draft its verdicts. Nations that forget the restraints of justice and the discipline of order may roar for a season, but their echo fades; those that cultivate wisdom, integrity and unity endure beyond the tempests of their time.

This account reflects an abiding truth: that no power may lay unilateral claim upon international law or the sovereignty of states, and that every action, if it is to endure, must carry the imprimatur of legality and moral justification. In the aftermath of President Trump's venture in Venezuela, many nations—most notably Colombia and Greenland—began to be regarded as potential targets. This posture of American policy sowed disquiet across the international community, provoking the uneasy question of how far the movements of the mighty may imperil the fragile fabric of world peace.



The operation was not circumscribed by the frontiers of Venezuela alone; its tremors have been felt throughout the region and upon the broader international stage. The strong reactions of Britain and France regarding Greenland, and the emergency session of the United Nations Security Council, testify that great powers, whatever their reach, remain answerable not only to their own ambitions but to the imperatives of international law and the moral framework that girds it. Trump's actions made plain that the engines of power are still very much alive; yet when force is wielded beyond the boundaries of law, the outcome is instability, global anxiety and the loom of escalating tensions. The episode underscores that the use of power must remain within legal, ethical and geographical bounds, and that centres of power must conduct themselves in conformity with domestic and international order.

The balance of global politics and the primacy of internal order

The Venezuelan affair has driven home a familiar but often neglected lesson: power does not subsist in battalions, arsenals and military hardware alone. It endures only when yoked to inner discipline, the farsightedness of leadership and the transparency of governance. The pages of history bear solemn witness to this truth. Great empires—whether Rome, the Ottoman Caliphate or the Soviet Union—fell not merely beneath the blows of external enemies but through the dry rot of internal weakness. Somalia, Afghanistan and Iran supply contemporary testimony that robust institutions, national cohesion and internal order outrank the mere accumulation of military strength.

Potential global risks and other target nations

After the Venezuelan intervention, several states—especially Colombia and Greenland—were increasingly perceived to stand in the crosshairs of American ambition. This raised grave anxieties: to what extent do the movements of the world's power centres threaten the peace of mankind? The lesson is stark: the deployment of power must be circumscribed by law, ethics and geography; those who wield it must govern themselves in accordance with both domestic discipline and international restraint.

Trump's initiative seemed to herald a blunt message: the United States would no longer rest content with a doctrine of non-intervention but was prepared to avow a policy of domination. For Colombia, Cuba and other nations, this was a sobering admonition that power does not operate solely through

the rattle of arms; its political and economic reverberations are also felt upon the world's stage. The arrest of Maduro in Venezuela, the pressure of American arms and the breach of international norms conjure a landscape in which the central question presses itself forward: does power undermine freedom and sovereignty, or does it merely add to the burdens of external pressure? History answers that states are not sustained by cannon alone; they are upheld by order within and the unity of their people.

If one casts an eye across the galleries of history, one perceives that its pages do not lie silent. They record every deed and, at the appointed hour, read their verdict aloud. Power struggles bereft of law and transparency place the very future of the state under a question mark. Leadership, internal order and respect for international law are therefore indispensable to the survival of the polity. These parables and metaphors remind us that no power—however advanced its technology—can remain secure upon weak foundations at home.

The lesson of inner strength

The historical experiences of Venezuela, Afghanistan, Somalia and Iran indicate with crystalline clarity that nations do not prevail by military strength alone when their inner institutions are frail. External conspiracies may abound, yet the gravest breach is usually within. As the Qur'an declares:

﴿وَفِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَفَلَا تُبْصِرُونَ﴾ (الذَّارِيَات: 21)

And within your own selves—will you not then behold?

This verse reminds us that the fountainhead of power lies not in external conquest but in inner cohesion and unity. Where the chain of command is secure and steadfast, even the most sophisticated weaponry cannot bring a nation to its knees.

The Venezuelan operation, the claims upon Greenland and the American posture toward Colombia have given new momentum to the theatre of world politics. The event offers a stern lesson to every nation: it is essential to understand the motions of power, to honour international law and to preserve domestic order. The words of the Secretary-General of the United Nations emphasise that international law already possesses effective instruments for addressing narcotics trafficking, disputes over resources and the violations of human rights. The report lays bare a fundamental reality—that global security, regional stability and the protection of human rights cannot be secured by military might alone. Without the firm pillars of law, morality, leadership and transparency, no power can claim durable stability.

This historic episode teaches us that power is not confined to steel and gunpowder; it rests also upon law, order and ethical leadership. States are not sustained by artillery; they are upheld by inner unity, resilient institutions and the trust of their people. Without respect for international law and national sovereignty, the security of any country remains precarious. True victory is not the conquest of territory, but the winning of hearts, the establishment of justice and the strengthening of inner strength—rather than coercion or naked aggression.

Let it be remembered: history does not remain silent. The victors of today may stand tomorrow in the dock of accountability. Real power is that which endures the scales of justice. The Venezuelan episode, American foreign policy and the chorus of global response together instruct us that genuine

success in international politics is wrought by internal stability, public loyalty and the resolute functioning of national institutions.

Conclusion: the reflective lesson

This report reveals a single commanding truth: that global security, regional equilibrium and the defence of human rights are not secured by power or threat alone, but by the sturdy columns of internal order, principled leadership, the rule of law and the dictates of morality—without which no nation, however mighty, can long endure.

Tuesday, January 20, 2026

Spectators or Witnesses?

The Silence on Trial

A Dream, A Cry, and the Lament of an Ummah

(An Address to the Muslim World in the Contemporary Global Political Landscape)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي جَعَلَنَا مِنْ أُمَّةٍ مُحَمَّدٍ ﷺ وَالصَّلَاةُ وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَى سَيِّدِ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ وَالْمُرْسَلِينَ، وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَأَصْحَابِهِ أَجْمَعِينَ

All praise belongs to God, who has made us part of the community of Muhammad ﷺ; and peace and blessings be upon the Seal of the Prophets and Messengers, and upon his family and all his companions.

«مَثَلُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ فِي تَوَادُّهِمْ وَتَرَاحُمِهِمْ وَتَعَاطُفِهِمْ كَمَثَلِ الْجَسَدِ الْوَاحِدِ»

“The likeness of the believers, in their mutual affection, compassion, and mercy, is that of a single body.”

Esteemed scholars, honoured teachers, venerable elders, courageous young men and women, and all those living souls

in whose chests not only hearts beat, but consciences still breathe;

whose eyes retain the strength to behold the truth,

and whose hearts have not yet surrendered to moral death—

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ وَبَرَكَاتُهُ

Peace be upon you, and the mercy and blessings of Allah.

This gathering is no ceremonial assembly.

It is no exercise in rhetoric, no indulgence in verbal ornamentation, no fleeting spark of emotional fervour.

It is, rather, a humble yet urgent knocking upon the doors of the heart.

I have not come today to speak of matters that are merely heard.

I have come to speak of truths that must be **felt**—

truths that do not merely engage the intellect but shake the soul;

truths that do not rest upon the ear but descend into the depths of the heart and leave the conscience restless.

I bring you no news bulletin, no policy analysis, no slogan fashioned for applause.

What I place before you today is a **dream**.

And yet—make no mistake—

this is not a comforting dream.

It is not an easy question I raise, nor a question that permits peaceful sleep.

It is the kind of question that robs one of rest,

for today I do not offer a speech—

I place before you a **mirror**.

And should we dare to see ourselves clearly within it, we may find sleep a stranger thereafter

My young friends,
if you imagine this gathering to be an ordinary programme, you are gravely mistaken.
This is a court of moral reckoning—
and in this court, the accused are none other than ourselves.

I will not recount fables.
I will not weave imaginary tales.
I will speak of a dream whose consequences are laid bare—
a dream that, for millions of Muslims across the world, is not a nightmare from which one awakens,
but a daily reality.

It is, in truth, our collective reality:
a cry suppressed for centuries,
a lament dissolved into the very breath of the Ummah.

Pause, then, and consider:
If tonight the roof above your home were torn away;
if missiles rained upon the beds of your children;
if your mother's scream never reached a television screen—
would you still say, *"This is not our concern"*?

Therefore, I ask you—no, I implore you—
for a few moments, silence the noise of the world.
Set aside your devices.
Make your hearts حاضر—present.
Awaken your conscience.
For what is said today is not meant to be heard alone, but felt.
And it is a testimony that shall summon every one of us before the tribunal of history.

This address is spoken on behalf of the children of Gaza.
It is spoken on behalf of the mothers of Kashmir.
It is spoken on behalf of those orphans who have known not the warmth of a father, but only the coldness of a shroud.

And today, with unrelenting force, one question strikes at the very door of your conscience:
Are we, truly, an Ummah?
I have not come to deliver a political speech.
I have not come to chant an emotional slogan.
I have not come to ignite momentary excitement.
I have come to place before you a dream—
a dream that is, in reality, our shared condition.
So, for one moment—just one—
I ask all those whose chests the heart still beats:
close your eyes.

Yes—close them.

And come with me to that moment when not one individual, not one family, but an entire Ummah was forced awake.

Imagine:

It is the final watch of the night.

The exhaustion of the day has settled.

Silence envelops the house.

A dim light lingers—

the kind that deepens sleep rather than dispels it.

The stillness is such that time itself appears to have paused.

Children lie in deep slumber.

A silence so profound that even a sharpened breath would be heard.

Innocent smiles rest upon peaceful faces.

The gentle rhythm of breathing moves like a quiet testimony to life itself—

those smiles which are the greatest treasure of a father, a mother, a grandfather;

those moments of unspeakable joy when one beholds one's children as living dreams,

as the answered prayers of a lifetime.

And then—suddenly—the eyes open.

They search instinctively for the faces of the children.

But what appears is no dream.

It is a vision of the Day of Judgement.

Faces covered in dust.

Innocent forms drenched in blood.

Bodies torn by wounds.

Collapsed rubble.

Falling walls.

A trembling body in the cold air.

The heart longs to scream—

yet the scream dies in the throat.

Hands tremble.

Fingers reach out, desperate to touch the children,

to believe—if only for a moment—that they still live.

Yet the heart recoils in terror, fearing that this touch may be the last.

Pain courses through the body.

Bones feel shattered.

Breath grows heavy.

But above all else, one thought consumes the soul:

My children.

Where are my children?

Then—abruptly—the eyes open fully.

The room is intact.

The walls stand.

The roof remains.

The children are safe, sleeping soundly in their beds.

Their faces are clean.

Peaceful.

Secure.

And in that very moment, the human spirit collapses.

One wishes to cry aloud—not because the dream was dreadful alone,
but because the body trembles violently.

Tears stream unbidden.

The heart quakes.

Hands rise instinctively in supplication.

And the tongue whispers:

O God, it was only a dream.

Yet the heart responds:

But O God—was it not someone else's reality?

This was not the dream of a single individual.

It was not a cinematic scene.

It was not a fictional plot.

It was the waking dream of a father in Gaza.

It was Gaza's living lament.

It was the sobbing night of a mother in Kashmir.

It was the story of Syria, Yemen, Libya, Sudan—

a story that descends each night into the dreams of one Muslim or another.

It is the daily reality of the children of Syria, Yemen, and Palestine.

And yet, when we awaken, all is well.

Our children sleep safely.

Our rooms remain secure.

And tears fall—

because we realise it was only a dream.

But for those for whom this is not a dream—
do we truly know their reality?
Who Lives This Dream?

Esteemed listeners,
Whose reality is this dream?

It is the reality of the father in Gaza, who each night presses his children to his chest amidst the thunder of bombardment.

It is the reality of the Palestinian mother who, as she lulls her child to sleep, does not know whether he will awaken alive at dawn.

It is the reality of the Kashmiri child who closes his eyes at night uncertain whether they will ever open again.

This is the dream of children who have not known toys, but rifles;
the reality of children in Syria, Yemen, and Sudan who have not seen playthings, but missiles.

It is the truth of every corner of the world where being Muslim has become a crime.

We shudder at a dream and lose sleep for a single night—
they live this reality every day.
Every night they sleep without knowing whether morning will come.

We tremble at imagination;
they endure truth.

Esteemed audience,
Pause and consider a question that rends the heart:
what must pass through the souls of those parents for whom this is not a dream, but a daily routine—
who run from place to place carrying the torn bodies of their children,
neither granted the strength to bury them, nor even the permission to hold them close?
If you wish to see calamity walking on its feet, watch the footage from Gaza.
If you wish to feel pain breathing, the images from Palestine are sufficient.
This is not merely war.
This is the assassination of humanity's conscience.
The blood that flows silently in Kashmir still cries out—
those who called "We are Pakistanis, Pakistan is ours" were buried beneath the soil wrapped in the Pakistani flag.
And where, then, do we stand?
There is an immutable law of nature:
so long as the oppressed still breathe, the oppressor remains an oppressor;
but when the oppressed fall silent, tyranny becomes unrestrained.
For years we have watched death dance,
while life gasps for breath.

The question is not: *Who is the oppressor?*
 The question is: *Where are we?*

Esteemed listeners,
 We comfort ourselves with the illusion that the
 danger has passed,
 that these horrors are occurring “somewhere
 far away.”

But the truth is far more unsettling.
 We are not passing through a difficult phase;
 we are entering a perilous age.
 To claim that the danger has receded is to
 deceive ourselves.

That moment can knock on any door, on any
 morning.

Which border is secure?

Which city is safe?

Which home is protected?

Today bombs fall on Gaza.

Tomorrow, on Kashmir.

And the day after?

History bears witness:

oppression does not halt quietly—it expands.

From Muhammad bin Qasim to Karbala, what does the mirror of history reveal?

When the cry of a daughter of Sindh was heard, Muhammad bin Qasim crossed the seas—
 no passport, no visa, no waiting for the United Nations, no reliance on resolutions.

One truth alone propelled him: the Ummah was one.

And Karbala?

When brutality and savagery were being inscribed upon the family of the Prophet ﷺ himself,
 history asks:

where were the rest of the Muslims?

Today, the answer to that question stands exposed.

It is written plainly in our conduct.

We are Muslims—

but only within our borders.

Sometimes only within our homes.

And often only within the confines of our interests.

In the modern world, the very concept of the Ummah is being murdered before our eyes.

We are taught that the nation matters, not the Ummah;

that borders are sacred, not human beings;

that interest is supreme, not ethics.

Thus, the idea of the Ummah has been buried—
 quietly, skilfully, almost beautifully.



“You mind your borders; we will mind ours.”

Let Gaza burn.

Let Kashmir groan.

We shed a few tears on our screens and then return to our routines.

The naked face of global hypocrisy now stands fully revealed.

The world knows who is the oppressor and who is the oppressed—
yet the oppressor is recast as the victim.

The United States stands shoulder to shoulder with Israel, fleets deployed in support.

Its Secretary of State invokes identity to sanctify injustice.

Joe Biden arrives bearing threats.

Donald Trump surpassed all limits in his infatuation with Israel.

Britain, France—partners in this crime.

And we?

We are engrossed in cricket.

Entangled in struggles for power.

When electricity fails in Ukraine, human rights awaken.

When Gaza is erased, silence prevails.

Perhaps because Muslims are no longer considered human.

Esteemed audience,

The greatest shame here is not the strength of the enemy.

The true tragedy—already etched into history—is our apathy, our cowardice.

We are busy with games.

We cheer before giant screens, dancing at boundaries and sixes.

We applaud in decadent gatherings.

Or we remain trapped in power struggles.

On social media, lies, vulgarity, and deceit mislead our youth, advancing the enemy’s agenda.

Falsehoods are spread without verification, fuelling division.

This silence.

This cowardice.

This indifference.

All of it has already been recorded by history.

And future generations will ask us:

When the Ummah was burning, what were you doing?

When Gaza, Kashmir, and others were butchered mercilessly, where were you?

On the Day of Judgement, no excuse will be accepted—

not that borders were distant,

not that responsibilities were heavy,

not that we were weak.

Esteemed listeners,

The injustices and suffering I have spoken of are not unknown to you.

You encounter them daily in the media.

You are aware of your helplessness.
 But must we leave our children and future generations an inheritance of despair and subjugation?
 That decision now rests with us.
 We must seek the solution ourselves.
 No outsider will come to wipe our tears.
 Remember well:
 The solution lies neither in NATO,
 nor in the United Nations,
 nor in the promises of global powers.
 Its only solution lies in the Divine command:
 وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا
 “Hold fast, all of you together, to the Rope of God, and do not be divided.”
 The Qur’an teaches us unity.
 The Sunnah teaches us sacrifice.
 And the Seerah teaches us courage.
 When the Ummah is united, Badr is born.
 When it fragments, Karbala is left to stand alone.
 A Final Call to the Ummah
 It feels as though this may be the Ummah’s final call—
 a call that declares clearly:
 this is not the time to be spectators,
 this is not the time for speeches,
 this is the time for self-accountability.
 Awaken your faith.
 Revive your conscience.
 Rise above sects, nationalities, and narrow interests—
 because if we do not awaken today,
 tomorrow this nightmare will become our own reality.

Esteemed listeners,
 What you have just heard was not merely a speech.
 It was history’s lament, speaking to you in the language of today.
 This question is no longer only about Gaza.
 It is no longer only about Kashmir.
 It is not confined to Palestine, Syria, Yemen, or Sudan.
 This question is about all of us.
 History’s pen does not pause—it continues to write.
 And future generations will ask us:
 When the Ummah was drowning in blood, where were you?
 When children’s shrouds were too small, which screen held your attention?
 When the first Qiblah was burning, which interest were you protecting?
 When oppressed Kashmiris in Srinagar, Shopian, Jammu, and Rajouri were riddled with bullets for
 chanting “We are Pakistanis and Pakistan is ours,” why did you forget us?
 Remember well:
 on the Day of Judgement, no passport will avail you,
 no nationality,

no flag,
no alliance membership.
Only one question will be asked:
What did you do for the oppressed?
Even now, there is still time—
but very little of it.
This is not the hour for spectatorship.
This is the hour of accountability.
This is the hour of return—
of holding fast to the Rope of Allah.
The Qur'an remains unchanged.
The Sunnah remains unchanged.
The Qiblah remains one.
The only difference is that we have fragmented.

Come—let us pledge today
that we will stand not with headlines, but with truth;
that we will decide not by interest, but by faith;
that we will not inherit silence, but responsibility.
My youth,
my brothers,
my sisters—
Today, history is watching us.
And in history's hand is not a blank page,
but a pen of judgement.
Remember this:
history will not record what you said—
history will record what you did.
If today we choose silence,
tomorrow our children will question us from our graves:
When the Ummah was being slaughtered, where were you?
Once again, time is calling.
Either we shoulder the burden of our faith,
or history will remember us as a cowardly nation.
If today we do not awaken our hearts,
tomorrow this nightmare will invade our homes.

This is not the time for tweets.
This is not the time for mere status updates.
This is not the time for tears alone.
This is the time to stand.
This is the time to set aside nation, race, language, and party—
and adopt one identity only:
I am a Muslim.

My youth, my brothers, my sisters—
The speech may be ending,
but the decision begins now.
This gathering will disperse.
The chairs will empty.
The stage will fall silent.
Yet the question will remain:
Did we merely listen, or are we leaving with the resolve to change?
The Ummah does not need another speech.
The Ummah needs awakened consciences.
The Ummah does not need applause.
The Ummah needs youth who are willing to stand.
Remember this truth:
nations die the day their youth fall silent in the face of oppression,
and nations are reborn the day their youth stand up for truth.

My youth—
If even today you excuse yourselves by saying “*We are helpless,*”
remember this:
tomorrow your children will stand at your graves and accuse you.
This is the time to bury fear.
This is the time to shatter silence.
This is the time to move beyond being warriors of social media
and become soldiers of action.
This is the time to rise above sects,
to step beyond nationalities,
to abandon parties, interests, and positions—
and embrace one truth:
We are Muslims,
therefore we cannot be indifferent.
We cannot abandon the oppressed.
We cannot accept a life without truth.
If today we fail to awaken our conscience,
remember this fire burning in Gaza today—
whose flames are reducing the human settlements beneath Kashmir’s beautiful chinar trees to
ashes—
will knock on our own doors tomorrow.
This blood flowing in Palestine today
will course through our streets tomorrow.
And the extremist Hindu who repeatedly dreams of staining his impure symbols with the pure
blood of Muslims and Pakistanis—
on that day, neither the United Nations will remain,
nor any superpower,
nor any treaty.

Even now, there is time.
 Even now, there is opportunity.
 Even now, our Lord is present.
 And the Qur'an still proclaims:
 وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا
"Hold firmly, all together, to the Rope of Allah, and do not be divided."
 Come—
 in this moment,
 in this gathering,
 before this stage—
 let us make a covenant with Allah:
 O Allah, do not make us spectators.
 Do not make us cowards.
 Do not make us silent nation.
 O Allah, make us the youth who stand for truth,
 who do not bow before oppression,
 who do not fear carrying the burden of the Ummah.
 Transform our apathy into awakening.
 Our weakness into unity.
 Our silence into courage.
 Make us once again an Ummah—
 not a nation of spectators,
 but a nation that bears witness to truth.
 O Allah, do not make us onlookers—
 make us warriors for truth.
 Do not make us a scattered crowd—
 make us one Ummah.
 Do not make us silent—
 make us voices of truth.
 O Allah, when history calls our names,
 let us not hang our heads in shame,
 but stand tall and say:
*O Allah, we did not sleep—
 we were standing.*
 وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا
 Hold fast to the rope of Allah, all of you, and do not be divided.

Allahumma ish'had. Allahumma ish'had. Allahumma ish'had.
 O Allah, be a witness. O Allah, be a witness. O Allah, be a witness
 Saturday, January 24, 2026

(Lecture Maulana Zafar Ali Khan Trust Lahore 24 January 2026)

A New Paradigm of Collective Defence

A Covenant of Defence and Destiny

History records, with an unblinking fidelity, that when nations choose to anchor their survival in mutual trust and shared vision, they do not merely sign agreements; they redirect the very current of history. In the annals of international relations, it is an established truth that individual security is seldom durable unless enclosed within the ramparts of collective security. The recently concluded defence agreement between Pakistan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia stands as an exceptional manifestation of this principle. Under its central provision, aggression against one state shall be deemed aggression against both. This clause is no mere assemblage of diplomatic words; it is a solemn declaration of shared destiny between two sovereign states. Its force is not confined to the military domain alone; it carries profound political, psychological, and strategic deterrent value—compelling any potential adversary to pause, reconsider, and reckon with consequences.

The strategic defence accord between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia marks a decisive stride towards the ideal of collective security within the Islamic world. It not only institutionalises bilateral defence cooperation but also lays the foundation for a broader Muslim security framework—one that addresses the balance of power in the region, safeguards the sovereignty of Muslim states, and responds with clarity to an evolving global security environment. This agreement gives practical expression to a doctrine long recognised in international security thought: that an attack on one is, in effect, an attack on all. In the days ahead, the potential inclusion of Türkiye and Iran could well transform this bilateral understanding into a wider Islamic defence compact of historic proportions.

The transition from national security to collective security has not occurred in a vacuum. The global security architecture today is marked by acute imbalance. Protracted conflicts in the Middle East, the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, nuclear tensions in South Asia, and sustained political and military pressure on Muslim states have collectively underscored the necessity of a Muslim collective defence model—one akin in structure to NATO, yet free from Western political hegemony.

At its core, the Pakistan–Saudi defence agreement rests upon a doctrine already validated by modern security arrangements. NATO’s Article 5 stands as the most evident precedent: a provision that offers not only military protection but also generates a powerful shared strategic deterrent. In much the same manner, this agreement establishes a unified defensive posture, designed to dissuade aggression before it materialises.

Formally brought into being through the signatures of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, this strategic mutual defence agreement symbolises a deliberate elevation of historic ties—from cordial diplomacy to an operational defence partnership. It is a moment where diplomacy clasped hands with strategic foresight.

The strategic alignment between Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has ensured that this accord is far more than symbolic. Under decisive leadership, it has been

translated into a practical reality—widely interpreted as a pre-emptive strategic measure in response to regional instability, escalating geopolitical risks, and mounting pressures on the Muslim world.

This agreement proclaims a deeper truth: that within the Islamic world, the age of mere reaction is giving way to an ethos of anticipation and preparedness. Leadership, in this instance, has consciously favoured long-term security over transient diplomatic convenience. Mirroring the spirit of NATO's Article 5, the Pakistan–Saudi pact establishes a shared deterrent mechanism against any potential aggressor.

Beyond strengthening the national security of both states, the agreement reflects a shared resolve to contribute meaningfully to regional and global peace. Its primary objective is to institutionalise defence cooperation and ensure an effective, united response to any act of aggression—thereby tipping the balance of power away from conflict and towards stability.

The institutionalisation of defence cooperation, joint preparedness against present and future threats, and a collective role in promoting peace constitute the central aims of this agreement.

In essence, it echoes the strategic vision that guided Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War through the creation of NATO. Yet its implications extend further: this pact is not merely bilateral, but foundational—offering the contours of a future regional security framework.

The joint communiqué makes it unequivocally clear that the Pakistan–Saudi partnership is no product of momentary interest. It is the culmination of over eight decades of steadfast, tested, and trusted relations—rooted not only in diplomacy but in military training, defence consultation, and intelligence cooperation. This agreement grants that historic bond formal legal and strategic protection, while also reaffirming a fraternity grounded in faith and shared responsibility.

In this context, the message conveyed to the international community is unambiguous: Pakistan regards the protection of the Haramain not merely as a strategic obligation, but as an article of faith and a means of seeking the pleasure of Allah and His Messenger ﷺ.

As the Qur'an declares:

وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا

"And hold fast, all together, to the Rope of Allah, and do not be divided." (Āl 'Imrān 3:103)

And again:

وَأَعِدُّوا لَهُمْ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ

"And prepare against them whatever force you are able." (Al-Anfāl 8:60)

In their union of resolve and preparedness, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have thus inscribed a new chapter—one in which collective strength is marshalled not for conquest, but for deterrence, dignity, and the preservation of peace.

This agreement stands as tangible proof of the deepening Pakistan–Saudi strategic partnership and the growing solidity of their defence cooperation. Pakistan's military leadership—most notably the Chief of Army Staff, Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir—played a decisive role in translating this accord from diplomatic intent into operational reality. In the aftermath of this agreement, Pakistan has formally emerged as a partner in the protection of the Two Holy Mosques, assuming the stature of

a responsible security state within the Islamic world. Such a role has seldom been entrusted to a non-Arab nation, and its conferral upon Pakistan marks a moment of exceptional historical significance.

This responsibility elevates Pakistan to the position of a central defensive pillar within the Muslim world. It is not a burden confined to the military sphere alone; it is at once doctrinal, civilisational, and historical. The safeguarding of the Haramain is thus framed not merely as a strategic duty, but as a trust rooted in faith, heritage, and collective memory.

Among the most consequential regional and global implications of the Pakistan–Saudi defence pact is its capacity to stabilise the balance of power in the Middle East, influence security dynamics in South Asia, and offer Muslim states a measure of emancipation from exclusive reliance on Western military architectures. According to leading international outlets, including Bloomberg, the potential inclusion of Türkiye would extend the agreement’s impact far beyond the Middle East, reshaping strategic equilibria across a wider geopolitical canvas.

The joint communiqué affirms that, in light of present and emerging threats, the agreement will enhance defence preparedness, integration, and operational coordination. As a result, both states will be better equipped to confront, in unison, any threat to their territorial integrity or national security. The accord explicitly addresses contemporary challenges encompassing conventional warfare, hybrid conflict, cyber warfare, missile and drone technologies, and regional instability—providing a framework for indispensable joint preparedness, integration, and strategic planning.

Expressions of interest from Iran and Türkiye signal a growing recognition across the Muslim world of a long-standing collective defence vacuum. Türkiye’s potential participation, informed by its NATO experience and advanced defence industry, could confer significant technical and operational advantages upon the alliance. In this broader context, a critical truth comes into sharper focus: the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation requires not merely a diplomatic identity, but a credible military pillar.

Under the agreement’s core provisions, any external armed attack against one signatory shall be considered an attack against both. While this clause bears resemblance to NATO’s Article Five, its resonance within the Islamic world is arguably deeper and more profound. Decades of shared military training, multinational exercises, and defence-industrial collaboration provide a firm foundation upon which this clause now rests.

In practical terms, this agreement represents the application of NATO’s collective defence doctrine within an Islamic framework. The distinction, however, is fundamental. NATO has historically functioned as the guardian of Western political and economic interests; a Muslim defence alliance, by contrast, has the potential to safeguard the very existence, sovereignty, and sacred sites of the Ummah. In this sense, the pact constitutes an Islamic interpretation of Article Five—addressing a strategic void that has long persisted. This comparison strengthens the agreement’s legal and normative standing. History attests that NATO became the guarantor of Europe’s collective defence, while SEATO and CENTO served predominantly American strategic interests. The Pakistan–Saudi agreement, for the first time, articulates a Muslim-centred defence vision anchored in sovereignty, sanctity, and collective welfare.

The benefits accruing from this defence pact extend across the domains of security, economy, and diplomacy for both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The defensive strength of one now stands in service of the other, rendering each a shield for its counterpart. By reinforcing the interdependence of security, economic stability, and diplomatic leverage, the agreement contributes to the protection of investments, the security of energy corridors, and enhanced coordination in global diplomacy. It is no coincidence that NATO member states have historically experienced fewer intra-alliance conflicts and stronger economic resilience.



From a policy perspective, this agreement may well serve as a model of defensive self-confidence for Muslim states. It holds the potential to provide tangible deterrence in crises such as Gaza, Palestine, and Kashmir, while simultaneously enhancing the negotiating weight of Muslim countries in engagements with global powers.

It bears recalling that at Al-Yamamah Palace, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman accorded a warm reception to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. Formal negotiations were held in the presence of both delegations, conveying best wishes for Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz and undertaking a comprehensive review of historic and strategic relations. A wide range of matters of mutual interest were discussed in depth.

The Al-Yamamah deliberations made one reality unmistakably clear: trust between the two nations has transcended individual personalities and taken root within enduring institutions. Shared interests are no longer reliant on informal understandings; they are now enshrined in written agreements and legal guarantees—a hallmark of policy continuity and strategic maturity.

Yet it must be recognised that adversarial forces rarely view the success of Muslim defence arrangements with equanimity. Inevitably, challenges persist: internal political divergences within the Muslim world, potential pressure from global powers, and the demands of institutional coordination. Addressing these challenges will require transparent, lawful, and incremental strategies rooted in prudence rather than haste.

In this unfolding context, Iran has also expressed its desire to join the defence agreement. During his visit to Pakistan, the Speaker of the Iranian Parliament, Mohammad Baqer Ghalibaf, stated that Iran should be included in the pact and that the OIC ought to establish a joint military force along the lines of NATO. His remarks reflect a growing awareness within the Muslim world of the existing defence deficit and the urgent need for a credible military pillar within the OIC. Iran's inclusion could transform the alliance into a pan-Islamic security bloc of unprecedented scope.

As the Qur'an reminds:

وَتَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْبِرِّ وَالتَّقْوَىٰ

"And cooperate with one another in righteousness and piety." (Al-Mā'idah 5:2)

In this spirit of cooperation, the Pakistan–Saudi defence agreement gestures towards a future in which unity is no longer rhetorical, preparedness is no longer deferred, and collective security becomes the lived reality of the Ummah.

The proposal advanced by the Speaker of the Iranian Parliament is, in essence, an acknowledgment of a profound and long-neglected truth: that the Ummah cannot be secured while remaining fragmented. Collective defence has ceased to be a matter of choice; it has become an inevitability. Should this proposal advance, it may yet breathe a martial spirit into the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. The Pakistan–Saudi defence agreement thus stands as a strategic exemplar for the Islamic world—its first tangible step towards collective security and the cornerstone of a future Muslim defence alliance. To fulfil this promise, the alliance must be rendered multidimensional, supported by joint military exercises, an integrated command structure, and a defence framework anchored within the OIC. For collective defence is not merely a military arrangement; it is the guarantor of political sovereignty, moral dignity, and equilibrium in the international order.

The Iranian Speaker further urged that Islamic nations—particularly Pakistan—should deploy forces to Gaza for the protection and relief of the Palestinian people, and that no action be taken which might further entrench Israeli domination. The ongoing atrocities in Gaza and Kashmir have laid bare an uncomfortable reality: statements and diplomatic condemnations alone are insufficient. Only credible collective defensive power can generate the deterrence capable of shielding the oppressed. It is here, precisely, that the moral legitimacy of an Islamic defence alliance will be tested—and it is this challenge that simultaneously strengthens its ethical foundation.

Mohammad Baqer openly acknowledged that the solidarity demonstrated by Pakistan during periods of Israeli aggression against Iran will never be forgotten by the Iranian nation. In his words, Pakistan represents a priceless asset for the Ummah. Pakistan and Iran confront shared challenges that are best addressed collectively, while vast opportunities for cooperation exist across sectors such as healthcare, energy, and banking.

Iran's recognition of Pakistan's role is emblematic of a broader transformation: Pakistan has come to symbolise balance, prudence, and principled resistance. It is now acknowledged not only regionally but globally as a stable and parallel power—capable of restraint as well as resolve.

Cooperation in medicine, energy, and banking completes the architecture of defence partnership, and Iran now seeks a multidimensional role within the evolving Pakistan–Saudi security framework. In a further significant development, Türkiye has also expressed its desire to join the Pakistan–Saudi defence alliance. According to Bloomberg, a defence compact comprising Pakistan, Türkiye, and Saudi Arabia could recalibrate the balance of power not only in the Middle East, but far beyond it.

Türkiye's inclusion—armed with advanced military technology, NATO experience, a sophisticated defence industry, and strategic geographic reach—could fundamentally reshape power dynamics across the Middle East, South Asia, and the Mediterranean. Its participation carries the weight of global strategic gravity and could well usher in a historic realignment.

It is noteworthy that Pakistan and Saudi Arabia had already signed, as early as last year, a defence agreement declaring that aggression against one would be treated as aggression against both—a

principle identical to NATO's Article Five. Türkiye, notably, is already a NATO member. History reminds us that SEATO and CENTO were conceived to serve American defence interests, while Europe secured itself through NATO. The question thus becomes unavoidable: does the Islamic world not possess the right to defend itself? Is it not entitled to collective security? This agreement constitutes a practical answer to that question.

Bloomberg further reports that negotiations to formally include Türkiye in this defence alliance may soon be concluded. Should this materialise, the alliance will transcend the character of a military bloc and emerge as a symbol of the Ummah's collective self-respect, self-reliance, and defensive unity.

If Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and Iran succeed in establishing institutionalised defence cooperation, joint command structures, and shared military exercises, such an alliance could become a force not for war, but for its prevention; not for domination, but for stability. It would stand as a guarantor of the Ummah's dignity and evolve into a future-oriented Islamic collective defence architecture—capable of contributing not only to Muslim security, but to global peace itself.

This defence alliance is not merely a compact of state interests; it is a civilisational declaration—that when the Ummah awakens, it alters the course of history. If advanced with vision, moderation, and principled politics, it may well herald a new era of stability and sovereignty for the Islamic world. Nations do not survive by weapons alone, but by character and unity.

The Islamic world must now move beyond reaction and embrace anticipation—towards collective defence and strategic alliance. This agreement is not simply a defensive arrangement between two states; it is the foundation of collective security for the Muslim world and the opening chapter of a future Muslim security architecture. True power does not emanate from arms alone, but from unity, institution-building, and shared vision. This agreement is a beginning, not an end. When nations choose to safeguard themselves, history, in turn, safeguards their choice.

As the Qur'an affirms:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِهِ صَفًّا كَأَنَّهُمْ بُنْيَانٌ مَرْصُورٌ

"Indeed, Allah loves those who strive in His cause in ranks, as though they were a solid, cemented structure." (As-Saff 61:4)

Tuesday, January 27, 2026

Between Noise and Stillness: The Politics of Power in a Fractured World

Silence as Strategy: Trump, Putin, and the New Balance of Global Power

At the present juncture of international politics, the exercise of power is no longer confined to military deployments or economic coercion. Silence itself—calculated delay, studied restraint, and the deliberate refusal to react—has emerged as one of the most potent instruments of statecraft. Global politics has never been merely a theatre of proclamations, treaties, or battlefronts; it is equally a chronicle of pauses, unspoken signals, and decisions taken beyond the reach of public utterance. As the year 2026 dawns, silence has once again asserted itself as the loudest voice among the great powers.

It is within this charged stillness that the contrast between President Donald Trump's aggressively declarative foreign policy and President Vladimir Putin's conspicuous quiet must be understood. At first glance, the juxtaposition appears paradoxical: bluster set against muteness, assertion against absence. Yet in truth, both represent different expressions of the same evolving global order—one in which power is exercised as much through restraint as through display, and where control over reaction has become as decisive as the capacity for force. This chapter, therefore, seeks to read silence not as an omission, but as policy.

Historically, the overt projection of power has almost invariably provoked response. The annals of international politics bear witness to a familiar rhythm: whenever American power extended its claws with conspicuous aggression, Moscow's reply followed with the unmistakable clang of steel. From the Cold War through the crises of Iraq and Syria, American interventions—whether in the Middle East or Latin America—were habitually met by swift and emphatic resistance from the Kremlin, articulated across both diplomatic and rhetorical fronts.

Yet the early months of 2026 present a tableau draped in an unfamiliar hush. Regime change in Venezuela, the seizure of a Russian-flagged oil tanker, and belligerent pronouncements regarding Greenland—each an unmistakable signal that Washington now seeks to reorder the international system not by juridical norms, but by the blunt arithmetic of power. These acts collectively suggest an America intent on redefining global order through dominance rather than consensus. And yet, despite the provocation, Moscow has remained silent.

This silence, far from signalling weakness, reveals a recalibrated political temperament—one that privileges interests over impulses. Trump's onslaught unfolded in full view: celebratory arrests in Venezuela, the detention of a Russian-flagged vessel, and even rhetoric hinting at territorial acquisition. All transpired without a single sharp rejoinder from the Kremlin, as though time itself had been momentarily arrested. Such comprehensive quietude marks a decisive departure from the politics of reflexive retaliation and announces Russia's entry into a colder, more calculating realm: the politics of interest.

Unlike in earlier episodes, there was no immediate condemnation, no sabre-rattling, no martial posturing. This silence is neither accidental nor involuntary; it is a considered policy choice, rooted in the conviction that transient outrage must not be permitted to imperil long-term strategic

objectives. Russia—long accustomed to denouncing Western interventions as conspiracies of regime change—now appears cast in the role of restraint itself.

President Putin's absence from the public stage is thus not coincidence but design. His refusal to issue formal statements, his withdrawal from the daily spectacle of political commentary, signals a Kremlin that places greater faith in closed-door deliberation than in public rhetoric. Putin's temporary disappearance from view is not political inattentiveness, but a deliberate pause—one that history suggests often precedes consequential decisions.

Indeed, the record shows that Putin's silences have frequently served as preludes to strategic pivots and diplomatic recalibrations. His retreat from public visibility following the Orthodox Christmas was less a matter of ceremony than a signal: decisions, at this juncture, are not being forged in speeches, but in negotiating rooms. The parallel quiet of Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov and state broadcasters is not holiday lethargy, but a conscious act of diplomatic stewardship.

Negotiations with Washington over Ukraine have entered an existential and perilously delicate phase—one in which a single intemperate phrase could unravel months of painstaking effort. In such circumstances, silence becomes a shield. Moscow is acutely aware that any harsh response to American actions in Venezuela or at sea might ignite a spark capable of severing the fragile diplomatic thread. The Kremlin's restraint, therefore, is an attempt to preserve equilibrium at a moment when balance is everything.

President Trump, by contrast, inaugurated 2026 with a declaration of power that echoes the imperial instincts of the twentieth century. The arrest of Nicolás Maduro and his transfer to New York was not merely a legal manoeuvre; it was a message—an announcement that diplomacy has yielded to detention, and that force now claims primacy over persuasion. In effect, it amounted to a contemporary reinterpretation of the Monroe Doctrine: power, once again, asserts itself as law.

Trump has made plain that the interpretation of international law now lies in the hands of the powerful—a notion Russia once dismissed as Western imperialism. For Moscow, however, Ukraine remains not a peripheral dispute but the central pillar of its foreign policy: a question bound up with national security, historical identity, and the legacy of the post-Soviet space. At this critical juncture, Russia has no interest in escalating confrontation with the United States.

According to prominent analysts, the emerging narrative within Russian state media reflects a calculated reading of American assertiveness—not as a threat, but as a precedent. If Washington reserves for itself the right to impose dominance within its sphere through unrestrained power, then Moscow, by the same logic, acquires both moral and political justification to act likewise within its own neighbourhood. The silence, therefore, is not born of indecision, but of timing.

Ultimately, Putin's restraint is dictated by one overriding consideration: the Ukraine negotiations stand at a knife-edge. A forceful reaction to events in Venezuela or maritime seizures could have sabotaged talks whose collapse would inflict direct strategic loss upon Russia. These American actions have thus been interpreted in Moscow as the operational expression of a new U.S. national security doctrine—one that tacitly acknowledges spheres of influence and the delimitation of power

among global actors. It is, ironically, a doctrine Russia has long advocated. Silence, in this moment, is not retreat. It is positioning.

One further explanation for Russia's tacit acquiescence lies in the substance of America's revised National Security Strategy itself. The document's explicit recognition of regional spheres of influence aligns, at least in principle, with a position Moscow has articulated for years. It is this underlying consonance that has inclined Russia not towards open criticism, but towards a posture of restrained, almost silent endorsement.

The Trump Doctrine, crystallised most starkly in the arrest of Nicolás Maduro, delivered an unambiguous message: within the contemporary international system, legitimacy is contingent upon power. This episode was widely interpreted as the operational manifestation of America's new national security thinking—a strategy Russian officials had previously welcomed precisely because it signalled the revival of regional politics. While the principle itself does not offend Russian strategic thought, Moscow is determined to retain sovereign discretion over when, where, and how such logic is applied, subordinating its execution firmly to Russian interests.

According to Fyodor Lukyanov, the Trump Doctrine marks a decisive turn away from universalist pretensions and a return to a world ordered by regions. Global politics, once again, is being reorganised around spheres rather than ideals. This observation is more than descriptive; it is diagnostic. It acknowledges that the liberal international order erected after the Cold War has entered an advanced stage of dissolution. In this sense, Lukyanov's remark functions not merely as analysis, but as a portent—an intimation of future global confrontations shaped less by norms than by geography and power.

Within Russian state media, the American action has been framed as a “precedent”—one that may, in time, furnish Moscow with moral and political justification for adopting firmer measures within its own neighbourhoods. Analysts such as Yevgeny Popov argue that global disorder, far from imperilling Russia, offers it an opportunity: pressure is diffused, diplomatic space expands, and amid the rivalry of great powers, secondary actors find unexpected pathways forward.

At first glance, the American strategy's acknowledgement of regional influence appears to mirror long-standing Russian positions, if only partially. It is precisely this overlap—this strategic resonance—that constitutes one of the principal reasons for Russia's silence. Popov himself characterises the present moment as temporarily uncomfortable but strategically advantageous. What appears in the short term as an erosion of influence may, over time, be converted into diplomatic leverage. Global turbulence, in this reading, grants Russia room to breathe—a pause in which pressure eases and options multiply.

Even among pro-Kremlin circles, one detects a curious mixture of resentment and reluctant admiration towards American assertiveness. This ambivalence reflects an unspoken truth: Russia itself has become ensnared in the same logic of power it now observes elsewhere. The method Washington employs abroad mirrors the approach Moscow sought to impose in Ukraine. The difference lies not in principle, but in outcome—where Russia's exertion of force became mired in a protracted war, American aggression on the global stage has instead widened the fissures between

Europe and the United States. That widening gap, in turn, reduces diplomatic pressure on Moscow and opens new corridors of manoeuvre.

The envy voiced by figures such as Margarita Simonyan is not merely personal pique; it is a symbolic acknowledgement of state-level limitation, even of strategic defeat. Decades of Russian investment in Venezuela—once a marker of Moscow’s global reach—have faded into the background under the weight of the Ukraine war. Maduro’s arrest has given formal expression to that decline, transforming a slow erosion into an undeniable fact. Moscow, with a realism born of necessity, appears prepared to accept it.



As Hanna Notte observes, Russia is presently in no position to antagonise Donald Trump, let alone challenge him directly. The logic is straightforward: Trump’s attention is fixed on the central issue—Ukraine. American posture on Ukraine is of decisive importance to Russia, where even neutrality, or a softened stance, constitutes a strategic asset of considerable value.

Moscow’s overriding objective has therefore been to draw Trump either into tacit alignment on Ukraine or, at the very least, to prevent the United States from assuming leadership of an overtly anti-Russian coalition. Thus far, this strategy has been largely successful. It explains why Russia refrained from a military response following the seizure of the Russian-flagged vessel *Marinara*, limiting itself instead to a formal objection grounded in violations of international law. This marks a notable return of legal rhetoric within Russian foreign policy.

Despite the presence of Russian naval assets in the vicinity, no force was employed. The decision to avoid escalation was deliberate, designed to contain tension rather than inflame it. Lukyanov, for his part, regards Venezuela as a secondary theatre. The true axis of concern remains Ukraine—a matter not only of geography, but of history, identity, and civilisation. Venezuela may carry political significance, but Ukraine, in Russian strategic thought, permits little room for compromise.

Hardline nationalist voices called for a military response, yet the Kremlin declined to elevate such sentiment into policy. Here, the distinction between statecraft and emotion becomes starkly visible. Moscow’s acceptance of the new interim administration reflects a preference for stability over ideological contention. The Russian Foreign Ministry’s welcome of the transitional government sent a clear signal: stability—even when achieved under external pressure—is preferable to chaos.

Russia’s reaction to the seizure of the *Marinara* was marked by restraint. There were no threats, no martial proclamations—only a measured invocation of the law of the sea. Moscow spoke the language of legality rather than force. Although a military response was entirely feasible, Russia neither demanded the tanker’s return nor hinted at retaliation. Instead, it chose patience over power, a posture indicative of diplomatic maturity.

Finally, Trump’s obstinacy has laid bare the fragility of European unity—a weakness from which Russia stands to derive tangible diplomatic benefit. In a world increasingly governed by fractures

rather than alliances, silence, once again, proves to be not the absence of power, but its most disciplined expression.

The Arctic occupies a position of decisive importance for Russia—strategically, militarily, economically, and symbolically. It is a region where energy security, military presence, and claims to global leadership converge. Whether American interest in Greenland intensifies, or Denmark's formal sovereignty remains intact, Moscow has, for the moment, characterised the matter as a bilateral issue between Washington and Copenhagen. By doing so, Russia has deliberately distanced itself from direct confrontation, signalling caution rather than indifference. Its measured stance on Greenland is, above all, an attempt to avoid premature escalation.

Hardline voices, as ever, have not been absent. Yet state policy is not forged in the furnace of emotion, but shaped by the calculus of interest. Figures such as Alexei Zhuravlyov may articulate public anger and nationalist fervour, but such utterances are no substitute for statecraft. Their rhetoric reflects sentiment, not strategy. At this juncture, Moscow's use of irony and restrained sarcasm has proved a more effective instrument—conveying displeasure without incurring the costs of outright confrontation. This is diplomacy in its modern form: subtle, indirect, yet far from innocuous.

Nationalist factions have described recent developments as tantamount to maritime piracy or even an act of war. The Kremlin, however, has carefully declined to elevate such language into official doctrine. The refusal to adopt a martial vocabulary underscores a deliberate distance from war rhetoric. Russia may acknowledge the logic of power in principle, but only insofar as it does not collide with its strategic interests.

Among pro-Kremlin circles, the faint smile elicited by Trump's obstinacy over Greenland is less admiration than irony—an unspoken commentary on European weakness and the visible strain within Western unity. Trump's insistence is interpreted as a symptom of European fragility and a widening crack in the Atlantic alliance. Yet this indulgent tolerance has limits. Should the United States move towards establishing a permanent military infrastructure in Greenland, Russian silence would almost certainly give way to response.

Kirill Dmitriev's sardonic remarks exemplify a refined diplomatic strike—soft in tone, but sharp in effect. They hold up a mirror to the European Union's double standards and deliver a blow without the discharge of a single round. With the conclusion of Russia's holiday period, a more comprehensive position from President Putin is widely anticipated—one that may formalise this silence into an explicit strategic doctrine.

Russia accepts the principle of power—but only to the extent that it serves Russian interests. The maxim "might makes right" is not alien to Russian strategic culture; indeed, it holds a certain appeal. Yet when that same principle threatens Russian interests, it becomes unacceptable. In the context of Greenland, an expanded American military presence could cross precisely that threshold. Accordingly, Russia has reduced its reactions to short-term provocations, privileging long-term strategic objectives instead. Silence has ceased to be passive; it has become an active policy. The Arctic, in this regard, is not merely a geographical expanse. It is central to Russia's military posture,

economic future, and symbolic claim to great-power status. President Putin has repeatedly identified the Arctic as a pillar of Russia's global leadership. It is not simply territory—it is a cornerstone of future power.

The Arctic is poised to become the epicenter of Russia's economic and military strategy in the decades ahead, and potentially a prelude to future conflict. This evolving posture is nudging the international system towards a new equilibrium—one in which power, silence, and opportunism are increasingly interwoven.

As Hanna Notte observes, the growing rift between Europe and the United States serves Russian interests, but any significant expansion of American military presence does not. A strengthened U.S. military infrastructure in Greenland would represent a clear red line—one beyond which Russian silence would no longer be sustainable. For middle powers, the lesson is unmistakable: not every act of aggression demands immediate resistance; sometimes, waiting is the more profitable course. Attention now turns to President Putin's anticipated address following the end of the holiday period. A comprehensive statement—perhaps among his most consequential—is expected. Yet for the present, silence remains Russia's most effective narrative and its most eloquent form of diplomacy. History teaches that, at times, silence speaks louder than any proclamation.

Trump's foreign policy announces itself in noise; Putin's strategy unfolds in stillness. One seeks power through volume, the other through restraint. And history, more often than not, remembers—and decides—in favour of that restraint. For there are moments when silence outweighs artillery, and this may well be such a moment—when politics stands poised on the threshold of history.

This chapter thus concludes that Russia's silence is not a temporary expedient, but a deliberate and organised strategic choice—one that signals the opening of a new chapter in the politics of global power.

Thursday, January 29, 2026

When Degrees Lied and a Nation Blushed

Paper Credentials, Public Shame

Contemporary international politics is embarked upon a vessel that sails not merely through tempestuous seas, but through the far more treacherous currents of human minds, economic dominions, and ideological lobbies. Ours is an age in which the coin of power and the codified boundaries of principle have perpetually collided—and today, that collision has brought the world to yet another decisive juncture. Upon the global map, where the sleight of authority contends silently with the rule of law, principles are too often confined to parchment alone, power dictates outcomes, and the lamps of morality burn faintly, if at all.

It is within this chiaroscuro of light and shadow that India's recent H-1B visa and fake degree scandal emerges—not as a merely domestic aberration, but as a mirror held up to the international order itself. It is a mirror that tests not only the moral selfhood of a nation, but also unsettles global confidence, transparency, and the credibility of educational standards. For the survival of a nation, much like the stability of a house, rests upon the soundness and integrity of its foundations; and when those foundations are hollowed out, even the loftiest edifices collapse with alarming speed. The revelation that a small but systematically organised group in Kerala had orchestrated the issuance of forged academic credentials to hundreds of thousands is not simply an episode of educational fraud. It is a historical and intellectual lesson—a looking glass in which a nation's educational, ethical, and political frailties are starkly reflected. Investigations published by *The Commune* have cast grave doubts not only upon the transparency of India's higher education institutions, but also upon its global standing, the quality of its workforce, and the international trust upon which modern mobility depends.

This report, therefore, undertakes to examine the real consequences of these disclosures, to apportion responsibility where it properly lies, and to assess the reputational damage and tangible losses sustained by India. It will demonstrate how this web of deception has shaken not only the domestic economy and educational system, but also the fabric of international relations—standing as a cautionary episode of both political and historical significance.

In Kerala, a coordinated network is alleged to have supplied more than one million individuals across India with counterfeit degrees—credentials used not merely for local employment, but extensively for overseas migration, particularly to secure H-1B visas for the United States. This was no isolated lapse, but a systemic fraud, revealing the depths of institutional weakness and moral negligence. According to *The Commune*, the network fabricated over one hundred thousand academic certificates across twenty-two universities, complete with counterfeit seals and records. The principal accused, Dhanish—also known as Danny—was reportedly operating a printing facility for fake degrees from his own residence. Law enforcement agencies arrested several accomplices and recovered forged seals and mark sheets from at least twenty-eight universities.

The operation preyed upon aspirants not only within India but also among those seeking employment abroad. Forged qualifications were issued across more than a hundred disciplines—including medicine, nursing, and engineering—with exorbitant bribes extracted, particularly from

those pursuing H-1B visas. Indian applicants, it is reported, were compelled to pay substantial sums to navigate this corrupt channel.

Jessica Vaughan, Director of the Centre for Immigration Studies in the United States, described the Indian visa process as having degenerated into large-scale fraud. The network is believed to have sold over thirty-six thousand fake degrees, resulting in the issuance of more than two hundred visas daily—of which an estimated eighty to ninety per cent were entirely fraudulent. Mahwish Siddiqui, an Indian-origin American diplomat, went further still, characterising the Indian consulate in Chennai as the epicentre of the world's largest H-1B visa fraud operation.

This scandal inflicts a profound stain upon India's international reputation. A nation's dishonour is not wrought solely by military defeat or economic collapse; it is equally, if not more enduringly, brought about when the foundations of knowledge and morality are eroded. When a state facilitates—or fails to prevent—the entry of its citizens into foreign labour markets on the basis of forged credentials, it invites scrutiny not only of individual competence, but of its educational institutions and governance itself. The questioning of academic integrity inevitably breeds a deficit of trust on the global stage.

On the strength of counterfeit qualifications, India has exported underqualified professionals to numerous countries, with damaging consequences across healthcare, education, engineering, and technology. In medicine and nursing, inadequately trained individuals have endangered human lives; in engineering and infrastructure, substandard workmanship has inflicted lasting economic and structural harm. This predicament recalls the enduring truth that nations are not sustained by weapons and proclamations alone, but by knowledge, ethics, and collective integrity.



Responsibility for this debacle cannot be confined to the principal accused alone. It exposes a gaping systemic failure—marked by governmental negligence, administrative corruption, and the collapse of oversight in both visa processing and academic verification. Educational institutions have failed in their duty to authenticate credentials; political actors and administrators have turned a blind eye, while bribery has become an unremarkable currency of advancement. Even international bodies, through inadequate scrutiny, bear a measure of complicity.

Taking together, these elements constitute a crisis whose repercussions extend far beyond national borders. Arresting a handful of perpetrators is manifestly insufficient; what is required is the reform of the system itself.

Nor is this scandal limited to India's internal disrepute. Fraud within the H-1B framework has undermined the integrity of the global workforce, eroded international confidence, and exposed vulnerabilities within immigration systems worldwide. Questions now hang over the legitimacy of recruited professionals, and trust—once shaken—is slow to recover. The lesson is unmistakable:

transparency and ethical standards in international relations are not upheld by formalities alone, but by robust institutions, accountability, and internal discipline.

This episode stands as a historical mirror, reflecting the moral frailty of a nation and the failure of its educational system—much as weak states throughout history have declined due to their own internal defects. Nations endure not through cannon and conquest, but through knowledge, moral purpose, and unity. Leadership, institutional clarity, and loyalty are indispensable to state survival; where these falter, internal decay and external disgrace become inevitable.

The H-1B visa and fake degree scandal has thus tarnished not only India's educational and ethical standing, but also its global reputation, workforce credibility, and international trust. It serves as a solemn reminder that national progress and international esteem rest not upon official proclamations or formal certifications alone, but upon reform, self-accountability, and transparent oversight.

The circle of responsibility is wide: governmental failure, deficient university supervision, fraudulent private networks, and individual moral indifference have collectively engendered this crisis. India's foremost lesson is plain—without transparency and internal stability, neither educational excellence nor national dignity can be sustained.

Ultimately, this scandal offers a lesson for all nations: trust, transparency, and internal cohesion matter more than the accumulation of power or international influence. Where internal strength prevails, external threats falter; where internal weakness festers, even the greatest power is swiftly undone.

In conclusion, nations stand tall only when their institutions are strong, their leadership vigilant, and their moral foundations secure. This report, as both an investigative and literary document, seeks to present a comprehensive account of the scandal's dimensions, responsibilities, damages, and political-historical consequences—offering not merely information, but a deeper ethical and intellectual reckoning for the reader.

Monday, February 2, 2026

The Flight of Prudence

Steel and Statecraft

In the twenty-first century, global politics is no longer confined to the mere defence of borders, or the ostentatious display of military might. It has evolved into a delicate and often unforgiving synthesis of technology, economic capacity, diplomacy, and defence industrial self-reliance. In this altered world order, prestige no longer belongs exclusively to those who wield power, but to those who can legitimise it—states that are able not only to meet their own defence requirements but also to assert the ethical, political, and strategic value of their military products within the global marketplace.

It is against this shifting international backdrop that Pakistan's JF-17 Thunder programme assumes the character of a decisive milestone.

The project is far more than the manufacture of a combat aircraft. It represents the outward expression of an evolutionary transformation in Pakistan's defence doctrine: a gradual but deliberate departure from import dependency towards joint production, technological partnership, and restrained yet dignified defence exports. The collaboration with China has not merely strengthened Pakistan's military posture; it has repositioned the country as a responsible stakeholder within the complex geometry of global defence politics.

Recent negotiations concerning the prospective export of the JF-17 Thunder have consequently given rise to a series of consequential questions. Will Pakistan calibrate its commitments in accordance with its actual production capacity? To what extent will China's role prove decisive? Which states ought to be deemed eligible recipients of this aircraft—and which ought not? And, above all, how is the delicate balance between national security and geopolitical equilibrium to be preserved within the domain of defence commerce?

This defence policy paper constitutes a serious and methodical attempt to address these questions from a structured, analytical, and state-centric perspective. Its purpose is neither to rehearse technical minutiae nor to lend credence to transient political narratives. Rather, it seeks to present a clear, cautious, and practicable policy framework capable of guiding the State of Pakistan in its future defence-related decisions.

1. Negotiations on the Sale of the JF-17 Thunder: National Interest and International Partnership

Pakistan's confirmation that it is engaged in negotiations with multiple countries regarding the sale of the JF-17 Thunder is indicative of a significant shift in the orientation of its defence industry. No longer confined solely to domestic requirements, Pakistan's defence production apparatus is now making a conscious and calculated effort to secure a foothold in the international defence market. By choosing to introduce the JF-17 Thunder beyond the narrow confines of national defence, Pakistan signals its entry into a new phase of defence self-reliance—one in which military autonomy is consciously integrated with diplomatic foresight. The acknowledgment of ongoing preliminary negotiations with various states reflects a structured export strategy rather than an impulsive commercial venture.

It has been stated with complete clarity that any such agreement will necessarily include China's consent. This stipulation is neither incidental nor negotiable; it flows organically from the joint nature of the project, its technological interdependencies, and its overarching strategic character. To disregard this reality would be to misunderstand the very architecture upon which the JF-17 programme rests.

According to Pakistani officials, while negotiations are indeed underway, these are not matters to be concluded at the pace of newspaper headlines. Defence agreements demand patience, trust, and time. The interest shown by multiple countries testifies to the aircraft's growing credibility, yet legitimacy in such matters is achieved not through haste, but through silent maturation.

The Minister for Defence Production has reiterated that these discussions remain in their initial to intermediate stages and will require considerable time to reach fruition. Defence contracts are not mere commercial transactions; they are inseparably bound to considerations of national security, regional stability, and the tacit consent of global powers. Consequently, incremental progress has been prioritised over precipitous decision-making.

The JF-17 Thunder Block III: Capability and Strategic Relevance

The JF-17 Thunder Block III is not merely a fighter aircraft; it is the embodiment of contemporary military thought. Classified as a 4.5-generation multirole fighter, it is aligned with the operational demands of modern aerial warfare. Equipped with an Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) radar and long-range beyond-visual-range (BVR) missile capability, it is designed to dominate an increasingly contested battlespace.

Its ability to detect and engage adversaries at extended distances, combined with its multirole functionality—including air-to-air, air-to-ground, and electronic warfare missions—places it in competitive parity with contemporary regional and global platforms.

Operational Validation and International Perception

During the period of heightened tension between Pakistan and India from 7 to 10 May, the JF-17 Thunder was operationally tested under real-world conditions. Its performance became both a mirror and a credential—quietly observed by air forces around the world, which witnessed the striking emergence of a credible new aerial capability.

While claims regarding the downing of Indian aircraft remain subject to political contestation, the more enduring achievement lay in the impression forged within international military circles. The operational effectiveness demonstrated during this episode significantly enhanced the aircraft's global standing and reinforced its reputation as a combat-proven platform.

Cost, Philosophy, and Strategic Appeal

Where Western-manufactured fighter aircraft typically command prices ranging from \$250 to \$350 million, the JF-17 Thunder is offered at approximately \$40 to \$50 million. This disparity is not merely numerical; it reflects a fundamental divergence in defence philosophy.

The JF-17 represents not cheapness, but economy—an assertion that credible defence need not be prohibitively expensive. It is the philosophy of achieving greater capability with fewer resources, a principle that resonates powerfully with developing states seeking reliable yet sustainable defence solutions.

China's Role: Structural and Strategic Imperatives

As a joint endeavour between Pakistan and China, with components manufactured in both countries, Chinese participation in every export agreement is unavoidable. This involvement is essential not only for the protection of sensitive technologies, but also for maintaining diplomatic equilibrium and managing the responses of global powers.

China's role is neither ceremonial nor peripheral. It encompasses technical approvals, supply chain management, and technology control, ensuring that the strategic integrity of the programme remains intact. In this respect, Chinese participation constitutes a framework of technical, diplomatic, and strategic oversight rather than a mere contractual formality.

It is both natural and legitimate to ask whether Pakistan possesses the capacity to produce these aircraft in significant numbers within stipulated timelines. Yet such questions are not ordinarily debated in the open marketplace of opinion within defence-oriented states. At the level of policy, it is acknowledged that large-scale orders inevitably place production capacity under scrutiny. Nevertheless, this capacity is neither static nor improvised; it is a gradual and scalable system, capable of expansion in accordance with carefully assessed requirements. In the defence industry, production capability is not determined by factories alone, but by state resolve, long-term planning, and the discipline of time.

The response of the Minister for Defence Production was therefore both measured and revealing. This, he observed, is a matter of national defence, and national secrets must remain precisely that—secrets. By way of illustration, he emphasised that modern defence systems are not forged overnight; they demand patience, labour, and incremental development. Details relating to production capability, supply chains, and delivery timelines fall squarely within the domain of national security. Their public disclosure would not merely be imprudent, but contrary to established policy. This position reflects not evasion, but industrial realism tempered by state prudence.



Defence analysts consistently caution that agreements of this nature mature over years rather than months. Decisions driven by emotion or undue haste risk engendering long-term complications—ranging from supply-chain disruptions and technological bottlenecks to diplomatic pressure. Delays in delivery, interruptions in component availability, and external political leverage are foreseeable risks, and it is incumbent upon policymakers to formulate pre-emptive strategies to mitigate them. Wisdom and deliberation, rather than urgency, must therefore guide this process.

Given that critical components of the programme are sourced from China, Pakistan must refrain from entering into agreements that exceed its absorptive capacity or threaten to destabilise technological dependencies. This is a question of industrial sobriety, not political enthusiasm. Initial success in the global defence market demands nothing less than a robust, fail-safe supply-chain architecture capable of sustaining long-term commitments.

There is broad consensus among analysts that China occupies the position of senior partner within this project and will, quite naturally and necessarily, maintain close oversight of the sales process at every level. This entails a decisive role in final approvals, technology transfer, and export policy. Export decisions will proceed through bilateral consultation, with final authorisation resting on joint concurrence. Yet it must also be acknowledged that the success of these orders owes much—by the grace of God—to the demonstrated competence and resolve of the Pakistan Air Force and the armed forces as a whole, whose performance during the May conflict with India decisively validated the platform's credibility.

According to Anar Tangjen, Senior Fellow at the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), Pakistan may sell the aircraft, but control over the underlying technology will remain with China. The export of the JF-17 will thus operate within a joint framework in which Chinese primacy is an established fact. This arrangement serves to prevent the unauthorised diffusion of sensitive technologies.

Both China and Pakistan are acutely conscious of the risk that advanced technologies might reach Western powers through third-party intermediaries. It is for this reason that all agreements will remain under close Sino-Pakistani supervision. This concern forms part of the wider global contest over technological dominance, and accordingly, export policy will remain subject to stringent controls.

As the Minister for Defence Production aptly remarked, no state sells its weapons to its enemies. The JF-17 is not intended for universal sale; it is reserved for friendly states, and each decision is taken within a clearly defined geopolitical context. This is not exclusion, but statecraft—the recognition that no nation transfers the instruments of its defence to those who may one day wield them against it. Policy therefore dictates that the JF-17 be supplied solely to trusted allies and strategic partners, with geopolitical considerations occupying a central place in every agreement.

The details of the defence agreement concluded last year between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia remain classified. Negotiated at the highest levels of state, its confidentiality underscores both its sensitivity and its strategic weight.

International media have also alluded to a possible Turkish role, though official silence has been maintained. Turkey, alongside China, Saudi Arabia, and Azerbaijan, stands among Pakistan's partners with whom cooperation is neither transient nor transactional, but strategic and organic. Future joint ventures within this constellation remain a distinct possibility.

According to reports by Bloomberg, Turkey has expressed interest in drone production within Pakistan. While the Minister for Defence Production neither confirmed nor denied these reports, he did emphasise that Pakistan's private sector is already deeply engaged in UAV and drone technologies. This trend signals the decentralisation of defence production and the diffusion of technological capability—a quiet revolution unfolding beyond the glare of public spectacle.

In light of these considerations, policy recommendations must prioritise gradualism and realism in export agreements. Institutionalise coordination with China is imperative. Production capacity must

be expanded incrementally, and sales restricted strictly to reliable and friendly states. Technology control and information security must remain paramount.

The export of the JF-17 Thunder presents Pakistan with tangible economic, military, and diplomatic opportunities. Yet its success depends upon a cautious policy framework, close strategic alignment with China, and the setting of achievable objectives. Managed wisely, this programme has the potential to establish Pakistan as a credible participant in the global defence market.

Ultimately, the JF-17 Thunder is more than a combat aircraft. It stands as a metaphor for Pakistan's military sovereignty and self-respect, its industrial maturity, its diplomatic prudence, and its measured advance within global politics—particularly within the Islamic world. This is a flight sustained not merely by wings of steel, but by judgement, confidence, and historical awareness. It serves as a reminder that defence is not defined by weapons alone, but by foresight, partnership, and the patient test of time.

The debate surrounding the export of the JF-17 is, in truth, a debate about Pakistan's larger identity: whether it chooses to remain merely a purchaser in global politics, or to emerge as an informed, responsible, and autonomous defence partner. The aircraft may be an assemblage of metal and electronics, but the decisions surrounding it speak to national dignity, diplomatic balance, and future security.

This policy paper therefore concludes that the sale of the JF-17 represents both opportunity and trial. An opportunity to strengthen the defence economy, deepen strategic partnerships, and enhance Pakistan's industrial reputation—and a trial because any miscalculation may invite technological dependence, diplomatic pressure, or production constraints detrimental to national interest.

China's role as senior partner will remain central throughout this process, and Pakistan must harbour no illusions in this regard. Likewise, limiting exports to trusted allies is not only a matter of prudence but of state ethics.

In the final analysis, the success of the JF-17 Thunder will not be measured solely by the number of aircraft sold, but by whether Pakistan has upheld restraint, patience, realism, and strategic wisdom throughout the endeavour. Credible defence does not announce itself loudly, and enduring policy is that which withstands the judgement of time.

If the export of the JF-17 proceeds within this balanced policy framework, the programme may come to represent not merely a defence achievement, but a defining testament to Pakistan's strategic maturity.

Wednesday, February 4, 2026

The Wound That Awakens the Soul

The Soul in Exile

Among the deepest and most enduring states of the human condition, there exists one that resists complete articulation and admits no escape. Certain questions inhabit human life which the tongue cannot utter, yet which knock incessantly upon the chambers of the heart. An indefinable lack, a nameless melancholy, an inexplicable pull—persisting despite wealth, relationships, achievement, and comfort. One succeeds, forms bonds, laughs, advances through life; and yet, beneath it all, there remains a quiet but stubborn awareness that something has been lost, something left behind, something remembered by the soul with a restless ache.

Before one may comprehend the journey from this primal separation to spiritual seeking and the longing for reunion, it is necessary to understand the soul's passage into existence. Every human soul enters this world bearing an innate unease. This restlessness is the lingering ember of an ancient separation—a silent flame that warms the hidden recesses of the psyche. It reminds the soul, again and again, that its true homeland and its true Beloved lie elsewhere, and that its very purpose is to remain in a state of yearning for that return.

When a human being first opens his eyes in this world, he appears to be born into a complete and coherent order: parents, family, society, language, religion, civilisation. He is taught to recognise himself through these affiliations, to derive meaning within these boundaries, and to interpret joy and sorrow through their confines. Yet despite all these outward identities, there persists within the human interior a condition that no family can erase, no society can resolve, no learning can silence, no wealth can purchase away, and no power can conquer.

This inwardly lodged separation is, in truth, the consciousness of *firaq*—of primordial estrangement. It does not arise from a single incident, a particular loss, or a specific bereavement. Rather, it precedes them all, woven into human nature itself. The separations of this world—the death of a loved one, the loss of a beloved, exile from one's homeland—do not create this inner rupture; they merely awaken it. One may say that every worldly separation is but a reflection of that one great separation which the human soul has already endured, whether knowingly or unawares.

Thus, when a person loves and is then deprived of the beloved, the pain rarely confines itself to the proportions of that single relationship. The grief is disproportionate—excessive, overwhelming, at times far greater than the bond itself would seem to warrant. Here, the human being pauses in bewilderment: why does this sorrow cut so deep? The answer lies in this truth—that the pain is not of one relationship, but of separation from the Original Beloved, manifesting itself behind the veil of a single face, a single bond, a single memory.

It is a feeling that appears silent yet speaks unceasingly within; a lack that resides in the heart without any apparent cause; a quiet sadness that preserves its presence even amid the clamour of joy.

This, in essence, is the remembrance of the true homeland.

A homeland not fashioned of soil,
A homeland that was no territory upon the earth,

A home not built of brick or stone,
A closeness not bodily, but spiritual.

One who is the delight of the eyes, the coolness of the heart, the light of the face, and the support of life itself—

Who becomes shade beneath the burning sun,
A shore in a drowning sea,
A lamp in darkened paths, and the first light of the true dawn.

A bond akin to
The flower with its fragrance,
The instrument with its melody,
The verse with its poet,
The craftsman with his craft,
The bird with the sky.

One whose very thought steadies the heartbeat,
In whose presence anxiety dissolves into calm,
Whose companionship stands firm as a mountain,
Whose hand, once held, emboldens the feet to run without fear.
A bond that is rest and life alike;
Shade and direction;
Lamp and light, all at once.

...And then—

Suddenly, that hand slips away.

When such a bond is torn asunder without warning,

The glass of the heart shatters into shards,

Steps begin to falter,

Paths are swallowed by darkness,

Flowers wither,

And the heart descends into a deep sea of grief.

It is then that one learns, for the first time, that separation is not merely distance—it is an inner earthquake.

The greatest trial of love is not death,
But separation.

Death carries certainty.

Death possesses finality.

But separation is laced with waiting,

With longing,

With the torment of hope.

It binds the soul in an unending cycle of expectation and unease.

Sometimes one departs by descending into the dust,
 And sometimes one remains alive, yet is lost in the fog of distance.
 For love's true bond is not of the body,
 But of the heart—
 Like an invisible thread binding one heart to another,
 A thread that keeps love alive beyond time, beyond distance, and beyond death itself.
 This is the moment of *firaq*.

And *firaq* is the deepest wound of the human soul.
 The Qur'an reminds us that separation is no novelty of the human story; it was a trial even for the Prophets.
 Prophet Ya'qūb (Jacob) wept for his beloved son Yūsuf for forty years, until grief stole away his sight:
 وَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا أَسْفَىٰ عَلَىٰ يَوْسُفَ وَابْيَضَّتْ عَيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْحُزْنِ فَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ
 “And he turned away from them and said, ‘Alas, my sorrow for Joseph!’ And his eyes turned white from grief, yet he remained inwardly restrained.” (Sūrah Yūsuf, 12:84)

Likewise, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ endured the anguish of separation from Makkah—
 The city of his childhood memories,
 The companionship of Khadījah,
 And the sheltering affection of Abū Ṭālib.
 The pain he expressed at the moment of migration was not merely the sorrow of leaving a city, but the deeper grief of parting from memories, from sacred ties, and from a profound spiritual intimacy.

The Memory That Refuses to Fade

“O Makkah! How dearly beloved you are to me.
 Had my people not driven me out,
 I would never have chosen to dwell elsewhere.”
 These words were not merely an expression of affection for a city. They were the utterance of memory, belonging, and spiritual attachment.
 (Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān)

They stand as a lesson for every moment of human life: that even amid separation and deprivation, the hope of reunion and the longing for return never truly perish.

In the same vein stands the example of the mother of Mūsā (Moses), who placed her infant child—her very flesh and soul—into a basket and entrusted him to the river. This act remains one of the most profound illustrations of patience and trust, borne witness to by the Qur'an itself:
 وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ أُمِّ مُوسَىٰ أَنْ أَرْضِعِيهِ ۖ فَإِذَا خِفْتِ عَلَيْهِ فَأَلْقِيهِ فِي الْيَمِّ وَلَا تَخَافِي وَلَا تَحْزَنِي ۗ إِنَّا رَاوُوهُ إِلَيْكَ وَجَاعِلُوهُ مِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ
 “And We inspired the mother of Moses: ‘Suckle him; then, when you fear for him, cast him into the river, and do not fear nor grieve. Indeed, We shall return him to you and shall make him one of the Messengers.’” (Sūrah al-Qasas, 28:7)

The lives of the Prophets are, in truth, living embodiments of the longing for reunion. The mother of Moses did not place her child into the river in despair or shock; she did so in trust, sustained by hope and certainty of return. This episode stands as a sign that even after separation, yearning does not perish—rather, it gives birth to trust, perseverance, and the promise of reunion.

All these narratives point to a single truth: separation is not merely a psychological experience, but a profound spiritual mystery. Even Ādam and Ḥawwā' (Adam and Eve) were separated from one another for years, until Adam traversed the world on foot in search of his beloved.

Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī—poet of primordial separation—held that the root of all human restlessness lies in one reality alone: separation from the Source. His *Mathnawī* opens not with calm reflection, but with a cry—a lament born of estrangement. For Rūmī, this separation is the very foundation of human psychology. Every question we ask, every search we undertake, every restlessness we endure springs from the same truth: that the human being has been torn away from his origin.

When Rūmī was separated from his spiritual master, Shams of Tabrīz, the rupture shattered him so completely that he wandered the world in a state of ecstatic bewilderment. Yet it was this very separation that gave birth to the *Mathnawī*. Its opening lines are themselves a proclamation of *firaq*:

بشنوا زنی چون حکایت می کند

از جدایی هاشکایت می کند

*"Listen to the reed, how it tells a tale,
Complaining of separations."*

هر کسی کو دور ماند از اصل خویش

باز جوید روزگار وصل خویش

*"Whoever is cut off from his origin
Forever seeks the days of reunion."*

کز نستان تا مر ابریده اند

از نفیرم مردوزن نالیده اند

*"Since I was severed from the reed-bed,
Men and women have wept at my lament."*

This *reed-bed* is no mere metaphor. It signifies the Realm of Spirits—the original homeland. The lament of the reed is the voice of the soul, cut away from its source, separated from its true Beloved, cast into this world, and now crying out in yearning and pain for reunion. Rūmī teaches that if humanity wishes to understand its restlessness, it must first understand its separation; for the longing for reunion cannot arise without the consciousness of estrangement. The sound of the flute, he says, is the cry of the soul mourning its distance from its true homeland, its true Beloved—Allah, the Exalted.

The Qur'an draws our attention to this inner condition when it presents human creation not as a mere physical event, but as the continuation of a spiritual history. Man was not simply born into this world—he was sent. And the very notion of being sent bears witness to the fact that a separation occurred somewhere, at some time, before.

It is for this reason that the Qur'an repeatedly *reminds* humanity. A reminder presupposes prior knowledge—something once known, once seen, once experienced. Had the human soul never known its Lord, the very concept of remembrance would lose all meaning.

This is not merely a historical narrative; it is the spiritual foundation of human existence. Every soul recognised the Lordship of Allah, felt His closeness, and found tranquillity in that proximity. Thus, when man enters this world, he carries within his heart a thirst that no material thing can quench. That thirst is, in truth, the thirst for nearness.

The Realm of Spirits is our true homeland.

This world was never our first home.

We are travellers here—sojourners, strangers.

We come from a realm

Where there was neither hunger nor fear,

Neither grief nor desire,

Neither bond nor distance—

There was only One Being,

And the closeness to Him.



This longing stands at the centre of all human experience. Worldly relationships, attachments, and joys are but mirrors reflecting this deeper yearning. Though man seeks tranquillity in them, that tranquillity remains fleeting. True peace is found only in the moment of reunion with the Original Love.

The Qur'an repeatedly draws attention to this innate longing and renders it explicit through the Covenant of *Alast*:

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِنْ بَنِي آدَمَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَى أَنْفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُوا بَلَى شَهِدْنَا

"And when your Lord took from the children of Adam—from their loins—their descendants and made them testify concerning themselves, saying: 'Am I not your Lord?' They said: 'Yes, indeed, we bear witness.'" (Sūrah al-A'rāf, 7:172)

This is the covenant buried within our nature.

This is the memory that denies us complete rest.

No matter how obscured it becomes beneath the burdens of worldly life, it remains alive in some corner of the heart. This verse forms the foundation of humanity's inner quest. The soul remembers. The covenant made in pre-eternity continues to echo through every moment of life. From this remembrance springs longing—the longing that reconnects the soul to its origin and draws it away from the rusted attachments of the world toward a life of spiritual awakening.

The Sufi cry of Sulṭān Bāhū expresses this truth with striking simplicity:

"We are strangers; our homeland lies far away.

With every breath, the sorrow of separation grows."

This sorrow is not despair—it is the sorrow of remembrance. A remembrance that refuses to let the soul rest, and the very remembrance that ultimately returns man to his source. These words reflect the truth that man is a traveller in this world, perpetually drawn back toward his origin by spiritual longing. This cycle of yearning and reunion is the most fundamental experience of human life—it is what leads man toward knowledge, love, and gnosis.

The most powerful means of attaining this reunion is the remembrance of God. The Qur'an declares:

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ ۖ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ

"And when My servants ask you concerning Me, indeed I am near. I respond to the call of the caller when he calls upon Me." (Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:186)

When a human being immerses himself in the remembrance of his Lord with true longing, the sharpness of separation begins to soften, and the moments of reunion feel no longer distant, but near at hand.

This consciousness is reflected throughout the lives of the Prophets. The whitening of Ya'qūb's eyes from grief, the pain-laden farewell of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ at the moment of leaving Makkah, the restlessness of Ādam upon arriving in this world with the memory of Paradise still burning within him—all these are diverse manifestations of the same condition of *firaq*. Their sorrow was not worldly sorrow; it was a heightened spiritual awareness in which separation becomes not merely loss, but a trial of meaning and fidelity.

It is also worth reflecting that the Qur'an does not merely speak of separation; it simultaneously proclaims nearness. It offers separation its remedy by affirming proximity, and alongside the pain of distance, it announces the certainty of closeness.

The Qur'an expresses this intimacy in words of astonishing clarity:

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ وَنَعْلَمُ مَا تُوَسْوِسُ بِهِ نَفْسُهُ وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ

"Indeed, We created man, and We know what his soul whispers to him, and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein." (Sūrah Qaaf, 50:16)

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ likewise said:

"The servant is closest to his Lord while he is in prostration; therefore, increase your supplications." (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 482)

True reunion begins with the death of the ego. This nearness—closer than body and breath—is realised when the veils of the heart are lifted and the soul, freed from its limitations, encounters its Original Beloved. The true separation is not one of distance, but of heedlessness. The path to reunion passes through the mortification and purification of the self.

For this reason, the Sufis taught worship and remembrance as the way of return. Prostration, remembrance, and contemplation cleanse spiritual energy, weaken the impulses of the ego, and prepare the heart for reunion. Just as a tree draws life from roots firmly anchored in the earth and nourished by water, so the soul is sustained by remembrance and self-effacement.

We have seen that the condition of separation within the human being is itself the seed of longing—a seed that gives rise to spiritual growth, gnosis, and the pursuit of reunion. Separation, then, is neither a crime nor a calamity; it is the first awakening of the soul. As the first light of dawn dispels darkness, so the longing for reunion illuminates the hidden recesses of the spirit.

Let us now understand this longing in the context of lived experience—of spiritual discipline, inner purification, and the path of self-refinement—so that separation may lead the human being toward knowledge, love, and spiritual insight.

Although separation and longing incline human nature toward its spiritual destination, this inclination alone does not guarantee reunion. If, despite intense yearning, a person remains enslaved to worldly desires, arrogance, envy, and the obstinacy of the ego, longing becomes hollow. Hence the Sufis emphasised self-knowledge, purification of the heart, and the resolution of inner contradictions.

This process is known as *tazkiyat al-nafs*—the purification of the self. It grants the human being the capacity to recognise his true condition, his limitations, and the proper relationship with divine nearness. The Qur'an declares:

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ تَزَكَّى

"Indeed, successful is the one who purifies himself." (Sūrah al-A'lā, 87:14)

The aim of purification is not merely abstention from sin, but the removal of all habits, desires, and thoughts that keep the soul separated from its Original Beloved. For the Sufis, the culmination of longing is *fanā' fī'LLāh*—annihilation in God. This is the station at which the human being is freed from the constraints of selfhood and finds true subsistence in the Divine Reality alone.

Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, drawing upon the Qur'an, cites:

وَمَنْ كَانَ فِي هَذِهِ أَعْمَىٰ فَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ أَعْمَىٰ وَأَضَلُّ سَبِيلًا

"Whoever is blind in this world will be blind in the Hereafter and even further astray from the path." (Sūrah al-Isrā', 17:72)

This statement makes clear that without spiritual vision, one remains trapped in the sorrow of separation. Blindness of the heart arises from worldly veils, heedlessness, and forgetfulness. The removal of these veils lies in purification and annihilation in Allah.

Ibn 'Arabī teaches that when longing is joined with purification and self-effacement, the soul reaches a station where, after the cleansing of the heart, it is illumined by divine light. The veils fall away, and the human being senses the nearness of the Original Beloved. It is here that separation is transformed into reunion, and the many give way to the One.

Rūmī expresses this truth with characteristic intensity:

عاشقم باش و عاشق را عاشق کن

تا کی یابی جان را در وصل جاناں

*"Become love itself, and awaken love in another,
Only then shall the soul find union with the Beloved."*

In *fanā'*, a person relinquishes the confines of selfhood and offers every expression of the self to the truth of unity. At this station, every heartbeat, every thought, every sensation is absorbed into remembrance and presence.

The Sufis remind us that within the human soul there exists an emptiness that no worldly thing can fill. Ibn 'Arabī says:

"The soul's true rest lies at the place of its origin—the place where it once tasted the nearness of Allah."

This is the station for which the human being yearns by nature. Longing not only advances spiritual growth; it deepens ethics, thought, and love itself.

Thus, the Sufis say:

موتوا قبل أن تموتوا

"Die before you die."

This means the death of the ego, so that the soul may taste the nearness of its Lord. It teaches us that the real problem is not distance, but the loss of awareness. Humanity has not moved away from God; it has merely grown heedless of His nearness. This heedlessness turns separation into enduring sorrow, while awakening transforms separation into the beginning of the journey toward reunion.

This writing does not call to anything new. It seeks only to awaken an old, forgotten memory—the memory of the true homeland, the Original Beloved, and the primordial covenant made with our Creator. Whoever reads these words should not merely read them as text, but should read himself—look inward—because this is not the story of one individual, but of every soul restless to return to its source.

For we are all strangers here, and our destination is one.

The ache of return has unsettled us all.

We once beheld our Beloved.

We once made a promise.

Then we were separated.

Since then, this world has been the land of separation.

Every love, every tear, every sense of lack

Is a reminder of that one great estrangement.

And every sincere soul ultimately yearns to return to that Beloved—

For there lies the true homeland,

And there alone, true rest.

When this awareness gradually becomes longing, and longing leads the human being onto the path that begins in separation and ends in reunion, the soul grows restless for its real home. For without separation, reunion would never be known; without estrangement, its value would never be understood.

This writing is an attempt to awaken that awareness. For until a person understands why he is restless, from what he has been separated, and what his soul truly seeks, there can be no sweetness in worship, no fervour in supplication, and no delight in remembrance.

This is the memory of the true homeland, the Original Beloved, and the eternal covenant we once made. Let the reader not merely read these words but read himself—because this is the story of every soul longing to return to its origin.

For we are all strangers,

And our destination is one.

Saturday, February 7, 2026

Where Does Pakistan Stand?

Power Has Changed

Mirrors of Power: Pakistan and the Changing Geometry of Global Politics

In international politics, there are moments that transcend the status of mere events. They become mirrors—held up before nations—reflecting their choices, their priorities, and their errors, however bitter that reflection may be. Some developments on the global stage are not simply items of news; they are moments of reckoning, demanding reflection rather than reaction.

The shifting balance of power across the Middle East, South Asia, and the wider constellation of global powers presents Pakistan with precisely such a mirror. Again and again, it confronts us with the question we have long sought to evade: *are we standing on the right side of history—or merely standing still while the world moves on?*

The United Arab Emirates' accelerating tilt towards India; the quiet yet deepening tension between Saudi Arabia and the UAE; the steady erosion of Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan—these are not isolated developments. Consider Afghanistan: a country upon which Pakistan expended decades of economic resources, security commitments, diplomatic capital, and immeasurable human sacrifice. Despite these investments, Pakistan has not only lost influence there, but now finds the same Afghanistan drawing closer to India, emerging as a platform through which New Delhi seeks to weaken Pakistan's regional position.

This is not an anomaly; it is a pattern. The same mindset has shaped Pakistan's approach to the Gulf—emotional attachment in place of strategic clarity, decisions driven by short-term necessity rather than long-term economic logic, and a foreign policy too often divorced from economic reality. The consequences are now plain to see. These developments are not separate failures, but different expressions of a single strategic misjudgments—chapters of the same unfinished and troubling story.

This essay is an attempt to read that story with sobriety rather than sentiment. Through the prism of shifting Gulf politics, Saudi-UAE divergences, and the growing proximity between the UAE and India, it gestures towards a larger and more unsettling question. This is not merely about Gulf diplomacy, or Emirati-Indian relations, or even the future of Saudi leadership. It is about a deeper crisis that has seeped into Pakistan's foreign policy, economic direction, and state decision-making apparatus.

The question, therefore, is not why the world is changing. The real question is why Pakistan has been left behind. Have we demonstrated the seriousness required to adapt? Have we undertaken an honest reckoning with our failures—holding decision-makers accountable and learning from costly mistakes? If not, why not? Is Pakistan prepared to ground its foreign policy in realism, or will it continue to mortgage its future in an attempt to salvage the present with the instruments of a fading past?

In international politics, some headlines are not headlines at all—they are mirrors. Mirrors in which nations glimpse their true face, whether pleasing or painful. The sudden, brief, yet extraordinary visit of UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed to India was one such moment. Lasting little more than

an hour and forty-five minutes, the visit was not an act of diplomatic courtesy but the public unveiling of strategic choices made over years—choices whose reverberations are being felt from New Delhi to Riyadh, Islamabad to Washington.

The expansion of UAE–India defence cooperation; the elevation of bilateral trade from \$100 billion to \$200 billion; and announcements of investment across energy, space research, artificial intelligence, nuclear reactors, and infrastructure were not reactive gestures. They were the product of a deliberate, long-term strategy. The pertinent question, therefore, is not why the UAE moved closer to India. The real question is where Pakistan stands in this evolving picture—and what, meanwhile, is changing within the Gulf itself.

If Gulf politics can be distilled into a single sentence, few would be more accurate than this: *in the Gulf, friendships are not permanent; interests are*. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates appear, at first glance, as pillars of the same tent—bound by shared religious identity, oil-based economies, alignment with the United States, common regional security narratives, and a professed commitment to stability. Yet beneath this surface harmony lies a far more complex reality.

Below the façade of unity runs a fault line of disagreement that has deepened with time. Behind closed doors—and increasingly in public—the two states are separated by differences that are not temporary but structural: questions of power, leadership, economic direction, and global alignment. These divergences have moved beyond diplomatic murmurs and private consultations. They now shape economic policy, military strategy, regional leadership ambitions, global alliances, and even the balance of power in South Asia.

For this reason, their consequences will not remain confined to Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. They will extend across the Middle East, South Asia, and the wider international system.

Once again, if Gulf politics is to be summarised in a single line, it is this: interests endure where friendships do not. Saudi Arabia and the UAE may appear as steadfast pillars of the same Gulf order, yet the gulf between them grows wider by the day. Their tensions—economic, military, and geopolitical—are no longer hidden. They are structural rather than emotional, and their effects will shape regional politics for years to come.

Saudi Arabia has long viewed itself as the natural leader of the Gulf world—a claim grounded not merely in wealth or geography, but in history, demography, and religious authority. Custodianship of the Two Holy Mosques, a central place in the Muslim world, decades of Arab leadership, and a longstanding strategic partnership with the United States all form the architecture of Saudi self-perception.

The United Arab Emirates, by contrast, presents an entirely different model. Its legitimacy does not rest on religious authority but on modern economics: global investment, technology, logistics, financial services, smart governance, and integration into the arteries of global capital.

Mohammed bin Salman and Mohammed bin Zayed are both decisive, ambitious leaders with aspirations that extend beyond the regional to the global. History teaches us that two powerful and

autonomous leaderships rarely coexist indefinitely within the same region without friction—whether expressed through open confrontation or silent rivalry. It is here, at this juncture, that the roots of Saudi–UAE divergence lie. And it is this rivalry that increasingly defines the trajectory of Gulf politics today.

Economics as Destiny: The Saudi Emirati Divergence and Pakistan's Diminishing Space

Nowhere have Saudi Emirati differences become more visible—or more consequential—than in the economic sphere. Saudi Arabia's *Vision 2030* is nothing short of a revolutionary project: an ambitious attempt to loosen the kingdom's historic dependence on oil and recast Riyadh as a regional commercial hub. Foreign corporations are being compelled, through regulation and incentive alike, to relocate their regional headquarters to the Saudi capital. Billions of dollars are being poured into mega-projects such as NEOM, the Red Sea initiative, and Qiddiya, all designed to reposition Saudi Arabia as the economic centre of the Middle East.

Yet this strategy carries an unmistakable implication. By seeking to attract capital, talent, and corporate headquarters, Riyadh is mounting a direct—if unspoken—challenge to the Dubai model painstakingly constructed by the United Arab Emirates over decades. What Saudi Arabia presents as national transformation is perceived in Abu Dhabi as an existential economic threat.

The UAE, after all, has already established Dubai and Abu Dhabi as global financial and commercial hubs. It dominates logistics, aviation, and trade, and offers one of the most open and flexible business environments in the region. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that disputes between the two countries have surfaced openly within OPEC+, over oil production quotas, commercial privileges, and the flow of investment. This is no mere competition over markets; it is a struggle for regional economic primacy and strategic influence.

The war in Yemen was the first arena in which these differences played out in practical terms. Saudi Arabia and the UAE entered the conflict as partners, but over time their objectives diverged sharply. Riyadh sought a unified Yemeni state and the decisive defeat of the Houthis. Abu Dhabi, by contrast, focused on southern Yemen—its ports, maritime routes, and coastal access—strengthening local allies to secure long-term commercial and strategic footholds.

Unable to exit the conflict simultaneously, the UAE gradually scaled back its military role, while Saudi Arabia increasingly found itself carrying the burden alone. It was at this juncture that a crisis of trust took root, and long-standing bonds of partnership began to fracture.

A similar divergence is evident in attitudes towards the Muslim Brotherhood and political Islam—differences that are not merely geopolitical or economic, but profoundly ideological. The UAE regards the Muslim Brotherhood as an existential threat to its state structure and internal security, which explains its uncompromising positions in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia. Saudi Arabia's stance, by contrast, has shifted with circumstance—at times rigid, at others conciliatory—marked by caution, tactical flexibility, and strategic ambiguity. This ideological inconsistency has only widened the intellectual and strategic distance between the two capitals.

Iran presents yet another point of divergence. For decades, Saudi Arabia maintained a hardline

posture towards Tehran. The UAE, however, has in recent years pursued a path of quiet accommodation—reopening channels of trade, diplomacy, and security dialogue. In parallel, Abu Dhabi's decision to normalise relations with Israel through the Abraham Accords not only opened a new regional corridor but also positioned the UAE as Washington's most dependable Gulf ally.

Saudi Arabia, constrained by domestic religious sensitivities and its historic self-image within the Muslim world, has thus far proceeded with caution. The UAE's willingness to move decisively ahead sent Riyadh a message that was silent yet unmistakable. This divergence lies at the heart of the quiet tension between the two states and reveals a fundamental disagreement over the very meaning of Gulf security. It is within this context that the UAE's growing tilt towards India becomes intelligible.



Superficially, UAE–India relations are often described in terms of defence cooperation. In reality, they constitute a comprehensive economic partnership. Long-term gas supply agreements, multi-billion-dollar energy investments, infrastructure development, agricultural trade, artificial intelligence, space industries, and nuclear technology together signal a clear strategic judgement: the UAE views India as a pillar of the future. This choice is not merely an endorsement of India; it is also an indirect message—addressed to both Riyadh and Islamabad.

Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed's brief yet extraordinary visit to India was not ceremonial diplomacy. Whether in defence agreements or the expansion of trade from \$100 billion to \$200 billion, the central theme was not military alignment but economic destiny. The UAE has selected India as its future market, its secure investment environment, and its technological partner. Pakistan, by contrast, has been left trailing in this race.

Within this tableau, Pakistan's position is particularly revealing. When the UAE President visited Pakistan, he went not to the civilian capital but to the military cantonment. No major trade agreement followed; no significant investment announcement was made. This was no coincidence. It was a quiet diplomatic signal that the relationship with Pakistan is now framed largely in security terms, not economic partnership.

Pakistan continues to offer defence services, military training, and security cooperation to Gulf states. Yet in return, exports do not rise, investment remains limited, and industry, technology, and long-term trade fail to materialise. The relationship has become dangerously one-sided. Here, Pakistan emerges as a silent yet significant variable. Saudi Arabia continues to view Pakistan as a defensive pillar and strategic guarantor, while the UAE's strategic gravity shifts steadily towards India. This divergence is likely to bind Gulf politics ever more tightly to South Asia's power equations.

An unavoidable question thus arises: has the UAE chosen India in part to balance Saudi influence? Defence cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan is hardly new, but recent agreements have

deepened it further. Pakistan remains the only Muslim nuclear power—a reality that renders it a sensitive factor in Gulf calculations. Saudi Emirati disagreements over Yemen, political Islam, and leadership have compelled Abu Dhabi to seek alternative strategic pathways. Proximity to India is one such pathway.

To ignore the United States in this entire configuration would be an act of self-deception. Washington regards India as a central counterweight to China, and the UAE is among America's closest regional allies. Normalisation with Israel and participation in initiatives such as the Gaza peace framework form part of the same strategic logic. The UAE's tilt towards India thus aligns closely with American priorities.

An undeclared triad—comprising the United States, Israel, and India—now stands arrayed against the China–Russia bloc. Pakistan, as China's close partner, the hub of CPEC, and a country cultivating closer ties with Moscow, naturally finds itself under pressure. Yet a harsh truth must be acknowledged: external pressure is effective only when internal weaknesses already exist.

During last year's Pakistan–India crisis in May, Pakistan's military capabilities were widely acknowledged at the international level. But military strength is no substitute for economic attraction. The world no longer asks who can fight better; it asks who can safeguard capital, deliver long-term returns, and integrate into global supply chains. In this arena, Pakistan remains behind.

Between Warning and Reckoning: Pakistan at the Crossroads of Power

It may sound emotive to say so, yet the reality is difficult to escape: the undeclared alignment of the United States, Israel, and India has little interest in seeing Pakistan economically resilient, for economic weakness constrains strategic autonomy. A financially dependent state is rarely permitted an independent foreign policy. Yet external pressure is effective only where internal frailty already exists.

Here lies the central crisis of Pakistan's foreign policy: in its effort to rescue the present, it repeatedly sacrifices the future. Debt, bailouts, and short-term relief have become its organising principles, while the patient construction of economic power has been consistently neglected. This, more than any conspiracy, marks the fundamental difference between India and Pakistan.

Even today, Pakistan continues to provide defence services to Gulf states. Yet in return there is no meaningful flow of investment, no industrial integration, no technological partnership. The relationship has drifted into a dangerously one-sided arrangement. If Pakistan genuinely seeks an effective and dignified regional role, it must anchor its foreign policy firmly in economic logic.

Strategic alignment with Russia and China—and potentially with Turkey and Iran—must extend beyond defence and diplomacy to encompass long-term economic and institutional cooperation. Above all, Pakistan must abandon the habit of blind alignment with any single Gulf camp and adopt a policy of balance.

The growing tension between Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the UAE–India partnership, and Pakistan's diminishing diplomatic leverage are not separate stories; they are chapters of the same narrative.

The Saudi Emirati rift is not an accident of personalities, but the outcome of a new distribution of power. The lesson is stark: the world has changed and so has the currency of power. Global politics today is not driven by sentiment, historical services, or emotional loyalty, but by economics, strategy, and sustained decision-making. If this lesson is not learned now, such agreements will become routine—and Pakistan will find itself endlessly repeating the same question: *why does this keep happening to us?*

For Pakistan, this moment is not a humiliation; it is a warning. Either it restructures its foreign policy around trade, economic partnerships, and strategic investment, or it will remain a spectator in a changing world—asking questions while others write answers. The world does not move on curses or grievances, but on contracts, capital, and coherence. Nations do not advance by asking questions alone, but by preparing credible answers. This is the test before Pakistan today.

Perhaps the most painful aspect of the present moment is that Pakistan finds itself rich in complaints but poor in effective responses. The loss of influence in Afghanistan, India's growing presence there, the Gulf states' perception of Pakistan as merely a security partner, and the closure of doors to capital, trade, and technology—these are not the results of a single external plot. They are the cumulative outcome of internal weaknesses, flawed priorities, and chronic inconsistency in policy.

It has therefore become unavoidable to pose a direct question to the country's ruling elite, state decision-makers, and centres of policy formulation: do we truly believe that states are run on emotion, sacrifice, and gratitude for past services? Or are we prepared to accept the reality that today's world recognises only economic strength, institutional stability, and strategic continuity?

The time has come for Pakistan to speak honestly to itself. The loss of Afghanistan was not the failure of a single government or a single episode, but the result of decades of misguided policies, institutional fragility, and opaque decision-making. If the same model is replicated in relations with the Gulf, the cost will not merely be diplomatic; it will be economic and strategic.

The question can no longer be deferred: has Pakistan's bureaucracy lost the autonomy required to formulate policy in the national interest? Or are there unseen forces that have effectively taken the state hostage—exercising control in such a way that honest, competent, professional, and principled officers are punished for their integrity, reduced to ceremonial irrelevance, as I have discussed in detail in an earlier essay? If policy is shaped by those whose primary loyalty lies not with the national interest but with specific mafias, pressure groups, or short-term gains, then policies will inevitably serve narrow interests. The result, as history repeatedly demonstrates, is a return to the brink of economic collapse.

This, then, is the moment for Pakistan to move beyond an emotional foreign policy towards an economic one. Relations with the Gulf must no longer be confined to defence and security, but integrated with trade, industry, investment, and technology. Instead of blind alignment, Pakistan must prioritise balance, sovereignty, and institutional strength. The bureaucracy must be freed from political and invisible pressures and entrusted with genuine decision-making authority. Otherwise, these same unseen forces will once again entangle the country in agreements and policies whose cost will be borne by the entire nation.

The world no longer listens to stories of sacrifice; it looks for capital, stability, and credibility. Military capability matters, but without economic power it cannot translate into diplomatic influence. If Pakistan truly seeks a dignified role in the region, it must connect its Gulf relationships to trade, industry, technology, and investment—not limit them to security alone. Equally unavoidable is the need for a balanced strategic alignment with Russia, China, Turkey, and Iran, grounded in long-term interests rather than episodic necessity.

This essay is not directed against any adversary; it is an invitation to internal accountability. It is not an indictment of individuals or institutions, but a warning. The world has changed; the measure of power has changed with it. If Pakistan fails to recalibrate its priorities now, agreements like the UAE–India partnership will become commonplace, and Pakistan will appear increasingly as a secondary actor in narratives written by others.

Nations do not advance by endlessly asking why; they advance by preparing answers. States are not built on declarations, but on decisions. And for Pakistan today, delay in decision-making has become the gravest danger of all.

Friday, February 13, 2026

The Board of Peace: Justice or Dominion?

A New Trial for the International Order

Mr. President of the Session,

Distinguished Delegates, Esteemed Scholars, and Honoured Representatives of the International Community,

I rise before this international forum to address a subject that stands at the crossroads of peace, power, morality, and history—a subject that tests all four simultaneously. What I submit today is not an argument confined to one nation, one region, or one institution; it is, rather, a meditation on the very soul of the global order itself. I shall present my observations with clarity, coherence, and a sense of historical continuity, enumerated not to inflame emotion, but to advance understanding—so that this discussion may proceed on the firm ground of reason rather than the shifting sands of sentiment.

Throughout the long chronicle of human history, peace has remained a sacred aspiration, a dream cherished by civilisation. Yet the realisation of that dream has too often been distorted by the hand of power. From the Roman Empire to the modern United Nations, every age has witnessed the creation of institutions established in the name of peace—institutions that arrived professing to salve the wounds of humanity, but which, in time, transformed into symbols of dominance, control, and vested interest.

Ladies and gentlemen of discernment,

There are moments in the life of nations that do not merely belong to the present but decisively shape the future. These are the hours when history arrests its ordinary flow and poses its most searching question: *Did you choose power, or did you choose justice?* Today, we stand before such a delicate and consequential moment. Under the banner of “peace,” a new global institution—the *Board of Peace*—has come into being, entrusted with overseeing a ceasefire in Gaza, guiding reconstruction, and supervising an interim administration. Yet from its very inception, its contours have been shrouded in questions.

This is not merely the creation of an administrative body; it is an attempt to recalibrate the direction of global politics itself. It is an experiment in which peace is weighed upon the scales of power. And the world now stands at a junction of hesitation, hope, and apprehension.

The institution announced by President Donald Trump—ostensibly to render permanent the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas and to oversee the reconstruction of Gaza—presents itself as a herald of peace, yet in substance reveals a new narrative of power. In the President’s own words, the Board of Peace is tasked with guaranteeing the ceasefire and supervising an interim governance structure in Gaza. Its birth, however, coincides with an era in which moral principle has receded into the background, while strategic interest occupies the foreground of global politics.

The invitation extended to India to join this Board is not a mere diplomatic courtesy; it is a calculated move in the grand chessboard of international power, where each piece is compelled to bear a

burden heavier than its own weight.

According to President Trump, the Board's mandate extends beyond monitoring a ceasefire to sponsoring an interim administration in Gaza. Yet the fundamental question remains: *Can peace truly emerge from the barrel of a gun?* And can a peace that rests upon the discretion of a powerful leader ever prove enduring? Students of history know well that whenever a dominant power has proclaimed an "interim order" in a weaker land, authority has lurked behind the façade of order, and control behind the rhetoric of supervision. Global history teaches us, with relentless consistency, that not every proclamation of peace culminates in peace.

It is precisely this claim—to oversee not only a ceasefire but also an interim government in Palestinian territory—that elevates the Board of Peace from a technical arrangement to a profoundly political and historical question.

Gaza, already reduced to a symbol of siege, bombardment, and human tragedy, now stands on the brink of becoming the site of yet another global experiment. The question is not whether reconstruction is necessary—of that there can be no doubt. The question is: *under whose supervision, upon what terms, and in whose ultimate interest?*

Mr. President,

The Board announced by President Donald Trump—framed as an instrument to stabilise Gaza and solidify the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas—appears, on the surface, as a messenger of humanity. Yet beneath this veneer flows the same ancient thirst for authority that has marked every imperial age in history. It is therefore not an idle question to ask: *Is peace something that the powerful bestow? Or is it a trust that cannot survive without justice?*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was among the leaders invited to join this Board, and this invitation was no ceremonial gesture. It was an attempt to place upon India—one of the world's most populous nations—a share of responsibility in a moment of global consequence. To invite India to the Board of Peace was not merely an act of diplomatic etiquette; it was the imposition of a significant political test.

Yet when the Board of Peace was formally inaugurated in Davos, India's absence spoke louder than attendance ever could. Was this silence a calculated diplomatic strategy, or an expression of intellectual hesitation? That absence has itself assumed the character of a diplomatic statement. India, which presents itself as an emerging global power, appeared reluctant at this decisive juncture to commit itself. Perhaps, within the corridors of New Delhi, a single question continues to echo: *Is this Board a candle of peace—or merely a lantern illuminating American interests?*

When India's absence at Davos became a statement in its own right, that silence contained many voices: one speaking of principles, another of interests, and a third of the fear that even the decision *not* to decide might prove costly. Such symbolic hesitation betrays a deeper uncertainty of national conscience. Prime Minister Modi's name was on the invitation, yet India's absence at the Board's inauguration spoke volumes without uttering a word. It may well reflect the recognition that not every invitation is an honour, and not every platform is neutral.

Gaza—already reduced to an emblem of one of the longest sieges in modern history, of devastation without precedent, and of human suffering etched into the conscience of our age—is now being transformed into a laboratory for yet another global experiment. Much is said of reconstruction, yet it remains unclear whether what is proposed is the rebuilding of brick and mortar, or the reconstruction of authority itself. And should an interim government come into being, will it be a true expression of popular will, or merely an administrative shadow operating under the watchful gaze of global powers?

The participation of countries such as Pakistan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates in the Board of Peace may, on the one hand, be read as a sign of hope—that perhaps this platform might mitigate, however modestly, the scale of human tragedy. Yet on the other hand, it exposes a harsher truth of international politics: that participation is often less a matter of choice than of survival. Their inclusion also underscores a deeper reality—that in global affairs, principles frequently yield to geography and economics. According to President Trump, fifty-nine countries affixed their signatures; yet only nineteen appeared at the ceremony itself. This disparity lays bare an uncomfortable fact: many signatures were penned under fear, pressure, or political expediency. It is testimony to the truth that many nations joined on paper, but not in conviction. In international politics, written consent and genuine participation are rarely synonymous.

When President Trump declared on this occasion, *“You are the most powerful people in the world,”* he was, in effect, articulating a new global philosophy. This was no casual compliment; it was a creed. A new lexicon of power—one in which morality, law, and justice are relegated to the margins, and influence alone becomes the measure of worth. A form of power unmoored from ethics and untethered from law, rooted instead in proximity and loyalty. Such power weakens institutions while aggrandising individuals. This statement was not praise; it was a redefinition—power born not of legitimacy, but of leverage; power vested not in structures, but in personalities.

To place Azerbaijan, Paraguay, and Hungary in a single breath among “the world’s most powerful people” is to reveal a profound transformation: power is no longer the reward of principle, but the consequence of alignment. Even smaller states now seek shelter beneath the shadows of greater powers, mistaking proximity for security.

In India today, a serious debate is underway as to whether the country should join the Board of Peace. Several former diplomats oppose participation on the grounds that the Board stands in contradiction to United Nations Security Council Resolution 2803, which already provides a clear, time-bound, and accountable framework for an interim administration in Gaza. The resolution’s fixed duration, reporting obligations, and provisional character are designed precisely to prevent such arrangements from hardening into permanent global models. The Board of Peace, by contrast, offers no defined term, no transparent mechanism of accountability.

Unlike the UN framework, the Board of Peace is of indefinite duration. It is not directly answerable to the Security Council, and its authority is concentrated around a single individual. This distinction is not merely administrative; it is philosophical. It marks the difference between the supremacy of law and the ascendancy of personal power.

India's silence, therefore, is neither a full rejection nor an unequivocal acceptance. It reflects a deeper struggle—one in which a Hindutva-influenced power elite weighs whether participation would mean the sacrifice of principle, or abstention the loss of influence. This is the perennial dilemma that history sets before nations, and by which their stature is ultimately measured. Yet the language of India's silence is unmistakably one of hesitation.

The participation of Pakistan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates further illustrates that decisions in global politics are rarely driven by principle alone. Some states perceived the Board as a source of hope; others accepted it under duress; still others complied to satisfy the demands of political expediency.

Under the Security Council resolution, the interim arrangement is mandated to expire on 31 December 2027 and is required to submit reports every six months. The Board of Peace, by contrast, is bound by no temporal limits, nor does its mandate appear confined to Gaza alone. It is here that concern takes root. History bears solemn witness that institutions founded without an expiry date tend, sooner or later, to become fortresses of power. The Board's open-ended nature transforms it into an experiment whose outcome defies prediction.

In its structure, the Board resembles less an organ of the United Nations than a private club—one in which membership, finances, and influence all emanate from a single centre. A body without a defined lifespan conveys not partnership, but proprietorship. Salaries, expenditures, and permanent membership are all tethered to President Trump's discretion. This arrangement confers extraordinary leverage upon the American presidency and has become a source of deep unease across the world.

Supporters among Indian diplomats argue that India's participation would amplify the concerns of the Global South. Critics, however, pose a sharper question: if the locus of decision-making lies in Washington, how far will Delhi's voice truly carry? There is a palpable fear that India's presence may amount to little more than a softened endorsement of the Israeli position.

The extraordinary powers vested in President Trump under the Board's charter—veto, appointment, dismissal, dissolution, and succession—are incompatible with any democratic or genuinely multilateral conception of governance. These powers strengthen not the institution, but the individual. The Chairman appears not as a steward, but as a sovereign—an embodiment of authority unchecked and unaccountable.

Certain officials within the United Nations have already intimated that the model embodied by the Board of Peace could be extended to other conflicts. It is for this reason that many observers now regard it not merely as an auxiliary mechanism, but as a potential alternative to the United Nations itself—a notion that poses a grave and unsettling question for international order.

The suggestion that this model might be replicated elsewhere strengthens the fear that the Board of Peace is laying the foundations of a parallel global system. President Trump's own pronouncements have only deepened these suspicions, casting a longer shadow over the Board's true purpose.

The composition of its executive board is itself revealing: personal friends of President Trump, a former British Prime Minister, his son-in-law, and representatives of the American corporate world. This roster speaks less of impartiality than of proximity. It delineates a widening circle of loyalty orbiting around a single individual, rather than an institution anchored in neutrality.

For all its shortcomings, the United Nations remains a custodian of a fundamental principle: that the world ought to be governed not by power alone, but by law. Security Council Resolution 2803—establishing a clearly defined, time-bound, and accountable framework for interim governance in Gaza—stands as an expression of that principle. Supporters of the Board among Indian diplomats argue that it does not challenge the United Nations, citing its limited representation. They liken it to a forum parallel to the G20. Yet history warns us that today's limited forums often evolve into tomorrow's decisive centres of authority.

Pakistan's stated position appears straightforward: ceasefire, humanitarian assistance, and reconstruction. Yet the ambiguity embedded in the Board's charter—particularly regarding the duration of membership and the scope of financial authority—raises a more troubling question: is this participation temporary, or does it entail long-term entanglement? For India, the implications are even more acute. Should the Board of Peace one day turn its gaze towards disputes such as Kashmir, Delhi may find it far more difficult to remain outside this forum.

The Board of Peace is neither bound by the Security Council resolution nor accountable to any clearly defined global authority. It is precisely for this reason that it is increasingly perceived as either an alternative to the United Nations or, at the very least, a challenge to its mandate. Proponents contend that India's participation would amplify the concerns of the Global South.

Critics counter that when the axis of decision-making rests with a dominant power, the presence of others risks becoming merely ornamental—a fear that looms particularly large in India's case. The emergence of the Board must also be understood against a broader backdrop: an America that has declared NATO ineffective, withdrawn from dozens of United Nations bodies, and reshaped its foreign policy around power, pressure, and transactional bargaining. Taken together, these developments point towards an imperial vision in which peace is subordinated to authority.

Ladies and gentlemen,

History teaches us with unforgiving clarity that institutions founded without limits and without accountability sooner or later harden into citadels of power. The Board of Peace, by virtue of its indefinite mandate, risks becoming an instrument not of peace, but of enduring influence. As one former diplomat has observed, given that the Board's Chairman is President Trump himself, it is difficult to expect impartial justice from a political style rooted in transaction and deal-making. It remains equally unclear whether all member states will enjoy equal standing within this framework. To expect justice from a system shaped by such transactional instincts, another senior diplomat



remarked, is an exercise in naïveté. Membership in a body whose powers are ill-defined and whose future is uncertain could prove perilous for India.

It is argued that India's presence would strengthen the voice of the Global South. Yet the question persists: will that voice truly be heard? Critics warn that India may, in practice, become a tacit advocate of the Israeli position—thereby casting doubt on its neutrality. This concern is not merely political, but moral, for the Palestinian question is not solely a matter of geography; it is a question of justice. Even if India chooses not to join the Board, it will not be insulated from its consequences. Stability in West Asia is indispensable to India's energy security, its expatriate workforce, and its trade routes.

The Board of Peace has come into being at a moment when the United States is distancing itself from the United Nations and withdrawing from multiple UN institutions. This body has the potential to reinforce a unipolar global order—at odds with India's professed advocacy of multipolarity, even as, behind closed doors, it continues to align its policies with American interests.

Indian media has raised a fundamental question: will member states be able to challenge the decisions of the Board's Chairman, or will this institution operate as a model driven by invitation, capital, and personal influence? If not, the Board risks becoming nothing more than a reflection of one individual's will. The powers granted to President Trump under the Board's charter—veto, appointment, dismissal, dissolution, and succession—are incompatible with any democratic conception of governance. These powers centralise authority not in the institution, but in the individual.

They place Chairman Trump in a position of near-absolute authority, capable of enforcing his will without meaningful restraint.

The individuals comprising the Board's executive leadership—the US Secretary of State, the President's special envoy, a former British Prime Minister, the President's son-in-law, and representatives of American corporate interests—are either American citizens or figures closely associated with President Trump. Their collective background attests to an institution built more on proximity than on merit. It is a circle in which decisions are made not for the public good, but for the perpetuation of power. Such an arrangement raises profound questions about impartiality.

Pakistan has linked its participation in the Board of Peace to the objectives of ceasefire, humanitarian relief, and the reconstruction of Gaza. This intention is understandable. Yet the ambiguity surrounding the duration of membership and the financial terms has generated serious concern. The charter's vagueness invites a fundamental question: can good faith survive within an opaque system? Many states appear to have accepted membership either as recognition of their relevance or under American pressure. According to foreign policy experts, the Board's charter fails to clarify the obligations of member states, who will interpret those obligations, and what recourse exists in the event of disagreement.

The participation of the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Turkey may well intensify pressure upon India; yet history teaches us that decisions extracted under duress rarely endure.

India's gravest concern lies in the possibility that, should the Board of Peace one day extend its remit to disputes such as Kashmir, its long-standing doctrine of rejecting third-party intervention would be imperilled.

This Board has emerged at a moment when the United States is openly questioning NATO, withdrawing from United Nations institutions, and recasting foreign policy as a matter of transaction rather than principle—hallmarks of an unmistakably imperial temperament. As *The Hindu*, one of India's most respected newspapers, has observed, neither principle nor prudence permits a decision of such magnitude to be taken in haste. India, it argues, must not decide out of fear, nor out of the anxiety of displeasing a powerful ally.

Meanwhile, according to leaked versions of the charter, subsequent amendments have gone so far as to remove any explicit reference to Gaza, while proposing the Board's extension to other conflicts—a development that further entrenches the perception of this body as a substitute for the United Nations.

Pakistan's participation in the Board sends a clear signal to India, particularly if disputes such as Kashmir are ever brought within its purview—more so in light of President Trump's previously expressed desire to mediate on Kashmir. Here, the question is no longer one of peace, but of compliance. A peace that strips away the freedom to question is not peace at all; it is silence.

Ladies and gentlemen,

President Trump's withdrawal from NATO and multiple UN institutions has introduced a new volatility into the global system. He has already declared NATO and numerous UN bodies ineffective, and the United States has withdrawn from more than sixty international organisations. Nations are judged by the choices they make, and institutions by the ends they serve. The Board of Peace, too, will one day stand before the tribunal of history, where it will be asked a single, unforgiving question: *Did you strengthen peace—or did you entrench power?*

This broader context renders the very nature of the Board acutely sensitive. President Trump offered no public explanation for the withdrawal of Canada's invitation, yet it is a matter of record that Mark Carney had, only days earlier, criticised the US-led global order. That criticism, it appears, was unwelcome. The cancellation of Carney's invitation may well have been a response to his remarks in Davos. It is precisely such moments that future generations will scrutinise when they ask us: *When peace was being subordinated to power, where did you stand?*

The exclusion of Mark Carney is emblematic of a deeper disposition within the Board of Peace: an apparent intolerance of dissent. It reveals the institution's temperament—participation without obedience is not an option. This is a body that demands unanimity of voice, not diversity of thought. The world is thus confronted with a choice: the politics of principle, or the politics of expediency. The two cannot travel on the same road.

Under the charter, President Trump is vested with powers to veto decisions, appoint and dismiss members, dissolve the Board, and even designate his successor—authorities extraordinary in any multinational setting and perilous in a democratic context. Where justice is absent, peace is merely

an interlude. Unless the Board of Peace places justice at its core, it will offer nothing more than a pause between conflicts, not a durable settlement.

This Board is being established under an imperial vision in which power, domination, and control of resources have become the primary instruments of foreign policy. It is not merely a matter for India or Pakistan; it is a test of the global conscience itself. Will the world subordinate institutions to individuals—or individuals to the rule of law?

Once again, President Trump has offered no clear rationale for rescinding Canada's invitation, yet the sequence of events speaks for itself. Mark Carney's critique of the American-led order appears to have been the price of exclusion. It is this very question that posterity will put to us: *When peace was made subservient to power, where did you stand?*

The Board of Peace may present itself as a symbol of concord, but beneath its surface breathes the same old politics of power that have wounded the world time and again. History teaches us that only that peace endures which is founded upon justice, not one cast in the shadow of force. The question now is not whether history will judge—but whom it will vindicate.

India or Pakistan, the Global South or the Western world—each must decide whether it seeks peace grounded in principle or peace policed by power.

In conclusion, I submit this: peace is not a gift, not a contract, not a board. Peace is a moral covenant. And until that covenant is forged upon justice, transparency, and accountability, history will refuse to ratify it.

Distinguished Delegates,

Peace is not an institution, not a board, not a resolution. Peace is a moral commitment—one that cannot endure without justice, transparency, and accountability. If the Board of Peace becomes a guardian of these principles, history will welcome it. If it becomes an instrument for the perpetuation of power, history will summon it to its dock.

The verdict will not be delivered today—but it will be delivered. And it is history that will pronounce it. Thank you very much for listening so quietly and attentively.

Monday, February 16, 2026

Power as Trust: SMASH and the Islamic Conception of Responsible Deterrence

Power as Trust: SMASH and the Islamic Philosophy of Defence

In the present age, national defence can no longer be confined to the mere guarding of frontiers. It has assumed a far graver and more comprehensive significance: it is now the visible measure of a state's dignity, the guarantor of its political sovereignty, and the sentinel of its intellectual independence. Among the community of nations, esteem is reserved not for those who brandish force with impetuosity, nor for those who plead incapacity as virtue, but for those who, being self-reliant in their means of defence, exercise power with moral restraint and intellectual poise. Defence technology has thus become one of the cardinal pillars of sovereignty, geopolitical equilibrium, and the architecture of global politics.

Islam, in its enduring wisdom, neither consecrated power as an instrument of aggression nor sanctified weakness as an excuse for inertia. Rather, it elevated strength to the service of justice, protection, and the preservation of peace. The Qur'anic injunction—“*And prepare against them whatever force you can muster*” (8:60)—has, across the centuries, formed the cornerstone of the Islamic conception of defence. Yet this verse is not a mere summons to arms; it is a comprehensive intellectual charter. Within its compass lie knowledge and prudence, discipline and self-reliance, and above all a profound sense of moral responsibility. Islamic history bears eloquent witness to this truth: when power was subordinated to knowledge and ethics, the polity was at once just and ascendant; when severed from them, it degenerated into tumult and tribulation.

It is against this intellectual horizon that Pakistan's unveiling of the *SMASH* hypersonic missile at the World Defence Show 2026 in Riyadh must be understood. This was not simply the announcement of a new weapons system; it was a civilisational declaration, a considered knock upon the door of history. It signalled that Pakistan regards defence not as a theatre for ostentation, but as a solemn trust. The development of the *SMASH* hypersonic anti-ship and land-attack ballistic missile by Pakistan's defence industry represents a contemporary articulation of that Qur'anic principle—where technology, prudence, and responsibility converge.

The presentation of *SMASH* at the World Defence Show was therefore not merely a technical milestone but an intellectual, cultural, and strategic statement. The missile's dual-role capability—engaging both maritime and terrestrial targets—places it squarely within the demands of modern warfare, where versatility and precision are prized above brute mass. The paper under consideration seeks to examine the missile's technical features and dual function within the broader global defence landscape, while also subjecting this development to critical reflection in light of the Islamic philosophy of power, responsibility, and the ethics of defence.

When Global Industrial & Defence Solutions (GIDS) appeared upon the international stage in Riyadh, it did so not as a purveyor of imported hardware, but as the herald of an indigenous capacity. The introduction of *SMASH* made plain that Pakistan has begun to move beyond the posture of consumer and into the more exacting rank of creator and architect. In an era where strategic credibility rests upon domestic capability, such a transition marks no trivial advance. It is the point at which a state anchors its survival not in borrowed doctrines, but in its own scientific ingenuity and civilisational

capital. This, too, accords with the deeper Islamic conception of defence: preparedness as an expression of self-respect, and capability as the guardian of autonomy.

For decades, Pakistan relied substantially upon external sources to meet its defence requirements. The gradual emergence of a robust indigenous defence industry signals an evolutionary shift of consequence. SMASH stands as a conspicuous milestone in that progression—an emblem of strategic self-reliance in an increasingly contested regional environment stretching from the Middle East to South Asia and the Indian Ocean.

The missile's reported hypersonic velocity, its high-precision guidance, and its near-vertical terminal attack profile together reflect the changing philosophy of warfare in the twenty-first century. War is no longer waged solely upon visible battlefields; it is conducted within systems—of detection, interception, and rapid response. Hypersonic technology, travelling at multiples of the speed of sound, compresses reaction times to a narrow and unforgiving margin. In such a theatre, speed is not merely an advantage; it is a determinant of deterrence.

According to its developers, SMASH has been engineered to combine extraordinary velocity with acute guidance accuracy and a steep attack angle, thereby posing a formidable challenge to contemporary air and missile defence systems. By penetrating layered defensive shields and striking with what strategists term “strategic surprise,” it embodies a doctrine that views defence not as passive reaction but as calibrated deterrence. Herein lies the essence of prudence: the maintenance of credible capability so that conflict may be forestalled rather than invited.

Thus, the unveiling of SMASH must be read not as a flourish of martial exuberance, but as a measured affirmation of responsibility. It suggests a state mindful of its obligations—to its sovereignty, to regional stability, and to the moral discipline that must govern the use of force. In that equilibrium between power and principle resides the true dignity of nations.

The wars of the twenty-first century are waged less upon open fields than within the invisible theatres of cognition, velocity, and systems. It is no longer mass alone that determines ascendancy, but the mastery of tempo, the compression of response time, and the capacity to outmanoeuvre the adversary's architecture of defence. In the contemporary global order, hypersonic technology has altered the military equilibrium in a manner both subtle and profound: it diminishes the enemy's window of reaction, renders elaborate missile defence systems precarious, and affords the possibility of limited yet decisive action.

Across the Middle East, the Indian Ocean basin, and South Asia—regions where geography and geopolitics are locked in uneasy embrace—the appetite for such capabilities has grown markedly. Strategic friction along sea lanes and contested frontiers has elevated the defence industry from a supporting enterprise to a central actor in global politics. In this charged environment, technological innovation is no longer ancillary to diplomacy; it is diplomacy conducted by other means.

It is within this altered landscape that GIDS has introduced the SMASH missile as a modern hypersonic ballistic platform capable of engaging both maritime and terrestrial targets. In its anti-ship configuration, the missile possesses a range of 290 kilometres and carries a 384-kilogram warhead. Its guidance architecture integrates an HDGNS-assisted inertial navigation system with an

active radar seeker, ensuring both resilience and terminal precision. Propulsion is provided by a single-stage, dual-thrust solid rocket motor—an engineering choice that confers sustained acceleration and stable flight dynamics.

In its maritime role, the combination of a substantial warhead and an active radar seeker opens a new chapter in the grammar of naval warfare. The sea—now the arterial conduit of global trade, energy flows, and strategic influence—has become a domain where defensive superiority is no longer optional but imperative. With a reported circular error probable (CEP) of ten metres or less, and a terminal velocity exceedingly twice the speed of sound, SMASH emerges as a formidable instrument in littoral and blue-water contexts alike. Such characteristics render it particularly consequential in environments shielded by advanced missile defence systems, where speed and precision must converge to achieve effect.

Islamic history offers no stranger to maritime power. From the fleets of Andalusia to the naval reach of the Ottoman Caliphate, the sea was never regarded as a vulnerability but as a theatre of stewardship and strength. In this sense, SMASH may be seen as a modern expression of an older tradition: the transformation of maritime space from a source of exposure into a bastion of security. The missile's near-vertical attack profile in its anti-ship configuration poses a serious challenge to contemporary naval defence architectures, designed primarily to counter more conventional trajectories. Yet SMASH is not confined to the maritime domain. In its land-attack variant, the range remains 290 kilometres, while the warhead weight is increased to 444 kilograms, thereby enhancing its striking power without sacrificing reach. In this configuration, navigation relies fully upon the HDGNS-assisted inertial system, optimised for terrestrial targets and strategic installations.

The augmentation of payload without compromise in range signals that SMASH is distinguished not solely by speed, but by the force and finality of its blow. It is configured for limited yet decisive engagement—a capability aligned with the higher discipline of modern deterrence. Here, one glimpses the Islamic conception of warfare in its classical restraint: no needless prolongation, no indiscriminate devastation, but action defined, proportionate, and purposeful.

Notably, the same single-stage, dual-thrust solid rocket motor is employed in the land-attack variant. This is more than a technical convenience; it is an expression of intellectual economy. The development of a distinct configuration for terrestrial missions, while retaining core propulsion architecture, reflects a design philosophy in which simplicity and performance are harmonised. With a reported accuracy of fifteen metres or less and sustained supersonic velocity in terminal phase, the missile exemplifies structural coherence—an attribute central to contemporary defence thought.

Perhaps the most striking feature of SMASH is its dual-role character. A single platform adaptable to both maritime and land missions simplifies logistics, reduces training and maintenance burdens, and enhances operational flexibility. Islamic civilisation has long favoured wisdom-infused simplicity over ostentatious complexity—whether in jurisprudence, governance, or military organisation. Such simplicity strengthens reliability, curtails expenditure, and renders systems more resilient.

In practical terms, this configuration makes SMASH well suited to sensitive installations, military nodes, and strategic objectives. In conceptual terms, it resonates with the Islamic principles of order



and economy: the avoidance of extravagance, the disciplined use of resources, and the cultivation of self-reliance. GIDS has articulated the missile's dual-role design precisely in this spirit—so that a single system may serve distinct operational theatres without duplication or waste.

Frugality, discipline, and autonomy—these are not merely fiscal virtues but strategic imperatives. The employment of one missile across two domains demonstrates that defensive power is being exercised with deliberation and structure, not for spectacle but for substance. By streamlining logistics and lowering costs,

the system stands as a synthesis of military economy and operational prudence.

In Islam, the concept of strength is anchored not in aggression but in protection and balance. The exercise of force is circumscribed by moral limits; it is legitimate only within the bounds of necessity and justice. The development of a weapon such as SMASH can therefore be reconciled with Islamic thought only insofar as its purpose remains defensive, its use regulated, and unnecessary destruction scrupulously avoided. Under such conditions, it becomes not merely a military asset but a symbol of responsible deterrence.

The single-stage, dual-thrust solid rocket motor at the heart of SMASH enhances its speed, altitude control, and terminal maneuverability. By providing a refresher after initial acceleration, it helps the missile evade layered defenses and maintain momentum toward its target. This combination of engineering precision and principles of strategic restraint reveals the emerging forms of a defense philosophy that seeks security anchored in responsibility, not dominance for its own sake.

Defence analysts observe that in the Middle East and other volatile theatres, the demand for long-range, high-precision strike capabilities continues its steady ascent. In regions where strategic mistrust is layered upon fragile political equilibria, the appetite for hypersonic and precision-guided systems has grown markedly. The SMASH missile is presented as a response to precisely such contested and hazardous environments. It stands as evidence that Pakistan not only comprehends its own defence imperatives but is also acutely attuned to the temper and trajectory of the global defence market.

For Pakistan, this moment carries significance both economic and strategic. Yet the central question is not one of demand alone; it is one of responsibility. As an Islamic state, Pakistan bears an ethical charge no less weighty than its strategic ambition. In Islamic thought, power is a trust (*amanah*), not a mere commodity for trade. Should Pakistan step more decisively into this domain, it must do so accompanied by moral accountability, regulatory clarity, and principled restraint. It is this dimension which elevates SMASH beyond the status of an armament and renders it an intellectual emblem.

An Islamic polity is bound by the obligation that weapons are not to be instruments for inflaming conflict or perpetuating injustice. Transparency in defence cooperation, a preference for the

protection of human life, and adherence to declared norms must guide policy. Yet the Qur'anic injunction to prepare strength remains binding: to remain equipped with modern means of defence, capable of repelling aggression and preserving sovereignty, is itself a religious and civic duty. The balance is delicate but essential—preparedness without provocation, capability without recklessness.

The dual-role conception of SMASH reflects a conspicuous trend in modern military planning. Its advantages are neither trivial nor merely technical: logistical simplicity, reduced training expenditures, a unified maintenance regime, and enhanced operational flexibility. In a world where complexity often breeds fragility, such integration embodies prudence. Islamic intellectual tradition has long accorded high value to economy and order; the avoidance of extravagance and the cultivation of disciplined organisation are regarded not simply as fiscal virtues but as moral ones. The architecture of SMASH gives practical expression to that principle.

From this study several conclusions emerge. First, SMASH symbolises Pakistan's growing defence self-reliance. Secondly, its dual-role capability aligns with contemporary military requirements, where adaptability is as prized as power. Thirdly, its hypersonic speed and precision reinforce deterrence within a region marked by strategic volatility. Finally—and most critically—the employment of such technology under the Islamic conception of defence demands ethical governance. In Islamic jurisprudence and political thought, the purpose of strength is the prevention of oppression, the safeguarding of peace, and the discouragement of aggression. Force is justified not as an assertion of dominion but as a shield against injustice.

Weapons such as SMASH can therefore be considered consonant with Islamic thought only insofar as their deployment remains within a defensive doctrine. Properly framed, they strengthen deterrence, reduce the likelihood of unnecessary war, and preserve equilibrium in the balance of power. The dual-role strategy itself signals an efficient stewardship of resources—an embodiment of order and restraint. Within the moral boundaries prescribed by Islamic defence ethics, such technology is not only permissible but potentially prudent.

The unveiling of SMASH is thus more than a routine military announcement. It marks a stage in Pakistan's intellectual journey towards the integration of self-reliance, scientific proficiency, and strategic dignity. SMASH is not merely an assemblage of alloy and propellant; it is a declaration of intent—that Pakistan views defence not through the lens of fear but of prudence, not through aggression but through balance, not through ostentation but through responsibility.

It reminds us that the ultimate source of strength is not steel or firepower alone, but the animating thought that directs them. When knowledge is joined to wisdom, and capability to conscience, power may serve as a guarantor of peace rather than a harbinger of turmoil. In this sense, the SMASH hypersonic missile represents in Pakistan's defence history not simply the addition of a new system, but a strategic and intellectual pronouncement. True to its name, it resounds as a firm knock upon the door of the defence world—one that may well shape the trajectory of Pakistan's strategic identity in the years to come.

Above all, it demonstrates that modern technology and Islamic thought are not adversaries but

potential allies. Properly harmonised, they produce a model in which strength and morality, speed and restraint, modernity and tradition coexist in disciplined balance. That balance constitutes the very spirit of the Islamic conception of defence. If a nation can yoke knowledge to faith, and power to ethical purpose, then defence ceases to be a source of discord and becomes instead a guardian of peace.

In that light, SMASH may be regarded as a contemporary metaphor for the Islamic state's vision of defence—quiet yet formidable, firm yet measured, resolute yet responsible. It stands as a milestone in Pakistan's strategic evolution: a testament that when advanced technology is aligned with intellectual clarity and moral accountability, it not only secures the state but also confers upon it a dignified station within the international order.

Thursday, February 19, 2026

One Nation, One Reckoning, One Decision

A Breathing State, a Whining Conscience

O people of this land—listen well.

This is not an hour for whispers; it is an hour for a clarion call.

This is not a season of comfort; it is a season of questioning.

This is that solemn moment in the life of nations when they are compelled to stand before the mirror of history and speak truth to themselves. It is a juncture at which peoples either seize their destiny with conscious resolve or are thrust—silently yet irreversibly—into the long night of subjugation. When the courage to speak truth is lost, history records silence not as neutrality, but as a confession of guilt.

Today, this land—whose every grain of soil bears the trust of martyrs' blood, a mother's prayer, and a child's unfulfilled dream—lies before us like a gravely ailing patient. Its breath falters; its pulse weakens. Its eyes search desperately for hope, even as they fix upon us with questioning accusation. Its lips tremble, yet no sound emerges.

And let it be said without ambiguity: this patient is neither an individual nor a faction. It is Pakistan. This condition is no coincidence, no accident, no blind trick of history. It is a consequence—the harvest of misrule, injustice, fear, and the silence we chose in the face of oppression. When justice descends from the throne and conscience is banished from the court, states do not merely weaken; they become living corpses. Today, it is that corpse which rests upon our shoulders, while we turn to one another and ask, with growing dread: *What now?*

O people! The testimony of centuries is unambiguous: when states fall ill, their wounds are not confined to the economy; they strike the soul. When nations cease to ask questions, their answers are buried beneath the dust of oblivion. This is the very question that has echoed at every perilous turn of history—before Baghdad was reduced to ashes, before Granada slipped from Muslim hands, before Dhaka was severed from our body. Each time, the same refrain was heard: *"Nothing will happen."* Each time, darkness was mistaken for a passing shadow. And when night fully descended, there remained no one left to light a lamp.

Today, Pakistan stands at that same threshold: one step towards renewal, and survival; one step towards ruin, and collapse. Yet questions alone do not save nations—answers do. And answers are given only by peoples in whom courage, character, and faith are alive. Pakistan now stands at the physician's door where mere ointment will no longer suffice. What is required is surgery; not consolation, but decision; not transient politics, but enduring justice.

When justice grows feeble, truth is smothered, and power is treated as plunder rather than trust, nations hollow from within. That hollowing is now visible across our collective existence. Markets resound with the din of inflation; homes echo with the silence of hunger. In the halls of power, grand declarations are made; in the streets, shattered hopes lie scattered like debris. People meet one another, and before a word is spoken, a sigh escapes—as though every meeting were a rehearsal for a funeral. Every eye asks the same question: *What now?*

This patient cannot speak, yet its wounds cry out. They cry out through delayed justice, through deserted classrooms and ruined schools, through the groans echoing in hospital corridors; through the farmer's empty palm and the labourer's bent back and vacant pocket. These cries are not directed at a single individual; they are an indictment of an entire system—a system that has elevated power above law and wealth above destiny, granting indulgence to the strong while crushing the weak. Remember this well: when injustice becomes routine, resistance becomes a moral obligation.

O custodians of power! History delivers a stern warning: when nations cease to feel pain, their death draws near; and when they feel pain yet remain silent, their death becomes inevitable. Pause—listen carefully. Those breaths you hear are suspended upon your decisions. Attend to the breathing of this patient, for its life depends upon your judgment. These tears are not marginal notes on bureaucratic files; they are pages of history itself, crying aloud that power is not a crown—it is a trust. Betrayal of trust does not merely erase nations from existence; it drags them before the tribunal of history.

Let there be no misunderstanding: this is not a manifesto of despair. It is a revolt of conscience. For when conscience awakens, chains begin to fall of their own accord. This opening is not an announcement of hopelessness; it is a call to awakening. For as long as pain is felt, a nation remains alive.

O sons and daughters of this soil, and you in whose hands rest authority, power, and decision-making:

Today, every person endowed with even the slightest measure of insight stands stunned and restless. Faces have turned into questions; eyes search desperately for answers; and on every tongue the same anxious refrain circulates: *What is about to happen? Where do we stand? Towards what darkness is our future being led?*

People meet, and before conversation begins, a sigh escapes. Every heart thirsts for good news; every eye seeks a glimmer of hope. They look into one another's eyes as relatives of a dying patient look towards a miracle—clinging to the hope that some remedy, some master physician, or some earnest prayer might yet restore a flicker of life.

Today, this critically wounded patient has dragged itself, barely alive, to the physician's door—yet it lacks even the strength to name its illness. The truth is stark: the disease has reached a stage where balm alone is futile; where reassurance is meaningless; where courageous decisions, bitter medicine, and uncompromising accountability have become unavoidable. We have reached the point where prayer must walk hand in hand with surgery. And the longer the delay, the more prolonged, painful, and fatal the operation will become.

This Patient Is Not an Individual — It Is Pakistan

This patient is no single person.

This patient is no party or faction.

This patient is Pakistan.

Wounded, weakened, and writhing in pain, it lies before you like one hovering between life and death—having dragged itself, with its last reserves of strength, to the physician's door. Yet it is now

so depleted that it cannot even name its illness, let alone articulate its suffering. It cannot speak when questioned; but its wounds cry out. It utters no words—only tears. And those tears, those groans, those open wounds are unmistakable.

Each battered limb gestures silently toward its affliction. At times it clutches its head, as though the very faculty of reason has been stripped away. At times it presses a hand to its heart, as though justice itself has expired. At times it covers its eyes with both hands and weeps uncontrollably. And when the physician offers even the slightest reassurance, it begins—through its eyes alone—to beg for mercy, for hope, for the mere continuation of life.

Years of deprivation, injustice, and shattered dreams are etched upon its face, yet its tongue remains mute—as though it no longer possesses the courage to look towards the future. These tears are not merely tears; they are appeals, supplications, and questions—questions now being directed towards its own people and the corridors of power. This is the restlessness of those who feel the pain. Indeed, it is the condition of the relatives of a dying patient—clinging desperately to the hope of a miracle, a healer's prescription, a master physician's remedy, or the prayer of a righteous soul that might yet restore a breath of life.

This anguish is not confined to those who merely understand the circumstances; it is borne most heavily by those in whose hearts Pakistan's pain has hardened into a festering wound. Their sleep has deserted them; their hearts are denied peace. In the stillness of night, when they prostrate themselves before their Lord, sobs overtake their prayers. As they beseech God for the safety of Pakistan, they invoke the memory of the millions of martyrs of this land—those who sacrificed everything for its sake. And then a question, terrifying in its clarity, tears through the heart: *What answer shall we give on the Day of Judgement for those pure sacrifices?*

O holders of authority, O people of this nation—imagine this:

On the Day of Reckoning, the martyrs of this land will stand before you. They will ask: *We gave our lives—what did you give?*

Allah the Exalted declares:

﴿وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ اللَّهَ غَافِلًا عَمَّا يَعْمَلُ الظَّالِمُونَ﴾

“Do not think that Allah is unaware of what the wrongdoers do.” (Sūrah Ibrāhīm 14:42)

لکھتے رہے جنوں کی حکایات خونچکاں

ہر چند اس میں ہاتھ ہمارے قلم ہوئے

*We kept on writing blood-soaked chronicles of madness,
Though the pen, in every age, was held by our own hands.*

This condition is not exclusive to those who suffer in silence. History bears witness: those who glimpse an approaching storm before others do not remain quiet. For those who see the tempest in advance, silence becomes a sin. They raise the alarm; they warn; they devote their nights and days, their wealth, their words, their very breath, to averting catastrophe.

My purpose is neither to spread despair nor to cultivate fear. But consider this: if one of your own loved ones were afflicted with a fatal illness, would you sit calmly at ease? Would you not scour the world in search of the finest physicians, the most skilled surgeons? Would you not spend beyond

your means? And having done all this, would you not finally fall into prostration and say: *O Lord, healing lies only in Your hands?*

Then consider this homeland. It is our collective existence—our identity, our recognition, our present and our children’s future. A political mirage and an ever-thickening darkness surround us. With the fall of every government, the people breathe a sigh of relief, hoping that perhaps now conditions will change, perhaps now the darkness will lift. Yet, tragically, the darkness does not recede; it deepens. Inflation has already rendered life unbearable, and on top of it crushing electricity and gas bills have broken people’s backs. Those who proclaimed development now avert their gaze in shame.

Allah the Exalted warns:

﴿وَإِذَا أَرَدْنَا أَنْ نُهْلِكَ قَرْيَةً أَمَرْنَا مُتْرَفِيهَا فَفَسَقُوا فِيهَا فَحَقَّ عَلَيْهَا الْقَوْلُ فَدَمَرْنَاهَا تَدْمِيرًا﴾

“And when We intend to destroy a city, We command its affluent but they defiantly disobey therein; so the word comes into effect upon it, and We destroy it with [complete] destruction.” (Sūrah Banī Isrā’īl 17:16)

Have you ever reflected whether this apparent indulgence is itself a test? Power is a trust—not spoils of war.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

“Each of you is a shepherd, and each of you will be questioned about his flock.” (Bukhārī, Muslim)

When nations are deprived of justice, when they abandon raising their voices against oppression, when they grow indifferent to one another’s suffering and confine their prayers solely to personal safety—then even the hands raised for reform lose their effect, and divine assistance is withheld. If the responsibility of justice, governance, and equity is neglected, an answer will be demanded on the Day of Judgement. O decision-makers! This nation is your flock. Its tears will cling to your collars. Remember well: states do not survive without justice.

Allah declares:

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ﴾

“Indeed, Allah commands justice and excellence.” (Sūrah al-Naḥl 16:90)

And the Messenger ﷺ warned:

“Beware of oppression, for oppression will be darkness upon darkness on the Day of Resurrection.” (Muslim) Despair draws perilously close to disbelief—and today this nation is being deliberately driven into despair. Beware: this is the most dangerous weapon of all.

Allah says:

﴿لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِنْ رَحْمَةِ اللَّهِ﴾

“Do not despair of the mercy of Allah.” (Sūrah al-Zumar 39:53)



Today, through a calculated design, the Pakistani nation is being pushed into the thickets of despair—so that, once weakened, it may be set upon by ravenous beasts. Remember this well: despair is more lethal than nuclear fallout. History has shown that nations can rise again even after nuclear devastation if hope endures; but despair has claimed lives that wars themselves could not.

The Lamp of Hope

To extinguish the lamp of hope is, in truth, to concede defeat in the battle of life—to abandon the journey before the destination is reached. Pain itself is a sign of life. When blood flows, a person seeks treatment; he looks for means of protection and survival. Only the patient who desires to live survives. Despair is a satanic weapon. Desperation is the very signature of Iblīs. Iblīs is not merely the name of Satan; in the Arabic lexicon, a soul consumed by hopelessness is itself called *iblis*.

The Messenger of Mercy ﷺ said:

“Take charge of life, or life will take charge of you.”

And he ﷺ also said:

“The strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer.” (Muslim)

Strength is not confined to muscles alone; it resides equally in resolve, conviction, and character. Under the weight of conscience, with sincerity and pain, I have raised this call. Now this call must reach those halls where it belongs.

A final call to those in power:

There is still time. Revive justice and fairness. Uproot despair. Treat authority as a trust, not a prize. Return what belongs to its rightful owners. Give the nation hope and direction—and bow before Allah. O holders of authority, remember well: power is a trust, and oppression is a summons to punishment. Authority is not a bounty; it is an *amānah*. Pause for a moment. Turn your gaze away from your offices, your privileges, your power and your plans—and look instead towards your end.

The Qur'an proclaims:

﴿وَقِفُّهُمْ إِنَّهُمْ مَسْئُولُونَ﴾

“Stop them; indeed, they are to be questioned.” (Sūrah al-Ṣāffāt 37:24)

A day is coming when protocol will avail nothing—either documents, nor narratives, nor institutions. Only deeds will speak. On that Day the question will thunder forth: *Are we not answerable before Allah? Was authority not trust? Do the tears of this nation not shake the Throne?* Power is not indulgence; it is trust. These tears, these sighs, these sobs ascend rapidly to the Throne itself. Even now, if fear of the Hereafter awakens, if justice is revived, if mercy and integrity are proclaimed, this patient can still breathe. And once more, the fragrance of faith of an Islamic society can return to this land.

A Call to the People

And now, O people of this land: keep hope alive. This sermon is not meant for palaces alone—it is for you as well. Have you accepted oppression merely because it does not yet strike you directly? Have you fallen silent out of fear that your turn may come next? Silence and despair are themselves enemies. O people, do not abandon speaking the truth. Reject despair and choose the path of reform. Remember: silent spectators are partners in the crime.

The Qur'an warns:

﴿وَلَا تَرْكَبُوا إِلَى الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا فَتَمَسَّكُمُ النَّارُ﴾

“Do not incline towards those who do wrong, lest the Fire should touch you.” (Sūrah Hūd 11:113)

Praying only for one’s personal safety is not enough. Nations are saved through collective prayer and collective reform.

The Messenger ﷺ said:

“When people see an oppressor and do not restrain his hand, it is near that Allah will punish them all.” (Tirmidhī)

If fear of the Hereafter awakens, this very patient—Pakistan—can stand again. But if this moment too is squandered, history will not forgive—and the Lord of the worlds never does.

The Final Reckoning

O people of this land! If these words have pierced your heart, if they have descended upon your chest like fire, then know this: the heart is still alive. Dead nations feel no pain. This is not the time for lamentation; it is the time to rise. If your eyes have moistened, know that hope has not yet died. Nations are revived by this very moisture. This is not the hour for trading accusations—it is the hour for correcting direction. It is time to decide whether we shall remain spectators of history, or become its architects.

Remember well: darkness does not fear a single lamp—it flees from a caravan of lamps.

O those seated in the corridors of power—beware! History does not wait, nor does it forgive delay. It is written in moments of decision. A day comes when neither uniform nor pen, neither seal nor statement will avail. Thrones and crowns are temporary; justice is eternal. A day comes when no protocol, no narrative, no justification will stand—only deeds will speak.

The Qur’anic call still resounds:

“Stop them; indeed, they are to be questioned.”

Prepare for that question, for the tears of this patient rise swiftly to the Throne and shake it to its core. If mercy, integrity, and justice are revived today, this patient will breathe again. If justice is restored today, the state will survive. But if oppression is allowed to endure, the verdict will be delivered in Allah’s court—and if delay persists, the surgery of history will be ruthless. There, no one escapes.

And O people—listen well! This address is not only for the halls of power. Silence and despair are the most dangerous weapons of all. Silence is complicity; despair stands at the threshold of disbelief. If you abandon truth, falsehood will grow stronger. Do not accept oppression merely because it has not yet reached your doorstep—when fire breaks out, it does not ask which street it burns.

Speaking the truth is your duty. Bowing before falsehood is your defeat. Keep hope alive, for without hope, reform is impossible. Collective prayer and collective action alone save nations.

This patient—Pakistan—can still live, can still be saved—if fear of the Hereafter awakens; if justice is adopted as principle and shield; if authority is recognised as a trust; and if the people emerge from the shell of despair and embrace hope.

This is not an ending. This is not the conclusion of a tale. It is the knock of a beginning. It is a declaration. Either we respond to this call and open the door—or history will break it down and make an example of us.

The choice is now in our hands.

May Allah grant us the ability to hear, to understand, and to act.

Āmīn, O Lord of the worlds.

Saturday, February 21, 2026

The Chessboard of Power and the Test of Wisdom

The Roar of Power, the Voice of Peace

*****Policy Options for Pakistan amid Escalating Iran–United States Tensions:***

A Strategic Appraisal and the Prospective Response of the Islamic World**

In the widening shadow of escalating tensions between Iran and the United States, the following observations are advanced to offer a comprehensive appraisal of policy options available to Pakistan, alongside an assessment of potential reactions within the Islamic world. The purpose of this document is not rhetorical alarmism but strategic clarity: to furnish decision-making institutions with viable pathways that shield Pakistan from military entanglement while simultaneously reinforcing regional stability, internal security, and diplomatic credibility.

The recommendations herein are anchored in principled realism, active diplomacy, defensive preparedness without belligerence, and a calibrated role for Pakistan as a potential mediator within the Islamic world—a role consonant with both its history and its moral capital.

Pakistan is not a direct party to any prospective confrontation; yet geography, as history repeatedly reminds us, is seldom neutral. Iran's immediate neighbourhoods, proximity to Afghanistan, access to the Gulf sea lanes, and the convergence of great-power interests place Pakistan unavoidably within the crisis's gravitational pull. In the event of armed conflict, the secondary and tertiary effects—refugee flows, energy shocks, sectarian tremors, and economic disruption—would not remain abstract theories; they would materialise directly upon Pakistan's security and economy.

The presence of the USS *Abraham Lincoln* in the Indian Ocean is not a mere episode of naval manoeuvre; it is a sentence written in the grammar of global power—a language often inscribed with steel rather than ink. Although the absence of an immediate, unequivocal decision from the American President creates an impression of pause, history teaches that powerful states frequently prepare the theatre long before the curtain rises. According to highly credible sources, the deployment of a US carrier strike group in the Middle East resembles a chessboard meticulously arranged: every piece stands ready, though the game itself has not yet concluded.

While the *Abraham Lincoln*'s positioning signals a tightening American military grip in Iran's vicinity, maritime history cautions against premature conclusions. Colossal vessels at anchor do not invariably herald war. Rather, this deployment appears designed to exert psychological pressure upon Iran and to keep the region in a state of controlled military anxiety—a deliberate suspension between threat and action.

President Donald Trump's statements deepen this strategic ambiguity. Deliberation continues, yet decision remains veiled behind the curtain of fate. The carrier group operates under CENTCOM's jurisdiction; an immediate strike is not deemed necessary, but rapid-response capability has been markedly enhanced. The message is dual-edged: a signal to Iran and reassurance to allies. Pakistan, the Gulf states, and India alike interpret these developments as a heightened security alert rather than a declaration of war.

The carrier strike group itself is a roving embodiment of modern warfare, where air, sea, and electronic domains merge into a single operational continuum. The aircraft carrier forms its heart, missile cruisers its vigilant eyes, and destroyers its defensive shield. Endowed with overwhelming air superiority, integrated missile defence, and naval dominance, this formation has become a source of profound regional anxiety—not merely because of its firepower, but because of the potentially unbearable political cost its actual use would entail.

Reports from international media underscore mounting pressure from allied states, reminding Washington that between the display of power and the employment of power lies a narrow yet decisive distance. Counsel from allies urging restraint highlights an enduring truth of statecraft: military might remain subordinate to political wisdom.

Within Iran, streets and crossroads are now inscribing chapters of history in blood. Public spaces have ceased to be mere arenas of protest; they have become maps of collective anguish. The loss of thousands of lives can no longer be contained within the bounds of domestic sovereignty—it summons the conscience of the international community and generates moral pretexts for external intervention.

The rising death toll resulting from state crackdowns on demonstrators has evolved into a lament that unsettles global sensibilities. The United States and Europe increasingly frame the situation as a human-rights crisis, presenting grim statistics—whether provisional or verified—as evidence before the court of world opinion. These figures testify to a widening chasm between state and society, one perilous enough to be invoked as justification for intervention under the banner of humanitarian responsibility.

Here, the Qur’anic warning resonates with sombre relevance:

وَتِلْكَ الْقُرَىٰ أَهْلَكْنَاهُمْ لَمَّا ظَلَمُوا وَجَعَلْنَا لِمَهْلِكِهِم مَّوْعِدًا

“And those towns—We destroyed them when they committed injustice, and We appointed for their destruction a promised time.” (Qur’an 18:59)

President Trump’s rhetoric—simultaneously threatening and invitational—reflects a long-standing duality in American foreign policy: the stick and the handshake, the sword displayed alongside the olive branch. His assertion that “we are open for business” appears, on the surface, as an overture to diplomacy; yet beneath it echoes the reverberation of power. It may equally signal the opening of a new chapter in back-channel diplomacy, aimed at drawing Iran to the negotiating table on American terms—an interpretation lent credence by recent indications of Iranian willingness to engage following the President of Iran’s reported telephonic exchange with the Saudi Crown Prince.

On the walls of Tehran’s Inqilab (Revolution) Square, murals serve not as mere public art but as visual exegesis of the national narrative. Likewise, warnings issued from the pulpit during Friday prayers fuse religion, state, and resistance into a single voice. Addressing the United States from the sermon is emblematic of Iran’s political culture, wherein faith and governance recite from the same script.

This language—deeply embedded in Iran’s ideological consciousness—appears designed both to fortify domestic morale and to construct a religiously infused justification for psychological warfare

against the United States and its allies. In this domain of narrative contestation, the Iranian discourse has thus far demonstrated notable resilience.

Indeed, the rigidity of Iran's official narrative functions as a verbal armour of defensive resolve. The assured tone of the Foreign Ministry's spokesperson conveys a clear message: the movement of warships does not shake national will. Iran's strategic messaging—rooted in missile deterrence, military readiness, and ideological steadfastness—speaks in the voice of a nation that does not merely fear war, but regards it, if forced upon it, as the price of survival.

Here again, the Qur'anic ethos invoked within Iranian discourse finds expression:

كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقِتَالُ وَهُوَ كَرْهٌ لَّكُمْ وَعَسَى أَن تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ

"Fighting has been prescribed for you, though it is hateful to you; yet it may be that you hate a thing while it is good for you." (Qur'an 2:216)

The Long Shadow of War: Escalation, Deterrence, and the Architecture of the Next Conflict

Every war, history reminds us, leaves behind not peace but preparation—an apprenticeship for the next confrontation. Iran's clash with Israel proved to be not merely a battlefield encounter but a strategic laboratory. The claims emanating from Tehran after the twelve-day war in June are a reminder of an enduring historical rhythm: each conflict refines the instruments of the next. The barrage of missiles and drones was not solely a military manoeuvre; it was a political communiqué, delivered in fire and trajectory, conveying a single message—that the reckoning remains unfinished. It is for this very reason that Iran, far from slowing its martial tempo, has accelerated it. In the aftermath of the conflict, Tehran further consolidated its missile programme, refined its drone technology, and refused to allow its war-readiness to lapse into complacency.

Iran's principal strength now lies less in artillery than in technology—silent, long-range, and lethal. Its mastery of remote warfare, its accumulated missile stockpiles, and its expansive drone network form the central pillars of its military doctrine. Their presence beyond Iran's borders underscores a defining feature of modern warfare: geography is no longer a prison. Medium-range and intermediate-range ballistic missile technologies—many equipped with non-conventional payload capabilities—have become instruments Iran will not hesitate to deploy in defence, should war be imposed upon it. It bears remembering that such systems are not the monopoly of a single power; they are possessed by China, North Korea, Iran, India, and Pakistan alike.

In pursuit of asymmetric advantage, unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) technology will inevitably be brought to bear. Should this threshold be crossed, humanity may find itself embarking upon a terrifying journey of destruction—one whose momentum could suffice to ignite the spark of a global war.

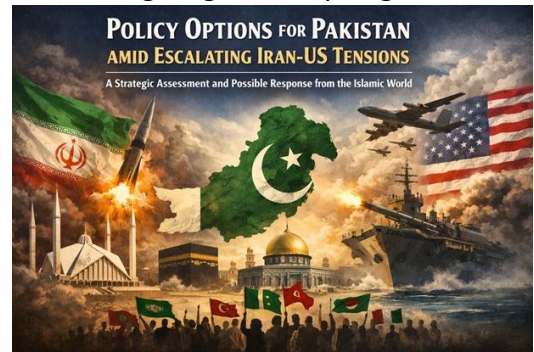
The statement issued by the commander of Iran's Khatam al-Anbiya Headquarters constitutes an unambiguous declaration: in the event of war, the theatre of conflict will not remain confined. This is the precise juncture at which defence transforms into pre-emption. The warning effectively threatens to drag the conflict to the very doorstep of the region, rendering every American interest a potential target.

In practical terms, American bases across Iraq and the Gulf can no longer be regarded as insulated from Iranian retaliation. Their defence would require extraordinary force deployments, imposing an immense financial burden upon the United States and its Western partners—one capable of straining already pressured economies under the weight of sustained military readiness.

Iranian warnings thus ring alarm bells not only in Washington but across allied capitals in the region. Pressure exerted by Gulf Arab states upon the United States reflects a sobering reality: wars are often fuelled from allied soil, and allies are frequently the first to burn in the fires of a powerful friend's conflict—before the flames eventually engulf all. It is precisely this fear of cascading regional instability that has driven Gulf states into relentless, day-and-night lobbying efforts to prevent a potential American strike, seeking to extinguish the embers before they erupt into an uncontrollable inferno.

Iran's web of regional proxies constitutes a core component of its strategic depth—a silent army, ostensibly non-state yet unmistakably custodians of state objectives. While some of these actors have been weakened, others remain well-armed and ideologically committed. It is this very unpredictability that renders them most dangerous. Hezbollah, though significantly degraded, has not been extinguished. The broader proxy network has yet to be fully dismantled, leaving the region vulnerable to the harsh truth that even a minor spark can detonate vast stockpiles of combustible grievances.

The statement by the commander of Kata'ib Hezbollah is not mere bravado; it is a declaration of ideological mobilisation. "This will not be a walk in the park"—a sentence that distils the psychology of resistance into a single phrase. It is less a formal declaration of war than a summons to belief, sacrifice, and alignment.



Such an appeal is sufficient to activate those groups who stand poised, lives in hand, awaiting nothing more than a signal to plunge into battle. Once unleashed, the alarm bells for American interests worldwide would ring loudly indeed.

Every state seeks distance from this fire, yet flames respect no neighbourhoods. Threats to target American bases in Gulf states, coupled with overtures to Saudi leadership, illustrate a volatile equilibrium—suspended uneasily between diplomacy and war. Saudi Arabia's pre-emptive distancing reflects a cautious doctrine of self-preservation, while the silence of other states invites uneasy speculation. Saudi neutrality, the ambiguity of Qatar and the UAE, and the intense pressure bearing down upon Pakistan have together plunged the region into a peculiar and precarious moment.

Rumours concerning the use of Pakistani airspace or territory in Balochistan are not merely military conjecture; they represent a sensitive chapter in geopolitical calculation. For Pakistan, this is not a binary choice of "yes" or "no," but a question that touches national security, regional equilibrium, and internal cohesion. It is a decision for which Pakistan must answer simultaneously to history, geography, and its people.

In the event of refusal, anxieties surrounding separatist elements in Balochistan recall the darker chapters of history, where indirect pressure proved more effective than open warfare. When the rifle does not fire from the front, conspiracy advances from behind. The carefully ambiguous signals from the US Secretary of State appear to echo this established tradition. The “Balochistan card,” played amid existing unrest, transforms hybrid warfare into a lurking predator—poised to strike.

Should Iran be attacked, the Pakistan–Saudi defence agreement will face a delicate and defining test. Its trial will not lie in waging war, but in preventing it. Balance, quiet diplomacy, and discreet consultation will prove decisive. Direct military intervention appears unlikely, yet the necessity for intensive behind-the-scenes coordination is beyond doubt—and almost certainly already underway. Turkey, as a formidable regional actor, is unlikely to remain a silent spectator—though it will reach for the scales rather than the sword. Its response will likely revolve around diplomatic pressure, regional mediation, and the protection of its own strategic interests. As a key NATO ally, Ankara is already positioning itself to perform a calibrated and balancing role.

On the other hand, Russia’s silence may yet prove more eloquent than any proclamation. Should it persist, it may represent another instance of strategic bargaining—Ukraine exchanged for quiet elsewhere. History abounds with examples of great powers converting silence on one front into advantage on another. Moscow, cloaked in strategic ambiguity, appears content to watch the Middle Eastern chessboard while calculating gains in its Ukrainian gambit.

Here, the Qur’anic reminder acquires renewed resonance:

وَاتَّقُوا فِتْنَةً لَا تُصِيبَنَّ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْكُمْ خَاصَّةً

“And fear a trial which will not afflict only the wrongdoers among you.” (Qur’an 8:25)

The Invisible Front, Strategic Restraint, and the Imperative of Collective Wisdom

The episode surrounding Afghanistan’s Bagram airstrip and the alleged cyber conflict stands as a defining metaphor of the modern “invisible war.” It was a confrontation without gunpowder—yet its consequences could easily have been incendiary. Iran’s timely countermeasures underscore a central truth of contemporary conflict: wars are no longer fought solely on physical battlefields, but within networks, signals, and algorithms.

In the recent cyber engagement, coordinated efforts involving Pakistan, Iran, and China/Russia played a decisive role in neutralising the covert designs attributed to Starlink-linked operations. As a result, the objectives sought through the unrest inside Iran suffered a severe strategic reversal—demonstrating that informational and cyber theatres can decisively shape outcomes without a single shot being fired.

The failure of such indirect measures heightens the risk of a dangerous shift toward direct military action and intensified pressure on neighbouring states. The region appears outwardly silent, yet behind the velvet curtain a diplomatic chess match is underway, driven by a singular objective: to extinguish the flames before they erupt, for fire recognises no borders. Once again, the region stands at the threshold of history—where a single misstep may burden generations. In this precarious moment, the need for collective diplomacy to prevent war and de-escalate regional tensions has never been more urgent.

Any American request for airspace or ground facilities would confront Pakistan with an exceptionally high-risk decision. The potential benefits would be limited; the dangers, virtually unbounded. Granting access could inflame internal security challenges—particularly in Balochistan—while refusal could invite diplomatic coercion and hybrid threats. In any external military escalation, Balochistan would likely become a primary target for proxy violence and information operations. As Iran–US tensions intensify, the risks of cross-border pressure, illicit arms and funding flows, and the reactivation of separatist narratives increase correspondingly.

The most immediate consequence of any external military cooperation would likely manifest in heightened militant activity within Balochistan. The state must therefore integrate counterterrorism,

intelligence coordination, and political reconciliation into a single, coherent response.

Given Balochistan’s internal security vulnerabilities, it is imperative for the state to define clear red lines, non-negotiable thresholds, and practical rules of engagement. These measures are essential to deter external interference, hybrid warfare, and internal destabilisation in a timely and proportionate manner—while simultaneously safeguarding civil rights, political processes, and national cohesion.

Such red lines and rules of engagement are not instruments of brute force alone; they are mechanisms for preserving state authority, public trust, and national unity in tandem. It is this delicate balance that can shield Pakistan from the spreading flames of an external war.

Pakistan’s long border with Iran, coupled with significant energy and trade potential, necessitates a diplomacy marked by caution and foresight. Escalation would endanger border security and undermine economic initiatives. Accordingly, Pakistan’s policy must rest upon non-aligned realism, cooperation for peace rather than war, humanitarian assistance, the offer of diplomatic mediation, and strict avoidance of military entanglement.

An atmosphere of regional conflict would also amplify risks to CPEC. Pakistan must therefore sustain robust strategic communication with China to safeguard shared economic interests.

Defence and economic ties with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states remain vital; yet for Pakistan, acting as a bridge rather than a bloc member offers greater strategic dividends. Without entering direct combat, Pakistan must nonetheless maintain full preparedness in air and border surveillance, cyber security, and internal stability.

At this juncture, it is incumbent upon the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to reaffirm the principles of the United Nations Charter and Islamic fraternity, to express grave concern over rising military tensions in the Middle East, and—upholding sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the sanctity of human life as foundational values—to exert coordinated diplomatic pressure in pursuit of the following concrete measures:

☆Approval for the establishment of a high-level OIC mediation committee.

☆Formulation of practical, actionable proposals urging all parties to the Iran–US dispute toward immediate de-escalation and restraint from the use of force.

- ☆Active encouragement of direct negotiations aimed at eliminating the risk of war in the region. A collective commitment by all regional states to deny their territories for use in any aggressive action.
- ☆Support for independent investigations into human rights violations and civilian casualties, under a joint UN–OIC mechanism, while also exposing and countering foreign conspiracies operating behind civil unrest.
- ☆Condemnation of regional proxy wars and firm opposition to the use of non-state armed groups, alongside collective measures against states that fuel such conflicts.
- ☆Adoption of a unified diplomatic stance at the United Nations and other international forums.

For Pakistan, the following red lines must be articulated with absolute clarity:

- ☆Any attempt to mobilise armed movements under the guise of sectarianism or nationalism shall be treated as a hostile hybrid operation.
- ☆Any cross-border infiltration or logistical support by foreign intelligence services, military assets, or proxy networks will be deemed intolerable.
- ☆Any attack on Gwadar, CPEC projects, gas installations, ports, or communication infrastructure will elicit an immediate and decisive state response.
- ☆The discovery of any foreign financial or military assistance through any channel will trigger the strictest legal and security action.
- ☆In its concluding affirmation, the OIC—together with the United Nations—must reiterate a solemn resolve: that for the Islamic world in general, and this region in particular, collective wisdom, diplomacy, and unity remain the sole path to averting yet another catastrophic war.

For the Islamic world, collective prudence and mediation are not optional virtues; they are existential necessities. And for Pakistan, the clearest course lies in active peace diplomacy—neither a silent bystander nor a belligerent party. Wisdom demands that Pakistan become a voice for peace amid the din of war. For the wider Muslim world, the moment calls for guidance by reason rather than emotion.

History bears witness: wars may begin with power, but their endings are always written by reason. Here, the Qur’anic counsel offers its final, enduring reminder:

Monday, February 23, 2026

When History Holds Its Breath

The Conscience of a World on Edge

There are turning points in history at which the silence of nations becomes not merely a lapse, but a culpability; when indifference hardens into a verdict upon the age itself. Today, as the air over the Middle East grows acrid with the scent of powder, and as the faint tremor of military preparation may be discerned beneath the polite papers laid upon diplomatic tables, the question is not simply why tensions have mounted between Tehran and Washington. The graver inquiry is this: where now stand the peaceable nations of the world? Where are the multitudes who once filled the streets in protest against the wars of Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan? Where are the scholars and moralists who were wont to challenge the intoxications of power?

It is true that in many Western capitals men and women of letters, professors, and public intellectuals have again raised their voices in warning that the conflagration of war, once lit, may consume more than its authors intend. Yet in the corridors of authority such admonitions are muffled, as though absorbed by the heavy drapery of state. Under the leadership of President **Donald Trump**, Washington appears to be edging toward a mode of politics that tests not only Iran, but the very architecture of international peace. When an institution such as the **United Nations** is treated as an ornamental seal rather than as a living forum for the arbitration of disputes, we are compelled to ask whether the grammar of power is once more seeking precedence over the rule of law. The United Nations was established precisely to ensure that conflicts between states might be resolved through counsel rather than cannon; to reduce it to a ceremonial witness is to loosen a principal column of the international order itself.

Some observers discern in the present crisis an echo of that conception of global equilibrium once advanced by thinkers and statesmen such as **Henry Kissinger**—a vision in which the centres of power are few, and the decisive levers rest in limited hands. If current American policy represents, in practice, a revival of that design, then the question grows sterner still: is the international community prepared once more to bow before a unipolar dispensation, in which might does not merely influence right, but seeks to define it?

For its part, Iran has invoked Article 51 of the Charter of the **United Nations**, asserting its inherent right of self-defence and sovereignty. Tehran maintains that it will not initiate hostilities; yet it will assuredly respond to aggression. Whether one finds this argument persuasive or otherwise, it is articulated in the language of legality and sovereign entitlement. Should tensions escalate, it is not beyond conjecture that a regional contest might widen into a more comprehensive international collision. History instructs us that world wars have seldom been born of grand design alone; more often they have sprung from a single spark, which, once loosed, sets the horizon alight.

In such an hour, the silence of peaceable nations assumes a more troubling aspect. Have economic interests subdued the conscience? Has the profit of the armaments industry acquired a value exceeding that of human life? Or has global politics descended to a point at which principles are paraded in speeches, while power alone performs the decisive act?

This essay is an echo of that anguish, that interrogation, that historical moment—when we must determine whether we shall remain spectators to events, or dare to exert some influence upon their course.

In contemporary politics there are moments when words cease to be mere utterances and become instead the prologue to what shall be inscribed upon the breast of history. The present strain between Iran and the United States is such a moment: the soft cadences of diplomacy sound in uneasy counterpoint to the iron tread of military might. This dispute is not merely a bilateral disagreement between two states; it is a test of the balance of global power, of the meaning of sovereignty, and of the authority of international law.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has addressed a formal communication to the Secretary-General of the **United Nations**, declaring in unequivocal terms that any act of “military aggression” against it would be met with the exercise of its right to self-defence. The letter makes plain that, in the event of conflict, all bases, military facilities, and strategic assets associated with a “hostile power” in the region would be regarded as legitimate targets. Its essence is clear: Iran will not begin a war; but should its sovereignty be struck, it will avail itself of the protections afforded by the Charter. The sword, one might say, remains sheathed—yet the grip upon its hilt is firm.

This was not a mere flourish of martial resolve; it was framed as a legal and moral argument. By explicitly invoking Article 51, Tehran sought to root its prospective actions in recognised principles of international law, presenting any response not as aggression but as defence. In so doing, it has endeavoured to align itself with global public opinion, to secure in advance a juridical warrant for measures that may yet be taken.

Iran has interpreted the pronouncements of President **Donald Trump** not as rhetorical exuberance, but as indicative of a tangible risk of military action. When the head of a powerful state speaks of force, such words do not remain suspended in abstraction; they acquire the density of policy. The severity and finality in Mr Trump’s tone have persuaded Tehran that Washington is seriously contemplating the military option.

In the lexicon of modern statecraft, statements themselves have become strategic instruments. When a leader of a great power alludes to “bad things,” those words function simultaneously as psychological pressure, domestic signalling, and international warning. By drawing attention to this danger, Iran seeks to caution neighbouring states that any adventurism would not remain confined within its borders; the entire Middle East might be drawn into the vortex.

On Thursday, President **Donald Trump** reportedly afforded Iran no more than a fortnight—indeed, at one juncture ten days—to reach what he termed a “meaningful agreement” in ongoing negotiations, failing which unspecified “bad things” would ensue. Such temporal compression is a familiar device of psychological diplomacy. By placing negotiations within a narrowing corridor of time, one party seeks to hasten the calculations of the other, to induce decision under the shadow of impending consequence. The offer, outwardly diplomatic, bears within its structure the

unmistakable cadence of coercion. Time, thus constrained, becomes not a neutral medium for deliberation, but a pressure chamber in which choices are forced into premature maturity.

There are turning points in history at which the silence of nations becomes not merely a lapse, but a culpability; when indifference hardens into a verdict upon the age itself. Today, as the air over the Middle East grows acrid with the scent of powder, and as the faint tremor of military preparation may be discerned beneath the polite papers laid upon diplomatic tables, the question is not simply why tensions have mounted between Tehran and Washington. The graver inquiry is this: where now stand the peaceable nations of the world? Where are the multitudes who once filled the streets in protest against the wars of Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan? Where are the scholars and moralists who were won't to challenge the intoxications of power?

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of impending consequence. The offer, outwardly diplomatic, bears within its structure the unmistakable cadence of coercion. Time, thus constrained, becomes not a neutral medium for deliberation, but a pressure chamber in which choices are forced into premature maturity.

President **Donald Trump** has spoken of “good meetings” between his special envoy, **Steve Witkoff**, and his son-in-law, **Jared Kushner**, with Iranian counterparts, while candidly conceding that a “meaningful agreement” with Tehran would be no simple undertaking. Yet the very existence of such back-channel encounters is itself instructive. It signals that diplomacy has not retreated from the field, but merely shifted its ground. History records that discreet negotiations, conducted beyond the glare of formal plenaries, have at times achieved what public conferences could not—precisely because flexibility and confidentiality are afforded a freer hand.

The statement of White House Press Secretary **Karoline Leavitt** further suggests that Washington, though unwilling to remove the military option from the table, continues to profess a preference for diplomatic resolution. It would be “wise,” she intimated, for Iran to conclude a deal; the President, she maintained, remains desirous of a negotiated settlement. Such language appears calculated to keep open the final window of diplomacy, even as the shadow of force lingers at the threshold. Yet some political observers, mindful of Mr. Trump’s previous departures from orthodoxy, caution that unpredictability remains an integral feature of his statecraft. In the theatre of global politics, they fear, a sudden detonation cannot be excluded.

At its inception, what has been styled the “Board of Peace” was understood to concern itself chiefly with overseeing an end to the conflict in Gaza between Israel and Hamas. Its remit, however, now appears to have broadened. This expansion lends weight to the impression that the United States may, in certain theatres, be inclined to cultivate parallel diplomatic platforms beyond the formal ambit of the **United Nations**. Should that prove the case, it would intimate a subtle yet consequential alteration in the balance of global authority. To some commentators, it suggests an attempt—whether deliberate or inadvertent—to sideline the United Nations in favour of alternative mechanisms more amenable to American initiative. If so, we may be witnessing the early tremors of a more profound reconfiguration of the international order.

Consideration of new authorisations for the use of force forms part of this same continuum—a chain of deliberations that could, at any moment, advance into a new and decisive phase. The reported strike upon Iranian nuclear facilities in the preceding year stands as a reminder that military action is not a purely theoretical construct, but a precedent of lived experience. American missiles and aircraft have already tested the boundaries of restraint. Reports that the White House has examined fresh options for further strikes this week underscore the point: the military instrument is not confined to debate; it resides within the realm of practicable policy.

The contest between Iran and the United States thus emerges as something more intricate than a bilateral quarrel. It is, in truth, a dialogue—albeit a strained and perilous one—between power and law, between sovereignty and international pressure, between diplomacy and militarism. Tehran’s tone is one of defensive self-assurance, an insistence upon dignity and the right of self-protection. Washington’s approach appears to blend pressure with negotiation, coercion with conciliation. The

Israeli dimension, the presence of regional allies, and the attentive, if cautious, gaze of other great powers further complicate the equation.

This tableau reminds us that history's heat is not confined by borders. Should diplomacy prevail, this episode may yet be recorded as a testament to prudence under strain—a chapter in which restraint triumphed over impulse. Nations that navigate the rapids of crisis with balance and foresight alone secure honour in the annals of statecraft. But should militarism assert its dominion, the soil of the Middle East may once more be scented—perhaps sullied—by the acrid breath of powder. And if war's flame is kindled, another dark and dismal chapter will be inscribed. Even then, history will reiterate its stern lesson: that the logic of power must be tempered by the illumination of wisdom, lest darkness envelop victor and vanquished alike. The eye of history watches closely, to discern whether reason's light or pride's intoxication shall prevail.

The horizon remains veiled in mist. Yet it is already evident that the coming days may prove decisive not merely for Tehran and Washington, but for the wider world. Should prudence and sagacity gain the upper hand, the lamp of peace will continue to burn. Should hubris triumph, that flame may find itself besieged by gathering tempests.

As we stand upon the brink of this crisis, one cannot escape the sense that history is again testing humanity. The struggle between Iran and the United States is no ordinary dispute; it engages the structure of the international order, the authority of law, and, in a broader sense, the prospects of human security. If decisions are imposed by force, if the **United Nations** is reduced to a ceremonial relic, then a perilous precedent will be set—one that may embolden future powers to act unilaterally under the guise of necessity.

The silence of peaceable nations is therefore disquieting. War does not respect cartography. A blaze in one region sends its smoke across continents. If the Middle East smoulders today, Europe and Asia may feel the heat tomorrow. Intellectuals may raise their voices; yet unless public sentiment exerts tangible pressure upon governments, such appeals risk reverberating within the chambers of power without effect.

The hour calls for the awakening of the global conscience. It calls for the corridors of power to be reminded that the world is not the preserve of a single ideology, lobby, or state. Should efforts be made to compress international politics into a rigid Unipolar Mould, resistance will manifest on a global scale. And if the fires of war are loosed, their trajectory will not remain subject to any single will.

History's gaze rests upon us all. Future generations will ask where the advocates of peace stood when the world approached yet another precipice. Were they mute spectators, or did they raise their voices against the encroachment of force?

Now is the moment for nations, scholars, moral and religious leaders, and citizens alike to strive—before the spark becomes a conflagration—to extinguish the embers. For if this spark should blaze into flame, no international institution, no diplomatic table, and no eloquent appeal may suffice to contain it.

The candle of peace has not yet been extinguished—but the winds gather about it. The decision is ours: whether to shield that flame with steady hands, or to abandon it to the tempests of power.

Thursday, February 26, 2026

When Silence Speaks: PL-17 and the Politics of Air Superiority

Silent Deterrence: China's PL-17 and the New Balance Aloft

In the contemporary military world—where the brute force of arms has gradually ceded primacy to the power of knowledge, discretion, and silent preparation—the first public glimpse of China's advanced and enigmatic long-range air-to-air missile, the **PL-17**, is not merely an image released into the digital ether. It is, rather, a meaningful signal in the shifting geometry of power: a signal that speaks volumes precisely because it leaves so much unsaid.

In Western strategic circles, this initial appearance of the PL-17 has not been treated as a routine military photograph. Instead, it is widely interpreted as another carefully calibrated chapter in China's long-term grand strategy—one defined by silence, ambiguity, and gradual revelation. Western defence institutions understand this logic well: what China chooses to display is invariably less significant than what it deliberately withholds. And it is in that realm of concealment that the true message often resides.

Pakistan today stands at a historical juncture where global power rivalries are no longer abstract or theoretical, but are palpably felt across the region's skies, seas, and contested borders. China's accelerating military ascent, and its emergence as a producer of sophisticated weapons systems—most notably the PL-17—represents for Pakistan not merely the strength of an ally, but the announcement of an evolving strategic environment. The changing global military balance, particularly the advent of China's advanced aerial capabilities, is reshaping traditional conceptions of power across South Asia and the Indo-Pacific. Owing to its geography and strategic partnerships, Pakistan is among the states most directly affected by this transformation.

Global politics in the twenty-first century no longer appears to rest upon two pillars alone. It now stands, at minimum, upon three: **China, the United States, and India**. The contest among these actors is not confined to military hardware; it is equally civilisational, economic, and psychological. Power in the international system is in motion. China's rapid introduction of cutting-edge defensive technologies is compelling both Washington and New Delhi to revisit long-held strategic assumptions.

Although defence analysts in the West speak with caution, a subtle tremor of unease runs through their assessments. Many suggest that the PL-17 may well be the longest-range air-to-air missile yet developed. Should such estimates prove accurate, its implications for American air dominance in the Western Pacific would be profound. It would represent not merely the arrival of a new weapon, but the declaration of a new strategic logic. The United States continues to view itself as the custodian of the global order, yet China's quiet, methodical, and scientifically grounded advance is increasingly challenging that perception. The PL-17 stands as a symbol of this challenge—a weapon that raises more questions than it answers.

Within American defence circles, the PL-17 is frequently described in the language of a *game changer*. For decades, U.S. air strategy in the Western Pacific has rested upon aircraft carrier strike groups and the layered aerial protection surrounding them. An air-to-air missile with a range of four

hundred kilometres or more, however, has the potential to fracture the very foundations of this doctrine.

Defence cooperation between China and Pakistan has long transcended the realm of formal agreements and joint exercises. It has matured into a shared strategic consciousness. In this context, systems such as the PL-17 offer Pakistan an indirect yet significant sense of strategic cover—particularly at a time when sustained efforts are under way to tilt the regional balance of power decisively in India's favour.

China's long-range aerial strike capability constrains traditional notions of air superiority within the region. The operational freedom of the Indian Air Force could, as a result, be meaningfully curtailed—an outcome that may serve, indirectly, as a *deterrence stabiliser* for Pakistan. This shift does not signal an invitation to war; rather, it presents an opportunity to preserve equilibrium and prevent any single actor from attaining unchecked dominance.

Chinese media sources indicate that the image of the PL-17 circulated on domestic social media platforms in recent days, though no official confirmation has been offered regarding its timing or location. In this ambiguity lies method. The image itself conforms to China's established military tradition: a symbol that speaks most eloquently through silence.

American analysts broadly concur that the PL-17's primary targets are not conventional fighter aircraft, but **high-value aerial assets**—air-to-air refuelling tankers, airborne warning and control systems (AWACS), and command-and-control platforms. These are the eyes and arteries of modern air warfare; without them, aerial combat becomes blind and enfeebled.

In Pakistan's military planning, air power has always occupied a decisive role. Should China secure a commanding advantage in long-range aerial combat, Pakistan may derive from it a form of strategic depth—one that preserves balance without inviting direct confrontation.

Pakistan's defence partnership with China is not merely transactional, nor confined to the acquisition of weapons. It is rooted in convergent strategic interests. China's growing aerial superiority could provide Pakistan with a more secure strategic environment—provided that Pakistan retains its policy autonomy. China's strength does not absolve Pakistan of responsibility; rather, it demands greater prudence in both defence and diplomacy.

India, within this emerging configuration, increasingly perceives itself as a natural ally of the United States. Yet geography places it faces to face with China. For this reason, Chinese military advancement—particularly in the aerial domain—has generated not just concern but palpable anxiety within Indian strategic circles. A growing realisation is taking hold: should China achieve decisive dominance of the skies, the balance of power in South Asia may no longer tilt in India's favour. It is this apprehension that is propelling India toward accelerated militarisation and deeper entanglement with Western alliances.

At such moments of strategic flux, the Qur'an's reminder acquires renewed resonance:

وَتِلْكَ الْأَيَّامُ نُدَاوِلُهَا بَيْنَ النَّاسِ

“Such days We rotate among people.” (Āl-‘Imrān 3:140)

Power, history teaches us, is never static. It circulates—sometimes announced with thunder, sometimes revealed through a single, carefully released image that changes how the world reads the future.

In the image itself, a PL-17 missile—or a full-scale mock-up indistinguishable from the real article—rests upon a display stand. Standing before it is a figure whose face has been digitally obscured, transforming the individual into a living metaphor for the secrecy that defines Chinese defence planning. Most military specialists believe the object to be a model rather than an operational missile; yet its dimensions appear faithful to reality—and in the martial realm, size is often an unguarded truth-teller.

Within the corridors of the Pentagon, the PL-17 is increasingly viewed as a logical extension of China’s strategic trajectory: an **anti-access/area-denial** instrument designed not to provoke battle, but to deter an adversary before it ever enters the field. Seen from this vantage, the missile becomes less a device of overt force and more an instrument of psychological power—a means of shaping behaviour without firing a shot.

Systems such as the PL-17 may well deepen defence cooperation between the United States and India. As Indo-American strategic convergence intensifies, regional pressures are likely to mount. For Pakistan, this demands restraint rather than reflex, and engagement rather than isolation. Such developments should not be read solely as threats, but as opportunities for policy recalibration—particularly in the domains of air defence and electronic warfare. Yet the other side of this equation cannot be ignored. Heightened military competition among great powers may compel Pakistan to clarify its stance, and history bears sober witness to the fact that neutrality, under pressure, is often the hardest posture to sustain.

According to Chinese sources, the PL series represents a continuum of air-to-air missiles developed for the People’s Liberation Army. Within this lineage, short-range systems such as the PL-10 and medium-range variants like the PL-11 and PL-12 have already secured their place in China’s defensive architecture. The PL-17 thus emerges not as an anomaly, but as the apex of a carefully layered design.

Another concern voiced in Western military circles is that the large-scale deployment of missiles like the PL-17 would force American and allied air forces to operate from greater distances, with heightened caution and escalating costs. In warfare, “expensive” operations are often the first sign of diminishing effectiveness.

For Pakistan, the central test is not the question of alignment, but the preservation of **autonomous military and diplomatic decision-making**. China’s rise presents both opportunity and ordeal—an opportunity to sustain balance, and a test of national self-possession. Pressures of bloc politics may intensify; regional instability could impinge upon Pakistan’s economic priorities; and excessive reliance upon any single power risks becoming a strategic vulnerability. The United States may view India as a pawn in this triangular contest, yet history teaches that pawns, in the games of great

powers, often begin to imagine themselves kings—and such illusions have repeatedly given birth to catastrophe.

True power does not reside in weapons alone. It lies in economic resilience, diplomatic equilibrium, and military prudence.

Reports suggest that the PL-17 has been under development for at least a decade, passing through multiple phases of refinement. Yet official information has remained deliberately sparse. The missile

has never been paraded with theatrical flourish, nor prominently featured in exercise footage. Still, since around 2016, a few attentive observers have reportedly sighted it mounted on the J-16 fighter—quiet confirmations rather than public declarations.

European defence analysts, less vocal yet deeply attentive, are observing these developments with growing concern. To them, the PL-17 signals that China is no longer merely a regional power, but a state increasingly capable of shaping global military benchmarks—a prospect that carries long-term implications for Europe's strategic calculus.

Should Pakistan read this shifting balance with wisdom, it need not remain a reactive state; it could instead emerge as a voice of stability within the region. If the moment is squandered, however, history offers a grim lesson: in contests among the powerful, the fate of the unwary has rarely been kind. With judicious choices, Pakistan can present itself not as a weak actor in a changing world, but as a responsible and effective one. Investment in air defence systems and electronic warfare, insistence on technology transfer within defence cooperation with China, balanced diplomatic engagement with the United States and other global powers, and an active diplomatic role in reducing regional tensions—these are not optional ambitions, but strategic necessities.

China, by contrast, continues to avoid direct confrontation, employing power primarily as **deterrence**. Missiles such as the PL-17 are an extension of this philosophy: designed not to fight wars, but to prevent them.

On the basis of the limited imagery available, one American military analysis website has estimated the missile's length to exceed six metres—approximately twenty feet. Analysts assess it to be a radar-guided, long-range air-to-air missile with a potential reach beyond four hundred kilometres. It is this figure, more than any other, that has stirred unease across global defence circles.

As far as India is concerned, the PL-17 is not viewed as a distant Pacific concern. Indian strategic thinkers increasingly link it directly to the Sino-Indian balance of power—particularly against the backdrop of persistent border tensions that have become a defining feature of bilateral relations.

Thus, for Pakistan, the significance of weapons like the PL-17 lies not merely in their range, but in the breadth of political insight they demand: how power is perceived, how it is interpreted, and how it is restrained. Within this triangular balance, Pakistan remains a quiet yet consequential factor. Its



geography, proximity to China, and historic rivalry with India place it at a juncture where a single misstep could push the region toward instability.

At such moments, a timeless reminder acquires renewed relevance:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ

"Indeed, God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves." (al-Ra'd 13:11)

In the end, missiles may shape the horizon of power—but it is wisdom, restraint, and foresight that determine how a nation walks beneath it.

For Pakistan, the central challenge is not embodied in any single weapon or any one country. It lies, rather, in the timely comprehension of a changing global reality—and in the capacity to adapt accordingly. National security now demands a synthesis of power, prudence, and economic resilience within a single strategic vision. If wisdom prevails, this emerging triangular balance may yet spare South Asia from the descent into a new cold war. If, however, pride, fear, or miscalculation gain the upper hand, history will once again record that power outran reason.

By contrast, the longest-range air-to-air missile currently in operational service with the United States Air Force—the AIM-120D—has a reported maximum range of approximately 160 kilometres. This comparison speaks eloquently in its own austere language.

Indian defence analysts caution that should China deploy long-range missiles such as the PL-17 effectively within its Western Theatre Command, the operational freedom of the Indian Air Force could be significantly constrained—particularly for platforms dependent on aerial refuelling and airborne surveillance. The implications are not theoretical; they touch the very sinews of modern air operations.

In its annual report on China's military power, submitted to the U.S. Congress in December, the Pentagon explicitly noted that a J-16 fighter equipped with the PL-17 could possess a strike reach exceeding 1,400 kilometres. The risk, therefore, is not confined to the missile alone; it extends across the entire aerial system that carries, guides, and sustains it.

It is within this context that voices in India are calling for a reassessment of air defence capabilities, missile technologies, and the selection of strategic partners. Defence cooperation with the United States, France, and Israel is increasingly viewed not merely as procurement, but as a means of restoring technological balance.

Analysts further suggest that the PL-17 may incorporate an advanced **AESA radar seeker**, similar to that already employed in the PL-15 missile. The PL-15 entered operational service in 2015 and is believed to possess a range exceeding 200 kilometres. In this evolutionary sequence, the PL-17 appears as the next—and markedly more formidable—link in the chain.

Within the broader panorama of international power relations, the PL-17 stands as a clear signal that the world is once again drifting toward a **multipolar military order**. The era in which one or two

powers exercised uncontested dominion over the skies is gradually receding into the margins of history.

Chinese media reports indicate that imagery of the PL-17 first surfaced in 2016, when it was observed during testing phases mounted on the J-16 fighter. The J-16 is China's most powerful heavy multirole combat aircraft and, to date, the only platform on which the PL-17's integration has been confirmed—suggesting a pairing designed with deliberate exclusivity, as though weapon and aircraft were fashioned for one another.

Students of military history understand that the balance of power is not altered by weapons alone, but by the **idea** of those weapons. The PL-17 may not yet have fully entered operational maturity, but its very concept is already shaping allied planning, air exercises, and defence budgets.

From Beijing's perspective, the PL-17 is neither a proclamation of aggression nor an invitation to war. It is the extension of a philosophy that seeks strength sufficient to make war unnecessary. It is at this juncture that military capability begins to speak the language of diplomacy. To regard the PL-17 merely as a missile is thus underestimate its significance. In truth, it is a symbol—a symbol of a global centre of gravity in gradual motion, a movement now reflected even in the skies.

If military history teaches any enduring lesson, it is that **silent preparation is often the loudest declaration**. The PL-17 may well be the embodiment of that silence—a name not yet fully spoken, but whose echo is already audible across the Pacific horizon.

Power, when stripped of wisdom, becomes disorder; wisdom, when divorced from power, remains only a prayer. The modern world requires both. Pakistan, therefore, must carve its own path between the two.

This is not an age defined by noise, but by balance. The nation that comprehends balance is the nation that secures its place in history. This essay is not news; it is a marginal note written in advance, a line whose meaning time will slowly underline. The PL-17 may today appear as an indistinct shadow—but in the annals of power, shadows have often been the first heralds of gathering storms.

And here, a final reminder resonates beyond strategy and steel:

وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا

"Hold firmly to the bond of God, all together, and do not become divided." (Āl-'Imrān 3:103)

In an era of shifting power and sharpening silhouettes, unity of purpose, clarity of judgment, and restraint of ambition remain the surest safeguards against the tempests that lie ahead.

Sunday, March 1, 2026

From Tension to Prudence

Gunpowder or Insight?

Frontiers in Flame: History, Sovereignty, and the Burden of Judgment

Frontiers are seldom mere lines traced upon a map by the cool geometry of surveyors. They are the burnished inscriptions of history itself—etched not in ink alone but in migration, mingled civilisations, covenant and betrayal, and in the austere alloy of blood and iron. The Pakistan–Afghanistan border belongs to that stern and storied category of boundaries which refuse to be reduced to cartographic convenience. Its mountains do not stand in mute indifference; they bear witness to oaths sworn and broken, to empires assembled and undone. Even the wind that sweeps through its passes carries more than dust: it carries remembrance.

Now, at a moment when diplomatic tension has hardened into open military confrontation—when Afghanistan’s overt assaults upon Pakistan have marked the formal commencement of war—the crisis can no longer be dismissed as a transient dispute between two neighbouring states. It has become a question that weighs upon the entire region’s future. This is not merely a bilateral quarrel; it is an ordeal for a civilisational space long bound together by religious affinity, cultural interdependence, and the unchosen intimacy of geography. Gunfire may deliver an immediate and brutal pronouncement; history, however, renders its verdict in a more exacting tribunal—where prudence, moderation, and statesmanship carry greater authority than indignation.

What follows, therefore, is neither apologia nor indictment. It is an attempt at sober examination: a search for clarity amidst the fog of accusation and counteraccusation; a refusal to treat this crisis as ephemeral newsprint, and instead to consider it as part of a longer, unfinished chronicle—particularly now, as flames burn on both sides of the frontier.

The boundary between the Indian Subcontinent and the lands once known as Khurasan is not simply a geographical divide. It is a smouldering line in the manuscript of history. Here, the echo of power has alternated between the thunder of artillery and the fragile authority of treaties—some solemnly drafted, many insufficiently sustained. When Pakistan conducted aerial strikes in Afghanistan’s eastern provinces—Nangarhar, Paktia, and Khost—it was an action freighted with symbolism as much as with strategy. It declared that the state would not remain a silent spectator where the preservation of its territorial integrity was concerned.

The operations carried out on Saturday, 21 February, were hardly incidental manoeuvres. According to Pakistani security officials, seven sites allegedly linked to Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) were targeted in those eastern provinces—locations from which, Islamabad contends, attacks upon Pakistani soil were being orchestrated. It was claimed that approximately eighty militants were killed. To construe such action as merely tactical would be naïve. Domestically, it signalled that the writ of the state remains operative. Externally, it served as a sign that continued cross-border aggression would invite response under the doctrine of self-defence.

Kabul, however, condemned the strikes as a violation of sovereignty and alleged civilian casualties, including women and children. The interim Afghan authorities warned of retaliation—and that

warning has since been translated into action. Thus has the lexicon of diplomacy yielded to the vocabulary of war.

In modern international law, sovereignty occupies an almost sacrosanct status; its breach is seldom regarded as anything less than aggression. A limited strike may, under certain conditions, be contained within diplomatic dispute. But when reciprocal cross-border attacks commence, the matter escapes the realm of diplomatic protest and enters that of armed confrontation—as we now witness.

At the heart of this impasse lies the interpretation of what is commonly referred to as the Doha Agreement. Though formally concluded between the United States and the Afghan Taliban, its implications have radiated far beyond the original signatories. Among its principal undertakings was the assurance that Afghan territory would not be used to threaten or attack other states. Pakistan argues that this commitment has not been honoured in substance—that militant groups hostile to Islamabad continue to find sanctuary within Afghan territory, thereby violating not merely the letter but the spirit of the accord. The Taliban authorities counter that Pakistan's insurgency is a domestic problem, the burden of which cannot be transferred across the frontier.

Here, the dispute is less about language than about meaning. Interpretation thrives in the climate of trust; it withers in suspicion. This is the point at which the line between “covenant” and “accusation” begins to blur. History instructs us that agreements unsupported by mutual confidence are reduced to paper fragments scattered by the first strong wind. The question, therefore, is not solely juridical. It is moral and political: when intention itself is doubted, words forfeit their authority.

President Asif Ali Zardari has warned that the presence of militant sanctuaries in Afghanistan risks propelling the world towards a catastrophe reminiscent of the attacks of 11 September 2001—an event that irrevocably reshaped global politics. His invocation of a “new 9/11” is not mere rhetorical flourish. It is a calculated appeal to international memory—a reminder that crises which appear regionally in theatre may, in consequence, prove global in reach. The trauma of September 2001 altered the architecture of international security; it remains a cautionary emblem of what neglected threats may become.

Yet beneath the rhetoric of sovereignty and counter-terrorism lies another dimension, less dramatic but no less profound: the paralysis of trade, the suffocation of fragile economies, and the mounting anxiety of civilian populations. When border crossings close, it is not only military convoys that are halted; commerce falters, livelihoods wither, and scarcity tightens its grip. Economic contraction breeds social unrest; unrest, in turn, offers fertile ground to extremism. Thus, the cycle of insecurity perpetuates itself.

Pakistan maintains that Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan enjoys safe haven across the border. Kabul rejects this claim, insisting that TTP is an internal Pakistani matter. Again, the divergence lies not in vocabulary but in interpretation—and interpretation cannot endure where trust has eroded. When suspicion clouds intention, language itself grows infirm.

The present war, therefore, is not merely a contest of arms. It is a contest of narratives, of principles,

and of credibility. Whether the region moves towards prolonged conflagration or halting de-escalation will depend not only upon military calculus but upon political imagination. Statesmanship is most severely tested not in moments of triumph but in moments of anger.

History's tribunal remains patient, but it is exacting. It does not judge merely who fired first, but who possessed the wisdom to know when to cease.

This is no mere utterance in the theatre of domestic politics. It is, rather, an appeal addressed to the conscience of the world — a reminder that when frontiers grow porous and authority falters, the spark struck in one valley may yet set alight distant capitals. President **Asif Ali Zardari**, in his recent intervention, cautioned the international community that the continued indulgence of non-state militant sanctuaries risks ushering the world to the brink of another calamity, not unlike the convulsion that followed the **September 11 attacks**, when the certainties of global politics were so violently undone.

His words are widely interpreted as an attempt to stir dormant will — to awaken that shared historical memory which, after 2001, gave rise to the doctrine of collective action against terrorism. Pakistan, it seems, seeks to rekindle that moment of solidarity, so that Afghanistan's instability may once more be recognised not as a peripheral affliction but as a matter of urgent global concern. The message, stripped to its essence, is stark: if silence prevails today, tomorrow's reckoning will not be confined by geography. Yet the question persists — now that hostilities have begun in earnest, will the international community remain content with statements of concern, or will it summon the sterner discipline of practical diplomacy?

Reports emerging of formalised attacks from the Afghan side — artillery fire upon border posts, alleged violations of airspace, and in certain sectors the grim gravity of ground engagements — suggest that the situation has advanced beyond the realm of a limited dispute and stands perilously near the threshold of open war. Wars, as history has taught with weary consistency, begin with a suddenness that startles; they end, more often than not, in protracted exhaustion.

There is, however, another theatre in which this conflict unfolds: that of commerce, sustenance, and the fragile equilibrium of civil society. When border crossings are sealed, it is bread, not bullets, that first bears the injury. Trade routes constricted, supply chains disrupted, fuel and food rendered scarcely, these are the slow violences that corrode a nation's sinews. Economic privation breeds social unrest; unrest, in turn, provides fertile soil for extremism. Thus, does military tension incubate economic crisis, and economic crisis give birth to militancy.

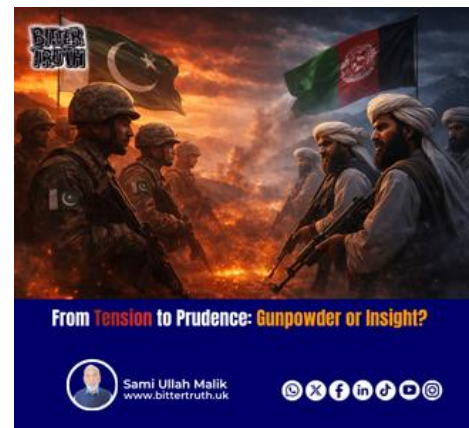
For months now, the gravest questions have not been purely martial but humanitarian and economic. The suspension of cross-border trade — once measured in billions of dollars annually — has left commerce nearly paralysed. Border communities grow restless; whispers of a fresh tide of refugees gather force. Economic contraction swells the ranks of the unemployed; unemployment becomes the nursery of radicalisation. One is confronted with a vicious cycle in which insecurity feeds destitution, and destitution, insecurity. How long can either state sustain such a burden? Does a window for dialogue yet remain ajar, or are we witnessing the slow rehearsal of that familiar and hazardous script so often described, euphemistically, as "regime change"?

Pakistan presents itself as a bulwark against the advancing tide of terror — a “front-line state,” the wall upon which the first blow falls. The metaphor is deliberate and freighted with post-2001 resonance, when Islamabad cast itself as the foremost bastion in the global war on terror. A wall, however, if subjected to unrelenting assault, will in time develop fissures; and should it crumble, the debris may bury more than its immediate custodian.

Islamabad’s contention is that the threat does not end at Quetta or Lahore; its shadow stretches toward Western capitals. This assertion finds reinforcement in reports of the **United Nations Security Council**, which have acknowledged the continued presence of extremist organisations in Afghanistan, among them **Al-Qaeda**. More recent assessments have likewise drawn attention to the activities of **Islamic State – Khorasan Province**, deepening anxieties across the region.

Neighbouring states — **China, Iran, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan** — have voiced their unease, each for reasons rooted in its own strategic calculus: frontier security, the movement of foreign fighters, the spectre of unrest spilling across borders. The matter has thus transcended the confines of a bilateral quarrel; it has become a question touching the collective security architecture of Central and South Asia alike.

The wider international tableau is scarcely more tranquil. The world remains entangled in the attritional conflict between **Russia and Ukraine**, while tensions in the Middle East — not least the fraught exchanges involving **Iran, the United States, and Israel** — have further crowded the global agenda. Afghanistan has slipped, almost imperceptibly, down the list of international priorities. Yet history bears austere witness: the neglect of Afghanistan has seldom come cheaply, whether in the era of Soviet intervention or in the aftermath of the American campaign.



Should the present confrontation between Pakistan and Afghanistan lengthen into a sustained war, the region may once again command the uneasy attention of the great powers. A research fellow in **Hong Kong** observes that as the Syrian theatre cools, certain militant currents appear to be redirecting themselves toward Afghanistan — a silent migration that may presage a more turbulent season. The world, preoccupied elsewhere, may fail to notice the gathering storm until it has already broken.

This, then, is the abiding peril: that in an age distracted by multiple crises, the slow-burning fuse in Afghanistan is permitted to smoulder unchecked. To disregard the warning would not be an act of prudence, but of perilous complacency. History has seldom been kind to those who mistook the rumble of distant thunder for the passing of a harmless cloud.

Even before the recent escalation, remarks attributed to Pakistan’s Defence Minister, **Khawaja Muhammad Asif**, had given rise to the impression that should the present administration in Kabul fail to discharge what are deemed its international obligations, alternative possibilities might be contemplated. The outbreak of hostilities has rendered that discussion infinitely more intricate.

What might once have been couched as strategic conjecture now stands exposed to the harsher scrutiny of war.

Yet within diplomatic circles, such a course is regarded as fraught with peril. The doctrine of “regime change” appears deceptively tidy upon paper; in the untidy theatre of lived history, it has more often proven combustible. The experience of **Iraq**, **Libya**, and indeed **Afghanistan** itself offers sobering testimony: externally induced transformations rarely yield durable stability. The architecture of imposed order seldom survives the withdrawal of its architects.

Military action, therefore, cannot be mistaken for settlement. It may silence guns; it does not reconcile grievances. Experienced observers of Pak–Afghan relations concede the presence of foreign fighters within Afghanistan yet insist that force alone will not extinguish the embers of extremism. They advocate instead the subtler arts of back-channel diplomacy — for the quiet word exchanged in confidence has, at times altered the course of history more profoundly than the thunder of artillery.

At the same time, the wider geometry of the region must not be ignored. Evidence, according to Islamabad, has accumulated suggesting that **India** has lent support to anti-Pakistan elements operating from Afghan soil — an allegation New Delhi emphatically denies, even as Pakistani officials maintain that their evidentiary submissions remain unanswered in substance. Such claims, whether vindicated or refuted, contribute to the slow drift toward proxy politics, where confrontation is waged obliquely and the battlefield is displaced from declared frontiers. In a region shadowed by nuclear capability, the perils of miscalculation are self-evident.

Pakistan’s endurance, many within the country contend, is nearing its limit. Extremist violence has seeped from remote borderlands toward the capital itself, converting what was once peripheral unrest into a question of national survival. Islamabad professes its desire for stability and increasingly looks eastward — toward **China** — as though hoping that Asian diplomacy might steady Western anxieties. Meanwhile, the Afghan spokesman **Zabihullah Mujahid** has demanded the transfer of certain detainees alleged to be affiliated with extremist organisations — a request Islamabad has declined, arguing that prisoner exchanges are governed by the disciplines of international law and bilateral accord, not by rhetorical assertion. The episode has further chilled an already brittle atmosphere of trust.

Diplomatic and commercial relations remain, for the present, effectively frozen. Pakistani officials assert that documentary evidence has been presented in negotiations, only for Kabul to question the very existence of the problem. Yet when an ailment is denied, how shall a remedy be prescribed? Prolonged stagnation risks entrenching suspicion within both societies, rendering reconciliation ever more elusive. Seasoned envoys caution that the military path rarely yields durable peace; only sustained engagement, discreet negotiation, and regional cooperation offer the prospect of de-escalation.

The fundamental question thus emerges with stark clarity: can the two states transcend the reflex of force and rediscover the disciplines of confidence-building and dialogue? History’s verdict is

unambiguous. Enduring peace has seldom been born from the barrel of a gun; it has more often emerged from patience, prudence, and political imagination.

It is in this fraught context that the echo of governmental change reverberates once more. Certain official statements have been interpreted as intimating that, should Kabul's authorities persist in what Islamabad deems dereliction, alternative arrangements might be explored. Yet analysts warn that the remedy of regime change often deepens the wound it purports to heal. A more practicable course, some suggest, would lie in strengthening moderate currents within the Taliban itself — allowing transformation to arise organically rather than be imposed externally.

Those with experience in diplomatic statecraft counsel restraint. Military escalation may breed only further fragmentation; therefore, priority should be accorded to the restoration of back-channel contacts, the establishment of joint border-monitoring mechanisms, and perhaps a regional conference drawing together **Iran, China**, and the Central Asian republics. These avenues are

arduous, yet they are preferable to the blind alley of perpetual hostility.

Islamabad has further alleged that **Israel**, alongside India and other unnamed actors, has supported anti-Pakistan elements from Afghan territory — accusations firmly rejected by the states concerned. Whatever the veracity of such claims, their circulation complicates an already intricate regional chessboard. Central Asian governments, too, express anxiety regarding the presence and mobility of foreign militants. The demand for a coherent regional strategy grows more insistent.

Some analysts contend that sustainable reform is more likely to emerge from within Afghan leadership than from the application of external pressure. Pakistani authorities, however, maintain that the struggle against extremism is inescapable and that national security, together with the protection of citizens, admits of no compromise.

Pakistan's stated aim, it insists, is not dominion but responsibility: that Afghanistan should honour its commitments as a sovereign state. Heavy-handed military action risks inflaming public sentiment, which hostile powers might then exploit. Hence the argument for restoring discreet lines of communication — to thaw the frost of mistrust before it hardens irretrievably.

At this martial juncture, the decisive issue remains whether the two countries will drift toward total war or arrest themselves after limited engagement in search of diplomatic reprieve. The opening declarations of conflict are invariably impassioned; yet states, in the end, act in accordance with perceived interest. Should hostilities protract, both economies, domestic stability, and regional alignments would come under acute strain.

Certain diplomatic sources suggest that back-channel communications have not entirely ceased. **China**, along with other regional actors, may yet assume a mediatory role. If so, the present crisis might be contained before it matures into wider conflagration. But should military operations intensify unchecked, the vacuum thus created may invite non-state actors to widen the theatre of conflict — and what began as a border war could metastasise into something far more intractable.

In such moments, prudence is not timidity; it is statesmanship. And history, that stern tutor, seldom absolves those who mistake escalation for strength or impatience for resolve.

Pakistan maintains that national security and the protection of its citizens will be ensured at any cost. Afghanistan, for its part, declares that sovereignty is not a negotiable commodity. Each narrative, taken in isolation, possesses its own internal logic and rhetorical force. Yet wars are not ultimately adjudicated by declarations, however resolute; they are determined by facts upon the ground — and the stubborn truth is that for several years Islamabad has sought, with what it describes as substantial evidence in hand, to persuade the Afghan Taliban to restrain cross-border militancy emanating from Afghan soil. Pakistan contends that these efforts have yielded insufficient practical response, and that Kabul, rather than engaging the matter with due seriousness, has drifted into the orbit of rival regional interests — notably **India** and **Israel** — a charge those states reject.

Be that as it may, the present crisis is rendered especially delicate by the internal pressures bearing down upon both governments. Public sentiment runs high; media rhetoric has hardened; social platforms reverberate with appeals to national honour. In such an atmosphere, retreat or compromise is politically perilous. Yet history offers a stern lesson: it is the mark of wise leadership

not to allow the vessel of prudence to founder amid the tempest of emotion.

The relationship between Pakistan and **Afghanistan** is not confined to the parchment of treaties. It is woven from centuries of cultural intercourse, shared memory, and religious affinity. War may invert the chessboard for a season; it cannot wholly sever the deeper fibers of civilisation. The question, therefore, is whether the present flames can be contained, or whether they will spread across the region's dry undergrowth.

For when trust frays, and politics is stripped of wisdom, even fraternity becomes burdened, and neighbourhood shades into estrangement. The essential inquiry endures: is the remedy to be found in gunpowder or in judgement? Can regime change deliver stability, or will it merely summon fresh disorder? More fundamentally still — can both states rise above the constraints of their internal narratives and undertake the patient construction of a shared future? If the answer be affirmative, history stands ready to open a new chapter; if negative, this tension may metastasise beyond a border dispute into a wider regional conflagration.

In the court of history, nations are vindicated not by strength alone, but by the capacity to marry strength with wisdom, resolve with restraint. Should dialogue be restored, the thunder along the frontier might yet dissolve into the hum of markets and the traffic of ordinary life. Should it fail, the embers now glowing along the boundary may cast a far wider and more enduring glare.

At the heart of the matter lies a question as old as statecraft itself: can durable peace be secured through force? History suggests otherwise. The rifle may clear a path; it cannot reveal the destination. If Kabul were to undertake a demonstrable and serious effort to purge its territory of armed groups, and if Islamabad were to sustain its commitment to diplomatic engagement, the possibility of thaw might emerge. Otherwise, the mountain of mistrust will continue to cast its long shadow across the region.

This is no mere neighbourly quarrel. It is a relationship shaped by centuries of cultural consonance — one easier to recast in the Mould of enmity than to sustain in the discipline of peace. Should a renewed sense of mutual responsibility prevail, the present fog of tension may yet lift. Failing that, the crisis risks ensnaring not only two nations but the wider equilibrium of South and Central Asia. The choice remains. Conflict may be widened, or prudence may be sought. The war has begun; its ending has not yet been inscribed. That decision rests with the present generation of leaders — whether they bequeath another theatre of grievance to posterity or lay the arduous but enduring foundations of peace.

What is required now is balance: to temper the heat of passion with the coolness of judgement; to align military pressure with diplomatic insight; to ensure that the clamour of accusation does not drown the quieter voice of dialogue. If leadership can rise above immediate rhetoric and decide in favour of future generations, this episode may be remembered as a trial weathered — not as a wound unhealed.

Otherwise, the sparks rising from the frontier may refuse confinement. A fire that might have been extinguished by timely wisdom could redden distant horizons. The alternative still stands before us: the widening road of confrontation, or the harder, nobler highway of prudence. History will bear witness to the path chosen.

Tuesday, March 3, 2026

Power, Prudence, and Fate

Dust at Dusk

There are junctures in history when time itself appears to pause, as though the age were drawing breath before pronouncing its next decree, and the fate of nations is weighed in the narrow scales of a handful of decisions. The Middle East now stands upon such a threshold—where the language of power, the fire of ideology, the pulse of the global economy, and the fragile respiration of diplomacy have become entangled in a knot of uncommon complexity.

The admonitory pronouncements of Ali Khamenei, the avowedly combative instincts of Donald Trump, the meticulous war-gaming of the United States Department of Defense, and the acute sensitivities surrounding the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab El-Mandeb together compose a tableau in which it is not merely bullets that are in motion, but the very chessboard of international politics that is being reset. This is no ordinary exchange of fire; it is the rearrangement of the strategic grammar of a region whose tremors are seldom confined to its own frontiers.

To characterise the moment as a simple confrontation between Iran, the United States, and Israel would be to mistake the shadow for the substance. What is unfolding is a contest between ideological persistence and global interest; between the continuity of revolution and the assertion of primacy; between the rhetoric of resistance and the doctrine—so often rehearsed in Washington—of “regime change”. The question is not which side commands the greater arsenal. The more searching inquiry is which possesses the deeper reservoir of patience, the steadier faculty of judgement, and the longer horizon of statecraft.

Beneath the visible architecture of military manoeuvre lies a substratum of domestic calculation, the volatility of global energy markets, the unease of the Gulf monarchies, and the cautious alignment of the world’s major powers. Should the waters of the Strait of Hormuz grow turbulent, the echo will be heard not merely in the Gulf but in Tokyo, Beijing, Berlin, and New Delhi. Should the gate of Bab el-Mandeb shudder, European markets will feel the tremor in their very ledgers. In an age of interdependence, a regional spark may yet illuminate the farthest reaches of the globe.

This essay seeks to gather these strands into a single, intelligible whole—not merely to recount events in their chronology, but to discern the meanings that lie beneath their surface. Here, words are not employed simply to report occurrences; they are summoned to register the heartbeat of an era. Analysis is not confined to the enumeration of assets and losses; it aspires to hold the present up to the mirror of history. Let us therefore read this unfolding drama not with a cursory glance, but with the attentive eye of reflection—for what is being inscribed today may well furnish the chapter headings of tomorrow’s history.

Weeks ago, when Ali Khamenei issued his warning, it was not the casual flourish of a routine communiqué. It bore the cadence of ideological proclamation and the weight of strategic intent. Since the upheaval of 1979, the leadership born of the Iranian Revolution has declined to regard itself as merely the custodian of a nation-state; it has conceived of itself as the nucleus of a revolutionary axis. Thus, when Khamenei declared—on the anniversary of that revolution—that should America

ignite war and spread across the entire region, the statement was less a threat than a thesis: a proposition about the geometry of conflict in a connected theatre.

The meaning was plain to those prepared to listen. Iran signalled that its influence did not terminate at its borders; that political networks, allied movements, and asymmetrical capabilities extended its reach beyond its own territory. It would not consent to encirclement. The doctrine implied was one of retaliatory diffusion: if the centre were struck, the reverberation would travel outward to the circumference. And when Tehran has since sought to give operational form to those earlier words, one is compelled to observe how rhetoric, under certain pressures, may transmute into ordnance.

The reverberations of Iranian missiles across the airspace of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates were not merely acts of reprisal; they were cartographic messages. According to the United States Department of Defense, approximately forty thousand American personnel remain stationed across the Middle East. The vast Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar functions as a central nervous system for aerial command and control; the Fifth Fleet in Bahrain anchors maritime power; installations in Kuwait, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia form a lattice of readiness that, from Tehran's vantage, resembles not a shield alone but a tightening cordon.

In Washington's lexicon, this posture is defensive and stabilising. In Tehran's, it is the politics of encirclement—a sustained military pressure whose permanence alters the regional equilibrium. The Gulf has thus become a chessboard upon which every square is freighted with consequence, and every piece is implicated in a larger design.

Why, then, should Iran direct its response toward Gulf states rather than exclusively toward the United States itself? The answer lies in the perennial question of escalation: who shall delimit the theatre of war? Tehran appears intent upon demonstrating that if a front is opened against it, the heat will not be contained within Iranian territory. Its conduct may be read through the lens of deterrence—the Cold War logic whereby the prospect of intolerable cost restrains an adversary's hand. If Iran is encircled, it implies, the walls of the encirclement cannot presume immunity.

Striking at facilities within host states is not, in this view, solely a message to Washington but an address to the hosts themselves. It is a form of indirect resonance: pressure applied in Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, Doha, or Amman is intended to echo in the corridors of Washington. Military partnership, the message suggests, may exact its price in local vulnerability.

For Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar, economic stability is not an accessory but the cornerstone of national policy. Energy infrastructure, ports, and urban development projects are ill-suited to protracted turmoil. Their predicament is that of a double-edged sword. They rely upon the American security umbrella; yet they harbour no appetite for open war with Iran. If hostilities remain confined to American assets and spare oil installations, it is conceivable that these states will strive to avoid direct confrontation, coupling formal denunciations with practical restraint. Behind the scenes, one may expect heightened defensive preparations and discreet diplomatic efforts to lower the temperature.

In politics, silence can be a strategy and caution itself a declaration. The Gulf monarchies, poised between protection and peril, must calculate not only the cost of action but the consequence of

association. In such an hour, prudence may prove the most eloquent of policies.

The immediate reverberation of Iranian action is registered not only in the theatre of war but upon the trading floors of the world. In an energy market so finely balanced, even the suspicion of disrupted supply is sufficient to quicken prices. It is therefore unsurprising that the first discernible tremor of Tehran's moves has appeared in the upward flicker of oil benchmarks. Markets, like nervous systems, respond to the faintest hint of pain.

Should Shi'a militias in Iraq expand their operational tempo, American installations may find themselves exposed to fresh hazards, while Israeli targets confront a new and volatile calculus. Investor confidence—never an inexhaustible resource—would inevitably suffer. Thus the circumference of conflict has extended beyond borders and battlefields; it now presses upon the very pulse of the global economy.

The international energy market already exhibits visible signs of agitation. In such a climate, the mere prospect of constraint in oil or gas supply suffices to propel prices skyward. Asia's industrial economies—above all China, Japan, and South Korea—remain materially dependent upon Gulf hydrocarbons. Europe, having only recently weathered successive energy shocks, can ill afford another season of instability. This confrontation, therefore, is not regional in its consequences but intercontinental in its reach.

According to assessments circulated by the Stimson Center, Iran has adhered to a phased and pre-announced pattern of retaliation. In other words, Tehran appears intent upon aligning deed with declaration, thereby preserving the credibility of its narrative. The strategy, while likely to strain relations with Gulf capitals, was foreshadowed by explicit warnings: if regional states proved unable—or unwilling—to restrain American operations, they must be prepared for the consequences. Some analysts discern in this posture a politics of calibrated pressure—an attempt to induce Gulf governments to advocate de-escalation and impress upon Washington the mounting costs of adventurism.

Indeed, Iran seems determined not to confine the quarrel solely to the United States and Israel, but to broaden its ambit so that the burdens of war are more widely shared. If the price of escalation is borne collectively, then the calls for its cessation may arise organically from the very capitals that now practice guarded silence. The implicit logic is plain: widen the circle of impact, and you multiply the number of stakeholders in restraint. Such is the arithmetic of strategic diffusion.

Although Iranian strikes have thus far inflicted limited infrastructural damage in the Gulf, the impression has nevertheless taken root that Tehran operates under acute pressure. When a state concludes that it has little left to lose, its conduct may become bolder—at times even desperate. Reports of damage to residential structures in the United Arab Emirates and of attacks near Kuwait's airport have sharpened that perception of fragility. Yet it is plausible that Gulf governments, rather than resorting to direct retaliation, will privilege defensive readiness and strategic patience. In the clamour of war, restraint can prove the most formidable of weapons.

Domestically, Iran contends with the cumulative weight of sanctions, inflation, and social unease.

External confrontation can, for a time, serve as a solvent of internal division, forging unity in the crucible of perceived siege. But should material losses mount, that same instrument may recoil upon its wielder. For Tehran, the maintenance of equilibrium between outward defiance and inward stability is therefore not merely desirable but imperative.

For his part, Donald Trump has been unambiguous in declaring regime change in Iran as an objective. Such rhetoric amounts not merely to policy preference but to a direct challenge to the architecture of the Iranian state. It exerts psychological pressure even as it proclaims political resolve. The suggestion that the Iranian populace might be stirred to the streets betrays a hope for internal rupture. Yet history offers sobering counsel: transformations induced by external coercion often inaugurate prolonged disorder and yield consequences no strategist fully anticipates. The experiences of Iraq and Libya remain cautionary. In a polity as institutionally entrenched as Iran, sudden collapse appears improbable; protracted uncertainty, however, is far from inconceivable.

Scholars at the Stimson Center, including Barbara Slavin, have warned that even senior Iranian officials—conceivably the Supreme Leader himself—could become targets. The removal of high command rarely produces a vacuum for long; it may instead summon forth a harder line or engender extended instability. Iran's institutional lattice—the armed forces, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the judiciary—constitutes a resilient network capable of absorbing abrupt shocks. Leadership change does not invariably entail systemic transformation.

It is conceivable that the United States and Israel will concentrate their efforts upon constraining Iran's missile and nuclear capacities rather than pursuing comprehensive regime overthrow. A gradualist approach—degrading military assets, applying pressure to civilian leadership, and encouraging domestic protest—presents itself as a conceivable path. Yet it is a path both narrow and perilous. The planning of the United States Department of Defense appears oriented towards diminishing Iran's missile, drone, and nuclear infrastructure: a strategy of capability reduction rather than explicit systemic replacement. Between the two, however, the boundary is slender, and miscalculation ever a lurking hazard.

Gulf leaders perceive with increasing clarity that the war has approached their own thresholds, even as their principal ambition has been economic diversification and regional development. The crisis is an unwelcome encumbrance. Though embedded within the American security framework, these states are acutely aware that the costs of escalation are frequently borne upon their own soil. Across the Middle East there is discernible frustration—not solely with the war itself, but with the strategic tenor of the Trump administration. Prospects for swift rapprochement appear dim, yet this does not imply uncritical alignment with every decision emanating from Washington. Hence the pursuit of balanced foreign policies, and the cultivation of ties with Beijing and Moscow, must be understood within this broader calculus.



Recent strikes have, for the moment, swept the negotiating table clear. The candle of diplomacy burns low, and the region seems once more enveloped by flame. Formal channels may be obstructed, yet intermediaries such as Oman and Qatar, alongside certain European governments, may still labour quietly in the interstices of conflict. History reminds us that, on occasion, it is only after the fiercest exchanges that the aperture for compromise reopens. When the guns speak, diplomats are compelled to silence—such has too often been the tragedy of our common past.

The aspiration for transformation in Iran is, for Washington, a wager of uncommon magnitude—one that may stir tempests not only abroad but within the precincts of American politics itself. Public opinion in the United States has long been divided over foreign wars; enthusiasm wanes swiftly when campaigns lengthen and outcomes fall short of promise. Should this conflict prove protracted, or its results equivocal, presidential credibility may suffer, and the tremors could be felt in the theatre of electoral politics. Economic pressures—budget deficits, inflationary strain, and the quotidian anxieties of voters—will weigh heavily upon the national mood.

Donald Trump has, in effect, placed a formidable stake upon the table. His strategy—reshaping the Middle East through the application of military power—revives an enduring ambition, one glimpsed in earlier administrations yet never fully realised. The notion of “re-engineering” the region by force is hardly novel; but the experiences of Iraq and Afghanistan counsel sobriety. Military supremacy does not inexorably beget political stability. Iran’s state architecture is, by most measures, more cohesive than that of post-Saddam Iraq; the consequences, therefore, may differ in form and duration.

Even were air power to cripple Iran’s nuclear capabilities, even were its atomic progress temporarily arrested, and even were authority in Tehran to change hands—however indistinct the subsequent map—one question would remain obstinately unanswered: what then? Is there a coherent political design to follow the clash of arms, or is military success deemed sufficient in itself? Would such an outcome prove durable? And if leadership were altered, would a successor align more closely with the international community, or chart a more fiercely autonomous course?

The United States Department of Defense has reportedly designated its campaign “Operation Epic Fury”—a title as emphatic as it is portentous. Should the flames spread, the political ramifications could extend to the midterm elections in November, with consequences for the Republican Party’s prospects. American opinion remains divided on overseas ventures; when the President acknowledges that “American heroes’ lives may be lost,” he concedes, however obliquely, the risk that this contest may prove both long and costly. In interviews, he has spoken of casualties while simultaneously expressing readiness to speak with Iran’s leadership—a juxtaposition that suggests the tension between martial resolve and diplomatic necessity.

The slogan “Make America Great Again” is rooted in a promise of domestic renewal. If foreign entanglement appears to contradict that pledge, persuading core supporters may become an onerous task. Will advocates of inward consolidation embrace a fresh expedition abroad? Amid inflationary pressures and unresolved domestic concerns, this question may yet confront the President with a stern political reckoning.

Reports indicate that certain senior officials within the Trump administration harboured reservations about a major operation against Iran. Between the rhetoric of escalation and the prudence of restraint, policy divergences appear to have surfaced—an indication that unanimity in decision-making was, at best, imperfect. Such fissures, though seldom publicised, are seldom inconsequential.

The geographical and economic centrality of the Strait of Hormuz may prove decisive in this unfolding drama. This narrow artery, linking the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman, spans roughly twenty-one miles at its tightest point and carries a vast proportion of the world's seaborne crude. By many estimates, between a fifth and a third of global oil trade traverses this corridor; for Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Qatar, it is the principal conduit for energy exports, including liquefied natural gas. Should it be closed, even temporarily, the shock to global energy markets would be profound. Asian economies would feel the impact with immediacy; Europe would be compelled to seek alternative routes and suppliers at considerable cost.

Recent reports suggest that Iran has moved to impede passage through the Strait—an act whose repercussions would extend far beyond the region. Prices could surge; shipping insurance premiums would rise; freight costs would mount; and energy distribution chains would strain under sudden constraint. Japan, India, and China would be driven to secure substitutes with urgency. The global economy, already susceptible to disruption, might confront a crisis of severe magnitude.

The peril is compounded when one considers the Bab el-Mandeb, gateway to the Suez Canal on one flank and the southern entrance to the Red Sea on the other. The Houthi movement has previously demonstrated its capacity to target maritime traffic. Were this non-state actor to render the passage effectively insecure, it would represent a striking instance of asymmetric power shaping global commerce. Disruption here would divert shipping between Europe and Asia around the Cape of Good Hope, lengthening voyages, inflating costs, and delaying delivery. The price of consumer goods would rise accordingly; time itself would become more expensive.

In contemplating the road ahead, three broad scenarios present themselves. First, a limited military engagement accompanied by gradual diplomatic re-engagement. Second, a wider regional conflagration in which maritime routes and energy supplies are gravely impaired. Third, internal political upheaval—either in Iran or in the United States—precipitating a shift in policy. Each path carries its own hazards; none offers assurance.

States such as Turkey, Egypt, and Pakistan are not direct belligerents, yet neither are they insulated from consequence. Their diplomacy may incline towards balance and mediation. Meanwhile, China and Russia may seek to convert crisis into strategic or economic advantage. Following the reported killing of senior Iranian figures, prospects for immediate settlement appear diminished. Both Moscow and Beijing have condemned what they characterise as an American violation of Iranian sovereignty, warning that such actions imperil international peace.

Thus, the conflict stands at a perilous intersection of force and fortune. The decisions taken in Washington and Tehran will not merely determine the fate of a bilateral quarrel; they may recalibrate the strategic architecture of an entire region—and, by extension, the equilibrium of the wider world.

This crisis is not the quarrel of two or three states alone; it is a reckoning with the destiny of an entire region. Iran's strategic calculus, America's military enterprise, the guarded diplomacy of the Gulf monarchies, and the trembling pulse of the global economy are inextricably intertwined. What confronts us is not merely an exchange of gunfire and communiqués, but a contest of narratives and markets, of ideological constancy and entangled global interests. Should prudence fail to prevail, the region may descend into a prolonged season of uncertainty. Yet if reason asserts itself, this very crisis might furnish the prologue to a new diplomatic dispensation. At such a hinge of history, each decision may cast a long shadow across the politics and economies of decades to come.

This struggle is not confined to missiles and pronouncements; it is a collision of doctrines and designs. Iran pursues the fulfilment of its declared commitments; the United States tests the outer limits of its power; and the Gulf states tread the narrow path of equilibrium. At moments such as these, a single spark may set an entire harvest aflame. The question is not whether the fire has been lit, but who possesses the resolve to extinguish it.

When nations surrender to the tide of passion and allow emotion to supplant judgement, history subjects them to stern examination. In the confrontation between Iran and the United States, it is not merely two governments that stand opposed, but two conceptions of power, two political philosophies, and two historical narratives locked in contention. If force is treated as the final and sufficient argument, the conclusion is often one already familiar: regional instability, economic dislocation, and the forging of new alignments born of disorder. Yet should wisdom prevail, this moment of peril may yet become the seedbed of a more balanced order.

The Gulf states continue their delicate traversal of this contest; the global economy quivers; energy markets remain unsettled; and citizens across continents ask whether the price demanded was ever truly inevitable. History instructs us that external interventions frequently yield consequences unforeseen, and that ideological wars are waged not only upon battlefields but within minds and societies. If diplomacy's doors are sealed shut, future generations will inherit the cost; if, however, a glimmer of accommodation emerges from the present darkness, this hour may serve as the preface to a different chapter.

Reader, regard this essay not as a mere catalogue of events, but as a portrait of an age—an age that reminds us that power is transient, yet its repercussions endure. When will the dust rising over the Middle East finally settle? That verdict will be delivered not by missiles alone, but by discernment. And history, in its austere patience, seems once again to pose the question: has America learnt from its past, or does it stand yet again upon the precipice from which it has fallen before?

One cannot ignore the broader pattern of American intervention and its aftermath. Critics contend that the arteries of the American defence industry have too often pulsed with the lifeblood of perpetual conflict. From 1955 to 1975, the long war in Vietnam became one of the most conspicuous and controversial interventions in modern American history. The declared aim was to contain communism; the outcome, after two decades of sacrifice, was a withdrawal whose imagery—helicopters lifting the last personnel from Saigon—remains etched upon the historical conscience.

Following the attacks of 11 September 2001, intervention in Afghanistan was undertaken under the

banner of counterterrorism. The Taliban government was displaced, yet two decades later, upon the withdrawal of American forces, the Taliban returned to power. It was a protracted and intricate campaign whose political conclusion proved deeply challenging for Washington.

In 2003, the invasion of Iraq was justified on assertions of weapons of mass destruction that were never substantiated. Saddam Hussein's regime fell; yet the country endured years of instability and sectarian strife from which it has struggled fully to recover. In 2011, NATO intervention in Libya hastened the end of Muammar Gaddafi's rule, but the aftermath was marked by fragmentation and enduring turbulence.

Elsewhere, interventions such as the 1983 operation in Grenada and the 1989 removal of General Noriega in Panama were declared successes by Washington, yet each formed part of a longer chronicle of contentious engagement. The list is extensive, and the political debates surrounding these ventures have seldom abated. Frequently, the regions concerned have borne prolonged instability as their inheritance.

Is history repeating itself? The question is not rhetorical but urgent. Vietnam taught that local resistance cannot be dismissed as marginal. Iraq demonstrated that dismantling a state apparatus is far easier than constructing a stable alternative. Afghanistan revealed that extended military presence does not guarantee political success. Should the present tensions widen into general war, those same lessons may reassert themselves with renewed force.

The essential inquiry, then, concerns the future of the Middle East and the settling of its storm-raised dust. Dust subsides when diplomacy prevails over militarism; when regional powers choose balance over confrontation; when global actors, having pursued limited objectives, reopen the door to negotiation. History has shown repeatedly that power is transient, though its consequences may endure for generations. If foresight triumphs, the crisis may remain contained. If passion governs, it may inaugurate decades of instability.

The dust that now swirls above the Middle East will not be settled by rockets, but by negotiation; not by martial triumph, but by political sagacity. And so, history, with quiet persistence, poses its enduring question: has humanity truly learnt from its past, or does it once more approach the same precipice from which it has fallen time and again?

Saturday, March 7, 2026

A Dangerous Moment in the Great Game

The Quiet Chessboard of Global Power

In the long procession of history, certain occurrences rise above the level of mere events. They do not simply happen; they redirect the current of time itself. Such moments stand in the chronicles of nations like milestones upon a winding road—markers that signal not merely passage, but transformation. Nowhere is this phenomenon more evident than in the turbulent annals of the Middle East. From time to time the region appears to pause, as though history itself has drawn breath, awaiting the unfolding of some grave upheaval or unexpected turn of destiny. In that theatre of power and intrigue, certain incidents transcend the character of tragedy alone; they emerge instead as turning points that alter the course of the historical stream. There are chapters in the book of history which, once opened, leave the reader with the distinct impression that an entire epoch stands poised upon the threshold of change.

The present crisis appears to belong unmistakably to that sombre category. It has been widely interpreted in the light of the reported assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, and the mounting tensions that followed in its wake. The increasing pressure exerted upon Iran by both the United States and Israel seemed to herald the approach of a gathering storm—one whose first rumblings were sufficient to unsettle the entire region. To many observers this moment appeared less an isolated disturbance than the opening movement of a far more consequential drama. The alleged killing of Iran's supreme authority, combined with the intensifying strategic hostility directed towards Tehran, lent the unfolding crisis the character of a deeply unsettling chapter in contemporary history.

News of the killing of Ali Khamenei, accompanied by the increasingly assertive posture adopted by Washington and Tel Aviv, appeared to push the region towards a precipice from which the flames of conflict might easily have spread far beyond the Middle East itself. The political and military reverberations that followed his reported death gathered like darkening clouds upon the horizon of the region. What emerged was not merely a diplomatic dispute, but an atmosphere charged with foreboding—an eruption of tensions whose heat, one might suspect, could be felt by generations yet unborn.

This episode therefore seemed to signify more than the martyrdom of a single individual. It bore the unmistakable imprint of a political earthquake, one that shook the strategic architecture of the region to its foundations. The uncertainty that began to dominate the political horizon did not appear accidental or spontaneous. Rather, it suggested the quiet workings of a far subtler design—an intricate stratagem whose aim, some analysts argued, was to erode Iran's defensive bastions from within. The climate of ambiguity and apprehension that followed the tragedy seemed less the by-product of chance than the early outline of a calculated and complex plan intended to weaken Iran's strategic cohesion.

Indeed, the uncertainty that spread across the region in the aftermath seemed almost to mark the beginning of a broader project—one designed not only to undermine Iran's defensive apparatus but also to plunge it into a condition of political and military disarray. The intensifying pressure applied

by the United States and Israel hinted that a new contest was quietly unfolding upon the chessboard of power in the Middle East. What appeared before the world as a sudden crisis might, upon closer inspection, reveal itself as the opening move in a larger strategic game.

Behind the visible theatre of diplomacy, one could sense the gradual arrangement of pieces upon a far wider geopolitical board. The contours of that hidden contest were perhaps glimpsed in remarks delivered some time earlier by the Russian President, Vladimir Putin—a statement that reverberated through diplomatic corridors long after it was first uttered.

In that address, Putin warned the international community with unusual frankness that the territory of Afghanistan risked once again becoming a breeding ground for militant extremism. According to his account, the Afghan landscape was in danger of being transformed yet again into the arena of a dangerous strategic contest. More than twenty-five thousand trained fighters, he suggested, were being gathered there, many of them linked to Islamic State – Khorasan Province—militants hardened by the brutal theatres of war in Syria and Iraq.

Within this wider context, Putin's warning assumed a significance that few could ignore. By drawing attention to the concentration of extremist forces in Afghanistan, he effectively cautioned that the country might once again be drawn into the vortex of great-power rivalry. His words sounded, to many listeners, like the distant echo of a familiar phrase in geopolitical history: the advent of a new "Great Game." It was the kind of contest in which the players change and the pieces are rearranged, yet the underlying objectives remain curiously constant.

Unsurprisingly, these remarks stirred unease in diplomatic circles across the globe. They appeared to suggest that Afghanistan might once again be destined to serve as the arena in which global powers tested their rival ambitions. In such a design, the recalibration of regional geopolitics would become inevitable. Within that framework, weakening Iran while simultaneously exerting pressure upon Pakistan could easily be interpreted as elements of a broader strategic calculation.

Another intriguing turn in this unfolding drama emerged when, amid the mounting pressure upon Iran, the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, arrived in Israel for a high-profile visit. The symbolism of that moment did not escape the attention of seasoned observers. Barely two days before the clouds of crisis gathered over Tehran, Modi received an unusually elaborate welcome in Israel. His address before the Knesset and the series of meetings that accompanied it were not dismissed by certain defence analysts as mere diplomatic formalities.

According to several strategic commentators, the discussions extended well beyond ceremonial courtesies. They reportedly encompassed consultations on the broader security architecture of the region, including potential measures relating to Iran. Modi's speech in the Israeli parliament generated a subtle yet unmistakable murmur within diplomatic circles—whispers that some defence observers refused to interpret as routine protocol.

Reports in defence journals and intelligence assessments suggested that elements of "operational coordination" were among the matters considered during the visit. Some analysts believe that, within this emerging strategy, Afghanistan was envisioned as a strategic pivot from which additional

pressure might be applied upon Iran. In that larger contest, economic interests, the desire to undermine projects such as China–Pakistan Economic Corridor, and the relentless competition for regional influence all appeared woven together into a single and intricate geopolitical design.

Within this unfolding panorama there appeared, to many observers, the faint yet discernible outline of a strategic alignment between the United States, Israel and India—an alignment seemingly designed to consolidate their respective political and military interests across the region. From this vantage point, the impression emerged that a new axis of cooperation was quietly taking shape among these states, one whose underlying purpose was to strengthen their strategic foothold in an already volatile geopolitical landscape.

According to several analytical circles, a broader strategic conception appeared to be under consideration within this emerging partnership. The idea, it was suggested, involved transforming Afghanistan into a geopolitical pivot—a base from which pressure upon Iran might gradually be intensified. Such a design, if indeed it existed, was believed to intertwine several ambitions: economic advantage, the contest for regional influence, and the weakening of China-backed infrastructure ventures—most notably the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor.

The annals of international politics offer abundant testimony to a familiar pattern. When great powers set their sights upon altering the political order of a state, they rarely begin with overt confrontation. Instead, history reveals a recurring and rather sobering truth: internal turmoil is often cultivated long before external intervention appears upon the stage. Time and again the historical record demonstrates that when powerful nations contemplate what is now commonly termed “regime change,” they seek forces capable of weakening a state from within—forces whose actions can erode institutional stability through internal conflict and bloodshed.

The past few decades alone furnish numerous examples of this method. Across different regions of the world, episodes have unfolded in which local or non-state actors were utilised to destabilise established political structures. The experiences of Libya, Syria and Iraq frequently surface in such discussions, where militant groups—operating amid complex and shifting alliances—played roles that extended far beyond the conventional boundaries of insurgency.

Yet in the case of Iran the strategic equation appeared rather different. At the domestic level there existed no political force capable of matching the formidable authority of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Previous attempts to exert pressure through opposition figures such as Maryam Rajavi or Reza Pahlavi had produced little in the way of tangible results. In the absence of a viable internal challenger, external planners—so some analysts argued—may have turned towards a different instrument: seasoned fighters drawn from conflicts beyond Iran’s borders.

Reports consequently began to circulate suggesting that thousands of surviving militants from the battlefields of Syria and Iraq had been relocated to Afghanistan. According to these accounts, such fighters were expected to move towards Iran through routes associated with cities such as Herat and Mashhad. The strategic design, as some reports alleged, was to ignite simultaneous unrest across several Iranian provinces. In such circumstances Iran’s military and security institutions might

become preoccupied with internal instability, thereby opening a window through which external actors could influence the country's political trajectory.

The logic behind such a scenario is not unfamiliar in the study of geopolitics. When a state becomes engulfed in internal disorder, the barriers that ordinarily protect its sovereignty can weaken considerably. In the modern era, the use of advanced communication technologies, covert logistical routes and decentralized guerrilla tactics has frequently formed part of such designs. Indeed, several intelligence-oriented analyses suggested that similar operational concepts might have been contemplated within this broader strategic framework.



Amid these uncertainties, the role of Pakistan emerged in the eyes of many observers as a factor of considerable significance. Had militant networks operating near the frontier remained unchecked, the consequences might have proved far more alarming. At such a delicate juncture Pakistan's position acquired heightened importance. The country shares a vast and rugged frontier with Afghanistan—stretching across thousands of kilometres of mountainous terrain where infiltration has historically been difficult to prevent.

Following the emergence of these reports, Pakistani security institutions reportedly intensified operations along the border regions. Militant hideouts were targeted, logistical routes disrupted and the movement of suspected fighters increasingly restricted. In this context Pakistan's armed forces came to be portrayed by some analysts as a barrier that curtailed potential infiltration routes.

Meanwhile, within American political discourse, statements relating to the crisis also surfaced. Among them were the forceful remarks and appeals for public protest in Iran issued by the then President of the United States, Donald Trump. According to several commentators, had preventative measures not been undertaken along the frontier, thousands of militants stationed in Afghanistan might have found their way into both Iranian and Pakistani territory, unleashing a far wider wave of violence. In that sense Pakistan's actions were viewed by some observers as having prevented the escalation of an already volatile situation.

The catalogue of militant groups active in Afghanistan's borderlands is itself far from reassuring. Among the organisations frequently cited in security assessments is Islamic State – Khorasan Province, alongside other militant factions reportedly present in provinces such as Jowzjan Province, Nangarhar Province, Kunar Province and Khost Province. Certain reports have also claimed that groups linked to operations in Iran's province of Sistan and Baluchestan Province had been provided safe havens in parts of Afghanistan. The objectives attributed to such networks extended beyond Iran alone; destabilisation in sensitive regions of Pakistan was also believed to form part of their agenda.

Under such circumstances, the issue was not merely one of assisting a neighbouring state. For Pakistan, it also involved the defence of its own internal security. Consequently, enhanced border surveillance, intelligence cooperation and targeted military operations were undertaken in an effort to contain the emerging threat.

At the same time another potential front of concern entered strategic discussions: the possible movement of armed Kurdish factions. Some reports suggested that attempts to facilitate the infiltration of such fighters into Iran from border areas adjoining Turkey and Iraq had been thwarted through regional cooperation. In this regard, the measures adopted by Pakistan and Turkey were viewed by certain analysts as efforts aimed at preserving regional stability.

Taken together, this complex chain of developments revealed a stark and unsettling reality. The presence of numerous non-state armed groups in Afghanistan had effectively created a reservoir of latent instability—an explosive store of forces which, if ignited, possessed the capacity to engulf the entire region in flames at a moment's notice.

If this entire episode is examined from a wider vantage point, a sobering conclusion begins to emerge: both the Middle East and South Asia appear to be passing through an exceptionally delicate moment in their modern history. In such circumstances, the consequences of a single event rarely remain confined within the borders of one state. Rather, they possess the unsettling capacity to radiate outward, drawing an entire region into their gravitational pull. A seemingly minor incident, under such conditions, may become the prelude to a far larger conflagration.

Indeed, several analysts have suggested that had militant networks operating within Afghanistan succeeded in penetrating the territory of Iran, the resulting turmoil might well have escalated into a broader regional conflict—one in which global powers themselves could have found cause, or pretext, to intervene.

Against this perilous backdrop, it may reasonably be argued that the firm measures undertaken by Pakistan against cross-border militancy, combined with various forms of regional cooperation, contributed to preventing the expansion of a crisis that might otherwise have spiralled into a far wider war. In this light, certain observers have come to regard Pakistan as a stabilising pillar within the region—one whose actions were directed not merely towards the defence of its own territory but also towards preserving the fragile peace of neighbouring states.

To some commentators, this moment represented something more profound. It was, they suggest, a juncture at which Pakistan defended not only its own frontiers but, in a broader sense, the tranquillity of an entire region.

Viewed through the longer lens of history, such moments are comparatively rare. Only occasionally does the decision of a single state possess the capacity to influence the future trajectory of an entire geopolitical theatre. Had circumstances unfolded even slightly differently, it is conceivable that the Middle East might have been drawn into a conflict whose repercussions would have echoed far beyond the region itself, reverberating throughout the wider structure of international politics.

Within this context, Pakistan's actions have been interpreted in some quarters as a significant effort to preserve regional equilibrium.

When the entire episode is considered from a still broader perspective, a deeper conclusion presents itself. Both the Middle East and South Asia appear to stand at a historical crossroads where even the smallest gesture may carry consequences of global magnitude. The political landscape of these regions now resembles a complex intersection where power, strategic interests and competing ideological visions converge in intricate and often unpredictable ways.

If the crisis were to be distilled into a single metaphor, one might say that the board of global politics is crowded with pieces—yet the decisive advantage belongs not to the player who merely possesses the most pieces, but to the one who advances them with patience, foresight and measured judgement.

Recent developments, some observers argue, have at least created the impression that regional cooperation played a meaningful role in averting a potentially grave crisis. Should this interpretation prove accurate, the outcome represents more than diplomatic success. It may instead constitute a turning point in the preservation of regional peace.

Several analysts maintain that Pakistan's determined actions against cross-border militancy helped prevent a volatile situation from evolving into a full-scale regional war. In that sense, it may be said that within the intricate chessboard of contemporary geopolitics Pakistan assumed, at least in this particular moment, a role that helped restrain the drift toward a far more destructive confrontation. Such are the moments when history quietly records its judgement—moments whose full significance may only be understood by future generations.

The lesson conveyed by this chapter of events is both simple and profound: within the complex arena of international politics, the timely and prudent decision of a single state can sometimes alter the destiny of an entire region. Had circumstances unfolded differently, the Middle East might easily have descended into a conflict whose repercussions would have extended across the globe.

In this perspective, the actions undertaken by Pakistan are viewed by some observers as forming a protective barrier that helped contain what might otherwise have grown into a far larger crisis. Ultimately, this episode serves as a reminder that in the labyrinthine world of global politics, power alone does not determine the outcome of events. Wisdom, restraint and timely judgement often prove equally decisive. Had certain states not acted with foresight at that critical juncture, the crisis might well have transformed into a far more devastating war.

History, after all, occasionally requires only a single resolute and far-sighted decision to alter the course of its own relentless current.

Tuesday, March 10, 2026

Whispers in the Corridors of Power

An Unpublished Reckoning

The pages of history often sit in austere silence, as though content to bear witness without intrusion. Yet there are moments when they lean towards us and whisper—softly, insistently—pleading the case of truth in subdued tones. There are hours in the life of nations when sentences uttered in the corridors of power, words withheld in calculated restraint, and those decisive murmurs of authority together alter the very current of national destiny. The recent convulsions within India's political and military sphere belong unmistakably to such an hour—an hour in which words, decisions, and silences alike appear etched with consequence.

At the centre of this unfolding drama stands an unpublished memoir by India's former Chief of Army Staff, General M. M. Naravane, entitled *Four Stars of Destiny*. It is less a personal recollection than a reflective mirror—one that casts light not only upon the sensitive judgments of military command but also upon the fragile equilibrium between political stewardship and the imperatives of national interest. In its yet-unprinted pages lies the suggestion that power is not merely exercised; it is weighed, deferred, and, at times, relinquished into ambiguity.

India's present political-military contention thus forms a chapter in which an unseen manuscript has stirred visible tremors across the parliamentary floor. Questions have risen like dust in a summer squall, leaving national security, political accountability, and democratic convention momentarily standing at the same bar of scrutiny. Such episodes are not without precedent in India's parliamentary annals. There have been occasions—outwardly procedural, even routine—which in retrospect revealed the most delicate fibers binding civil authority to military command. The events of 2024, however, bear a distinctive gravity.

General Naravane, who served as India's Army Chief from 2019 to 2022, submitted his memoir for publication in 2024. It awaits official clearance, its progress slowed by the sensitivities attendant upon operational disclosures. The work, by all accounts, traverses both the arc of his personal journey and the strategic deliberations of a tenure marked by exceptional strain. It addresses questions of military preparedness, political consultation, and the burdens of command in moments when the margin for error narrows to a razor's edge.

Yet even before it has reached the printed page, excerpts attributed to the memoir have entered the public domain—most notably within the Lower House of Parliament. There, in a scene more reminiscent of a constitutional trial than a routine debate, Rahul Gandhi sought to cite passages from a photocopied text. The effect was electric. Members rose in protest; objections rang out across the chamber; and what might have been a sober discussion of civil-military coordination devolved into a partisan tempest.

According to the cited extracts, during the 2020 military standoff with China in the Himalayan region of Ladakh, the nation's senior political leadership was marked by hesitation and a want of clarity in directive command. The crisis, culminating in the deadly clash in the Galwan Valley—where twenty Indian soldiers and at least four Chinese personnel lost their lives—represented the gravest

confrontation between the two powers since 1975. It was no mere border skirmish, but a perilous juncture between two nuclear-armed states, where miscalculation could have borne catastrophic consequence.

The passages suggest that as Chinese armour advanced towards Indian positions, General Naravane was informed that he should “do what he deemed appropriate”. Repeated calls were reportedly placed to Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, through whom a message from Prime Minister Narendra Modi was conveyed. Yet the ultimate decision, it is claimed, was left in the hands of the Army Chief. In Mr Gandhi’s retelling, this amounted to a moment of profound isolation—“I truly felt alone; the entire establishment had left me,” he declared, invoking a phrase that has since reverberated far beyond the chamber.

Government ministers reacted with sharp rebuke. The Defence Minister and the Home Minister accused Mr. Gandhi of misleading Parliament and of diminishing the honour of the armed forces. They further contended that citing an unpublished manuscript constituted a breach of parliamentary convention. Proceedings were adjourned amid uproar; tempers, already strained, flared anew the following day. Eight members of the opposition were subsequently suspended for disorderly conduct.

The Congress Party, for its part, maintained that the memoir of a former Army Chief constitutes a legitimate and authoritative source, and that Parliament must remain a forum for candid inquiry into matters of national defence. This was not, they observed, the first time the opposition had questioned the government’s handling of the China crisis. Indeed, the controversy has reopened an enduring debate: whether, in moments of strategic peril, political leadership must speak with unequivocal clarity—or whether ambiguity is sometimes the instrument of prudence.

The wider context remains the summer of 2020, when tensions along the Line of Actual Control reached their most volatile pitch in decades. Years of military disengagement talks, and diplomatic negotiation eventually yielded a phased withdrawal agreement in 2024. Yet the political reckoning over responsibility, preparedness, and communication has proven more resistant to closure. In democracies, after all, wars may be fought by soldiers, but they are judged by history.

General Naravane has publicly remarked that his duty extended to writing the book and submitting it to his publisher; the responsibility for clearance rests elsewhere. That measured comment has only deepened the aura surrounding the text. A manuscript unpublished, yet profoundly present; unseen, yet shaping discourse—such is the paradox that has lent it the character of a political document before it has ever become a literary one.

What emerges from this episode is not merely a dispute over procedure or personality. It is a meditation upon the nature of command in a constitutional state. Civil authority must guide the sword; the sword must defend the state; and between the two there must exist neither vacuum nor confusion. Where instruction falters, responsibility becomes diffuse; and where responsibility is diffuse, history records its verdict with unsparing clarity.

Thus the affair transcends partisan quarrel. It compels reflection upon the delicate architecture of democratic governance—upon the necessity of transparency without recklessness, of loyalty without silence, of authority without abdication. History, when it whispers, does not seek to indict; it seeks to remind. And in this instance, its murmur is unmistakable: that the destinies of nations are shaped as much by the words spoken in crisis as by those withheld in caution.

In the final reckoning, *Four Stars of Destiny* stands not simply as a memoir awaiting publication, but as a prism through which India's recent past is refracted. It invites the republic to consider how power is exercised, how responsibility is shared, and how silence itself may carry the weight of decision. For in the long ledger of history, it is not only the clash of arms that is remembered, but the clarity—or absence thereof—with which leaders rose to meet the hour.

According to Rahul Gandhi, the memoir records that when Chinese tanks advanced towards Indian positions, General Naravane was told to “do what he deemed appropriate”. The political resonance of that phrase lay not in its brevity, but in its implication: that the nation's highest civilian authorities, rather than issuing explicit direction, entrusted the final decision to the military commander on the ground. In moments of crisis, such delegation may signify confidence; yet it may equally betray hesitation. The distinction is rarely settled in the heat of events—it is adjudicated in the cooler tribunal of history.

Mr Gandhi further asserted that General Naravane had telephoned the Defence Minister on several occasions, through whom a message from the Prime Minister was conveyed, but that the ultimate determination remained his alone. Describing the atmosphere of that hour, Mr Gandhi suggested that the General felt “alone, as though the entire establishment had left him”. Though presented as an interpretation of the former Army Chief's state of mind, the phrase struck the chamber with uncommon force. Words of solitude, when uttered in the context of national defence, carry an unmistakable charge.

The government's position was unequivocal. To cite an unpublished and unverified manuscript, it argued, offended the decorum and discipline of parliamentary procedure. The Defence Minister insisted that a document not yet formally published could not be selectively invoked upon the floor of the House. Kiren Rijiju, Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, cautioned that assertions neither substantiated nor procedurally admissible ought not to be pressed into debate. Yet Mr Gandhi was permitted to continue—a concession that underscored the delicate balance between preserving parliamentary order and safeguarding freedom of expression. In essence, the government sought to draw a firm demarcation between parliamentary privilege and national security. Military affairs, it maintained, must not become instruments of partisan point-scoring.

The Congress Party advanced the contrary view: that the memoir of a former Chief of Army Staff constitutes an authoritative source, and that if it raises substantive questions regarding national security, Parliament not only may but must examine them. They reminded critics that the government's handling of China had been subject to scrutiny before; this was no novelty conjured for transient advantage, but part of a longer and unresolved national conversation.

Outside Parliament, Mr. Gandhi displayed a copy of the unpublished manuscript to journalists and

asserted that standing instructions had discouraged the firing of shots should Chinese troops enter Indian territory without prior political authorisation. This claim was received with acute sensitivity. It seemed to hint at a possible tension between military doctrine and political caution and thus touched the most combustible of subjects: the interface between strategic restraint and sovereign defence. Transparency, he implied, is not an indulgence but a democratic necessity.

The uproar did not subside with a single sitting. Proceedings were disrupted the following day; the atmosphere remained charged; and eight Congress members were suspended for disorderly conduct. Thus, an unpublished book achieved what many printed volumes do not: it altered the immediate rhythm of political life and produced tangible parliamentary consequence. The episode revealed, with unmistakable clarity, that in contemporary India military questions are no longer confined to defence briefings—they have entered the bloodstream of political narrative itself.

At its heart lay a question both simple and profound: where does responsibility begin and where does it end between civil authority and military command? In a constitutional democracy, the armed forces are subordinate to elected leadership; yet the tempo and pressure of real-time crisis may thrust commanders into circumstances where decision precedes deliberation. If authority was indeed devolved to the Army Chief, that act might be construed either as an expression of trust or as a manifestation of uncertainty. Interpretation, inevitably, follows political alignment.

It is for this reason that *Four Stars of Destiny* has come to symbolise more than personal recollection. It has become a meditation upon the relationship between power and accountability. Intended for publication in 2024, its release has been delayed by the intricate processes of governmental clearance and the sensitivities inherent in operational disclosure. General Naravane himself observed with restraint that his duty was to write and submit the manuscript; its further progress rests with publisher and authorities. In that measured remark resides the complexity of the matter: the tension between military confidentiality and the historian's claim upon the record.

When an unpublished manuscript becomes the axis of political contention, it ceases to be merely literary. It becomes emblematic of power's architecture—of who decides, who authorises, and who answers. The controversy illuminates the fragile geometry binding military leadership, political authority, national security, and the integrity of historical memory. The memoir stands as a mirror in which crises, judgments, and burdens of responsibility are refracted layer upon layer.

The significance of the episode is manifold. First, it has revived the unresolved questions of 2020 and reawakened debate regarding the stewardship of that perilous summer. Secondly, it has placed parliamentary convention and the limits of speech under renewed examination. Thirdly, it has drawn the relationship between soldier and statesman into the arena of public discourse, where once it was discussed in quieter rooms.

Such moments leave a durable imprint upon a nation's collective memory. They are not mere



parliamentary skirmishes; they are stages in the formation of national narrative. Decisions taken in the corridors of power often reveal their full meaning only with time. A sentence uttered in haste may return years later as a question; a silence maintained in prudence may acquire the weight of an indictment. In the realm of authority and national obligation, every utterance matters, every hesitation carries implication, and every silence possesses intellectual dimension.

The unpublished memoir of General Naravane—and the storm it has stirred—reminds us that national security is not solely the defence of borders. It is equally the preservation of trust, clarity, and responsibility within the constitutional order. The controversy has laid bare the intricate weave of military and political relations and demonstrated that history's pages are not sterile catalogues of fact. They are records of human judgment, moral tension, and the ceaseless contest between prudence and principle.

In democracies, the equilibrium between civil and military leadership is exquisitely delicate. When maintained, the state stands firm; when strained, questions echo across generations. This episode therefore conveys more than the fate of a book or the turbulence of a debate. It affirms that in the court of history neither words nor decisions vanish. Each age must answer for its choices. That is history's sternest lesson—and its most enduring counsel.

Ultimately, this account urges us not merely to observe events but to comprehend the responsibility, sacrifice, and intellectual gravity that lie beneath them. It is for this reason that the memoir—and the parliamentary tempest surrounding it—resonates beyond immediate politics. It speaks to the enduring relationship between a nation's destiny, the duty of its leaders, and the conscience of its citizens.

Friday, March 13, 2026

A Strategic Signal Disguised as Trade

The Politics Beneath the Tariffs

Today, I wish to draw attention to an international development which, on the surface, presents itself as a trade agreement, yet in substance signals a consequential shift in the political equilibrium of South Asia and, indeed, of the wider world. The recent trade arrangement between the United States and India—under which American tariffs on Indian goods have been reduced to 18 per cent—is not merely an economic concession. It is, rather, a carefully calibrated strategic message. A message addressed not only to China and Russia, but to the entire region—and one whose reverberations inevitably reach Pakistan as well.

Let me come directly to the central point. This agreement between Washington and New Delhi is not an act of commercial generosity; it is a force multiplier. And force multipliers, as history consistently reminds us, are fashioned first in the realm of economics long before they manifest on the battlefield. The agreement underscores a decisive shift in American perception: India is no longer viewed merely as a market, but as a strategic pillar—particularly in the context of China’s expanding influence. History teaches us, with sobering clarity, that when one state is endowed with disproportionate strength through external patronage, regional imbalance is not an accident; it is an outcome.

The history of the subcontinent bears ample witness to this truth. Whenever a single state has been extraordinarily empowered by external sponsorship, instability has followed in its wake. The current US–India trade agreement is but a new link in this historical chain, and to regard it as a purely economic occurrence would be an act of political naïveté.

Another agreement has appeared on the horizon of global politics with a quiet authority—one in which the words are few, but the meaning profound. The latest trade accord between the United States and India is not simply a gesture of economic alignment between two states; it represents a new angle in the balance of global power. The reduction of American tariffs on Indian goods to 18 per cent is, in appearance, a commercial measure. In essence, however, it is infused with politics, strategy, and the subtle currents of power.

Lowering tariffs to this level will enhance India’s export capacity, foreign exchange earnings, and industrial base. Over time, this economic reinforcement will inevitably find its way into defence budgets, medium- to long-term threat amplification, and force structures. The transformation will not be immediate, but it is assured. Viewed against the backdrop of the Russia–Ukraine war, intensifying US–China rivalry, and the geostrategic sensitivity of South Asia, this agreement assumes exceptional significance. Pakistan—standing at the confluence of geography, history, and politics—cannot afford the illusion of detachment. Decisions of this nature, even when indirect, shape the pulse of the region.

That President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi chose to announce this decision via social media is itself emblematic of our age: history is no longer written solely in grand chambers, but increasingly inscribed upon digital walls. President Trump declared on “Truth Social” that a trade agreement had been concluded, reducing mutual tariffs from 25 per cent to 18 per cent. The United

States is, in effect, steadily strengthening India as an economic, strategic, and military partner—its principal objective being the containment of China’s influence. In this context, India’s economic empowerment carries the potential to disturb the regional balance of power, with direct implications for Pakistan’s security environment.

The reduction in tariffs will open new avenues for Indian exports and is likely to augment India’s economic strength. The lesson of history is unmistakable: in the subcontinent, economic advantage has often translated into military confidence and diplomatic assertiveness. Pakistan must therefore remain vigilant lest economic asymmetry evolve into strategic imbalance.

At present, the United States is actively engaged on three simultaneous fronts: containing China’s expanding reach; constraining Russia through the Ukraine conflict; and elevating India as a dependable regional pillar. The trade concessions extended to India are integral to this broader framework. They form part of a containment architecture directed at China—one in which India is expected to grow stronger economically, shoulder its own burdens, and advance American strategic objectives. Within this calculus, Pakistan is no longer regarded as a primary ally, but rather as a situational partner.

India’s prospective economic strengthening may directly influence its military self-assurance and diplomatic posture. For Pakistan, this is not a moment for emotional reaction, but for sober assessment—eyes open, nerves steady. The US–India agreement serves as a reminder that the world is changing with remarkable speed. Pakistan’s path forward lies in balance, dignity, and strategic insight—neither blind alignment nor needless confrontation.

It is also noteworthy that alongside this agreement, additional tariffs have been imposed on India over its purchases of Russian oil. This serves as a pointed reminder that in global politics, friendships are seldom permanent; interests almost always are. For Pakistan, the lesson is clear: energy security, trade policy, and foreign relations cannot be treated as isolated compartments.

Above all, this agreement reaffirms that the United States does not view India merely as a trading partner, but as a strategic pillar positioned against China. Pakistan’s challenge, therefore, is to present itself not as an extension of any bloc, but as an autonomous, credible, and reliable state.

The resonance of this announcement is heightened by the fact that US–India relations have experienced notable fluctuations over the past year—oscillating between warmth and strain. In such a context, the statement by US Ambassador Sergio Gorkh that “President Trump genuinely considers Prime Minister Modi a good friend” is not a casual diplomatic remark; it is a political signal. Under this agreement, India will not only reduce its tariff and non-tariff barriers vis-à-vis the United States, but will also commit—under the ‘Buy American’ framework—to large-scale purchases of American goods. Indications of procurement exceeding 500 billion dollars across energy, technology, agriculture, coal, and other sectors amount, in effect, to a transfusion of fresh blood into the American economy.

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This agreement also holds up a mirror to Pakistan. In contemporary global politics, it is not geography alone that commands attention, but economic credibility. Strategic location, once sufficient to secure relevance, no longer carries the same weight. Pakistan must therefore begin to view trade, exports, and the investment climate through the lens of national security. This is not a moment for reflexive

response, but for far-sighted decision-making. The true requirement of national security is that power be subordinated to wisdom—not wisdom to power.

American flexibility towards Iran presents Pakistan with a timely opportunity: to promote regional connectivity, to balance energy and trade initiatives, and to establish itself as a responsible mediator. Recent diplomatic signals concerning Iran and the Middle East offer Pakistan the chance to act as a bridge—neither confrontational nor indifferent, but constructively mediatory.

Within this framework, Pakistan's priorities must be clearly defined. Qualitative edge, electronic warfare capabilities, ISR, and multi-domain deterrence must extend beyond conventional strength to include superior air and missile defence. In the battle of narratives, silence is costly. Capability must find expression—not through bluster, but through measured demonstration, informed by experience and communicated with strategic intent. At intervals, it is both prudent and necessary to remind the world, through evidence rather than rhetoric, of one's preparedness.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, dedicating this decision to India's 1.4 billion citizens, publicly thanked President Trump and welcomed the reduction in tariffs on "Made in India" products. This statement carries domestic political significance, where economic achievement is consciously woven into the fabric of national pride.

Above all, internal stability has now emerged as a strategic necessity. No foreign or defence policy can bear fruit unless the economy is stable, political cohesion is intact, and the state narrative is clear and consensual. These are the foundational pillars of national security. We must never lose sight of the fact that national security is not forged solely at borders; it is constructed through the equilibrium of economy, politics, and diplomacy. Internal stability, political harmony, and a coherent national narrative remain our greatest strengths.

Modi's assertion that "when the world's two largest economies and the biggest democracies work together, countless opportunities for mutual benefit arise" reflects India's broader ambition—to be recognised not merely as a regional power, but as an equal partner of the United States. India will present this agreement as a validation of its global standing. Pakistan, by contrast, must resist emotional or purely defensive reactions. What is required is a sober, reasoned, and civilised narrative—one that projects Pakistan as a force for stability in the region. This demands an active National Strategic Council, the integration of foreign and economic policy, diplomatic flexibility alongside defence preparedness, and a consistent effort to present Pakistan internationally as a "state of stability".

Yet, when examined closely, this entire development is not merely a tale of friendship; it is also a contest of manoeuvre. From the outset, the move was described as a political gambit—a characterisation that increasingly appears accurate. On one hand, the United States has repeatedly highlighted the downing of Indian aircraft during Indo-Pakistani tensions to shape regional narratives; on the other, it has drawn attention to the underwhelming performance of French Rafale platforms, thereby warming the market for American defence systems. This duality underscores the transactional nature of great-power politics.

It bears repeating: no strategic advantage can endure without internal political and economic stability. The central lesson for Pakistan is that foreign-policy successes cannot compensate for domestic fragility. Internal cohesion is itself an expression of national power.

In this shifting landscape, Russia once again finds itself in a dilemma. On Ukraine, it must either acquiesce to deeper isolation or reassess its long-standing relationship with India. History suggests that Russo–Indian ties have been shaped less by sentiment than by interest—a reality unlikely to change.

This agreement is not merely a chapter in US–India trade relations; it is a new inscription in the ledger of global power. It would not be inaccurate to say that political decisions are defined not by what is said, but by what is understood. This decision belongs to that category: trade in appearance, strategy in substance; friendship in language, interest in reality.

This is not a moment for reaction, but for anticipatory alignment and strategic calibration. If we treat this agreement as mere news, we shall awaken too late. If we read it as a strategic signal, we retain the agency to determine our next move. This is the distinction between a reactive force and a strategic state. This is not the hour for emotional slogans, nor for complaint; it is the hour for judgment and foresight. Not a moment for noise, but for reflection, balance, and learning from history—for consciousness.

If Pakistan understands itself at this critical juncture, the changing world can yet be transformed into opportunity. Viewed with the right perspective, Pakistan need not remain a mere piece on the board; it can be recognised as a dignified player. If decisions are taken with clarity amid change, Pakistan will not stand as a spectator on the new global chessboard but will play a respected and effective role. If not, these agreements will remain stories of others' advancement alone.

May God grant us the wisdom to choose rightly. Amen.

Sunday, March 15, 2026

A World Holding Its Breath

The Moment Before the Storm

The Middle East and the Shadow of Catastrophe

The soil of the Middle East has, for centuries, been a theatre of contending powers; yet the present tensions have brought the region to a threshold where even the breath of history seems to grow heavy. Once again the Middle East stands at a fateful turning point — a moment when the pulse of time appears to falter and the horizon of politics carries the acrid scent of gunpowder. The region's diplomacy has reached a delicate and perilous juncture, where each step threatens to stir new tremors in the annals of history.

In the wake of successive strikes by the United States and Israel against Iran, Tehran's retaliatory actions have cast a fresh unease across the global stage. The Middle East today appears seized by an agitation whose echoes reverberate through the long corridors of history. The politics of power has entered the field armed with its full panoply, while clouds of war gather upon the horizon as though centuries of uneasy silence were preparing to break into storm.

The atmosphere of the region is laden with foreboding, as if history itself were listening for the distant rumble of an approaching tempest. Pieces move restlessly upon the chessboard of power; within the chambers of diplomacy circulate uneasy whispers; and across the wider horizon of international politics the clouds of apprehension grow steadily darker.

Iran's responses to the sustained assaults have borne testimony to a resolute determination in Tehran: that it will not bow before pressure but will instead raise the banner of resistance. Its firm and unapologetic actions have stirred a tempest across the firmament of global politics, the thunder of which resounds far beyond the immediate theatre of conflict. Despite relentless pressure, diplomatic manoeuvres, threats, media clamour, and the swirling tempests of propaganda, Tehran has refused to lay down its arms.

By declining to capitulate in the face of intimidation and diplomatic isolation, Iran has made plain that it does not regard this confrontation as a mere episode of war, but as a question bound up with the preservation of its sovereignty. Yet the ongoing exchanges between Iran on the one hand and the United States and Israel on the other have pushed the region towards a precipice of tension whose consequences are difficult to foresee.

It is in this charged atmosphere that a haunting question strikes the conscience of the world like a bolt of lightning: could the United States once again tread the dreadful path it chose at the close of the World War II, when atomic bombs were dropped upon the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, reducing them to ashes in a matter of moments?

This is not a mere conjecture of political imagination. It is the echo of one of the most tragic chapters in human history, now reverberating once again within the conscience of our age. Should that terrible echo be heard anew, it would not simply represent a military decision; it would inflict yet another wound upon the moral conscience of civilisation itself.

The harrowing story of those days remains etched in humanity's memory like a scar that time has never wholly healed. Were such a calamity to be repeated, it would not merely signify the devastation of a single nation; it would become another dark stain upon the brow of humanity and another grievous wound upon the conscience of civilisation. The tale endures like an indelible imprint upon the human spirit, one which even the dust of decades has failed to erase. If such an apocalypse were to recur, it would not be a strategic act alone but a moral catastrophe — a blow so deep that the modern world might find itself shrouded in a darkness thick with smoke and despair. History bears witness to the fact that this region has long been the arena of rivalry among the world's great powers. Yet the tableau now emerging appears more grave, and more ominous, than at any moment in recent memory.

Nuclear weapons are not merely instruments of war; they are a man-made apocalypse, capable of turning cities into rubble and silencing countless lives in the space of a single instant. Should — God forbid — a nuclear strike be launched against Iran, the devastation that would follow is of such magnitude that language itself trembles at the attempt to describe it.

For nuclear weapons are not simply symbols of military might; they are keys to the very gates of doomsday. Their destruction is not merely the thunder of explosives but a silent cataclysm whose consequences flow like poisoned rivers through the currents of time. There comes a moment when a blinding flash rends the sky — and then, in an instant, cities, towns, and the fragile lamps of human life begin to flicker and fade.

If such a tragedy were ever to occur, its devastation could never be captured by statistics alone. The fury of nuclear fire devours hundreds of thousands of lives in moments. Creatures across the earth would see the candle of existence extinguished in a single breath. Immediate deaths would form only the opening scene of that dreadful calamity; the deeper tragedy would unfold in the years that follow.

For radiation wounds do not fade with the passing hour. They seep into bodies and landscapes alike, carrying their poison through generations. This hidden fire plants the seeds of illness within the human body, seeps into the particles of soil, the droplets of water, and the currents of air, and leaves its mark for decades to come. It dims the fertility of the earth and infuses the atmosphere with a toxin whose echoes linger through time.

Thus nuclear devastation is never the tragedy of a single nation alone. It becomes a sorrow written upon the shared destiny of humanity itself. Its consequences cross borders with ease, ignoring the artificial lines that divide the world's peoples. It is a wound that no balm of time can entirely heal. An atomic strike, therefore, would not simply destroy one country; it would cast a shadow across the collective fate of mankind. History teaches with terrible clarity that the consequences of nuclear warfare never remain confined to a single land or people. Rather, they darken the horizon of humanity as a whole, leaving behind a legacy of suffering that belongs to the entire world.

The Wider Shockwaves of a Nuclear Catastrophe

In truth, a nuclear strike would not remain the tragedy of a single nation; it would swiftly become a calamity shared by the entire world. Its consequences would not respect borders nor be restrained

by oceans. They would ripple outward across the common destiny of mankind. It would resemble a stone cast into the still waters of a global lake — the initial splash may be local, yet the widening circles travel far beyond the point of impact.

Nor would the consequences for Iran remain confined to the realm of military strategy or geographical loss. The nations of the world would inevitably pay a heavy price for such a miscalculation. The destruction of a single city, in such circumstances, would send tremors through the future of humanity itself.

The neighbouring states surrounding Iran would hardly escape such an apocalyptic scenario. Geography offers no sanctuary from the invisible reach of nuclear devastation. The Gulf monarchies — whose prosperity, stability, and political equilibrium remain closely bound to the air, waters, and economic arteries of this very region — would scarcely be immune to the slow and merciless advance of radiation.

Nor would Iran's other neighbours remain untouched. Both Turkey and Pakistan inhabit the same geographical circle, breathing the same winds and sharing a landscape where borders are little more than lines upon maps. The winds of the earth do not recognise frontiers, and radioactive clouds carry no regard for diplomatic agreements. The disasters that travel upon the currents of air require neither visa nor passport.

In such a moment even those Arab rulers who have sought to cultivate political proximity with Washington — showering the American leadership, particularly Donald Trump and members of his family, with lavish honours, jewels, and princely gifts — would be compelled to confront a stark and inescapable reality. For when a conflagration erupts, its heat does not discriminate between friend and foe. Once the flames are kindled, they rarely remain confined to a single land; they spread with a fury that engulfs entire regions.

History teaches us with relentless clarity that when the fires of war begin to burn, they consume the frontiers of allies and adversaries alike.

Yet the political consequences of this crisis may prove even more explosive than its military dimension. The reverberations within the architecture of global politics could be far more profound. Only days ago a telephone conversation between the President of the United States, Donald Trump, and the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, reflected precisely this atmosphere of anxiety and apprehension.

Moscow has voiced grave concern about the prospect of war and has urged an immediate ceasefire. Within the halls of international diplomacy, a growing realisation is taking hold: if this fire is not contained swiftly, it may grow into a blaze capable of consuming the entire structure of the global



order. What now appears to be a regional crisis could swiftly transform into a convulsion that shakes the very foundations of international stability and rattles the pillars of the world economy. Against this backdrop there are also reports that Russia and China remain in continuous consultation over the crisis. Beijing has reportedly advised Washington to halt the escalation of war and has expressed strong concern over reports suggesting that Iran's senior leadership might become targets of a potential American strike.

The statements emerging from Moscow and Beijing suggest that the world's major powers are acutely aware of the danger now looming on the horizon — a danger which, if allowed to spiral beyond control, could propel global politics into a new and perilous epoch.

Behind the formal curtains of diplomacy, a silent yet decisive struggle is underway. In the chambers of diplomacy the words may be spoken softly, yet their implications travel vast distances. Around apparently quiet tables, diplomats are striving to erect a barrier around a fire that, if left unchecked, could engulf the world itself.

The great powers sense the peril: should the lamp of reason be extinguished, the sword of power may plunge the world into darkness. When the politics of force loses the guidance of prudence, history has often found itself standing at the brink of catastrophe.

Indeed, some strategic analyses now speculate that if the situation deteriorates further, Moscow might extend its nuclear "umbrella" to Iran. Such a step would imply that any further nuclear strike against Iran could be interpreted as an act of nuclear aggression against Russia itself. In such circumstances the fragile balance of global politics could fracture in a matter of moments, and the world might once again approach that dreadful threshold where the shadows of a third world war begin to gather.

At that moment humanity would be compelled to look into the mirror of its own history and decide whether it will bow before the arrogance of power or heed the counsel of wisdom.

History reminds us, again and again, that those who beat the drums of war are often the least acquainted with its horrors. Yet once the smell of gunpowder spreads through the air, it is the entire caravan of humanity that must pay the price. Time and again civilisation has learned that decisions taken in the intoxication of power have a habit of leaving entire societies buried beneath the rubble of their consequences.

Thus, the central question in this unfolding drama is not one of power, but of reason and humanity. If the lamp of wisdom is allowed to fade, the present spark in the Middle East could ignite a fire that engulfs not merely one region but the destiny of the entire world.

The lessons of history are unmistakable: the road to war often appears short and decisive, yet its destination is almost always lost in long corridors of darkness.

At this moment the world stands at a turning point where only reason, prudence, and diplomacy can safeguard the future of mankind. The issue before humanity is not the triumph of power but the

preservation of wisdom and civilisation itself. If global leadership fails to keep the flame of prudence alive, the present spark in the Middle East may grow into a conflagration whose flames reach far beyond the region and seize the fate of the world.

War, in its first appearance, often seems swift and simple. Yet its ultimate end is almost invariably lost in a wilderness of shadows.

History teaches us repeatedly that wars are often decided in moments of passion, but their cost is paid by humanity in long years of painful reflection. The survival of civilisation depends upon those who sit within the chambers of power remembering a simple yet solemn truth: a single moment of error can sometimes become the regret of centuries.

Today the world stands at a crossroads where those entrusted with decisions in the citadels of power must remember that when the fires of war ignite, their flames rarely distinguish between friend and foe. Humanity now stands at a junction where one decision may lead towards the shores of peace, while another may plunge the world into the whirlpool of destruction.

If the lamp of wisdom is extinguished, the spark now flickering in the Middle East could easily become a fire whose heat engulfs the entire world.

The Final Reckoning of History

The beating of war drums may outwardly proclaim the confidence of power, yet history reminds us that their echoes often fade amid the ruins of shattered civilisations. Again, and again the chronicles of mankind have demonstrated a sombre truth: the path of force may appear swift and decisive, but its destination is almost always lost in long corridors of darkness.

Should the leaders of the world keep alight the lamp of wisdom, this present crisis too may one day be recorded in the pages of history merely as a stern trial through which humanity passed and endured. Yet if passion were to overwhelm reason, the present spark in the Middle East could easily kindle a conflagration whose flames might redden the skies of the entire world.

The preservation of civilisation therefore lies in a simple yet profound choice: that the leaders of nations must prefer the counsel of prudence, foresight, and peace over the intoxicating pride of power. For history bears witness to a painful reality — that a single moment of misjudgement can sometimes ripen into centuries of regret.

Amid all these possibilities and anxieties, the central question confronting humanity is stark and unavoidable: can the world, intoxicated by the illusion of power, truly afford to repeat the most dreadful experiment in the history of mankind — the unleashing of nuclear devastation?

If global leadership fails to keep the lamp of wisdom, prudence, and diplomacy burning brightly, the spark now flickering in the Middle East may grow into a fire whose flames would seize not merely a region, but the destiny of the entire world.

For in the final reckoning of history, nations are not judged by the force they unleash, but by the wisdom they exercise when the fate of civilisation itself hangs in the balance.

Tuesday, March 17, 2026

The Shadow Game on the Global Chessboard

Crossing the Red Line

History, when contemplated with sobriety rather than sentiment, is never a mere procession of dates and incidents. It is, rather, a living chronicle of the resolve of nations, the shifting equilibrium of power, and the veiled stratagems through which global politics so often conducts its silent game. When the historian takes up his pen, he does not simply catalogue occurrences; he strives, as far as human insight allows, to draw aside the curtain behind which great powers arrange their pieces upon the board of the world. South Asia and the Middle East have for centuries formed one of the principal theatres of this quiet yet formidable contest—a vast chessboard upon which kings are sometimes checkmated and pawns, with tragic regularity, are sacrificed.

In my article published on 9 March 2026, entitled *“The Secret Game upon the Global Chessboard,”* I ventured to suggest precisely this: that what appears upon the surface of events in the region is seldom the true game itself, but merely its shadow cast upon the wall of public perception. The argument advanced therein was that Pakistan, during the preceding months, had played a constructive and stabilising role within the region—one that not only forestalled the eruption of a potentially devastating crisis but also helped spare Iran from a fate not unlike that which, in darker hours of recent history, befell Syria.

According to a range of emerging assessments, a covert strategic design had been forming among certain global actors: a design intended to weaken Iran through the calculated encouragement of internal unrest, ethnic insurgencies, and mounting economic pressure, thereby pushing the country towards the precipice of civil strife. The outline of the scheme was disquietingly clear. Militant networks operating in Afghanistan were to be manipulated in order to generate instability along Iran’s frontiers, while internal protests would be fanned into broader agitation, ultimately paralysing the authority of the government in Tehran.

Yet history, which often seems governed by inexorable forces, occasionally turns upon the foresight of a single state. There are moments when prudence exercised in time alters the course not merely of national policy but of regional destiny. In this instance, Pakistan appears to have acted with a combination of diplomatic subtlety and operational vigilance that disrupted the unfolding design.

Reports circulating in security circles suggested that more than twenty-five thousand militants affiliated with so-called “Khorasan” formations within Afghanistan, together with nearly twenty thousand fighters associated with Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, and other irregular elements, were being positioned within a wider plan intended for eventual deployment against Iran. The object was stark: to fracture the country internally and to ignite in the region yet another conflagration akin to the Syrian catastrophe, thereby plunging the wider Muslim world into a further twilight of instability.

Within this broader design, an additional instrument was reportedly prepared—an information campaign conducted through satellite-based digital connectivity. Under this plan, networks linked to Starlink internet systems were to facilitate a coordinated propaganda offensive. It is alleged that more than thirteen thousand specialised devices were intended to be smuggled through Afghan

routes into the frontier regions bordering Iran and Pakistan, enabling the orchestration of large-scale agitation through social media and encrypted digital channels. Yet here again, the vigilance of Pakistan's security and intelligence institutions appears to have intervened in time, exposing and frustrating the scheme before it could mature into a wider crisis.

At that juncture, the architects of the larger design were compelled to recognise that a carefully prepared stratagem had miscarried. History teaches us that when proxy warfare, information campaigns, and the engineering of internal upheaval fail to achieve their intended purpose, powerful states often resort to the final and most perilous recourse—open confrontation.

And thus events began to unfold along precisely the trajectory that earlier warnings had anticipated. When the attempt to destabilise Iran faltered, tensions within the region entered a new and more volatile phase. Various militant organisations operating from Afghan territory were once again activated against Pakistan, and the slow but unmistakable escalation of frontier tensions began to drift toward the possibility of military confrontation.

The developments we witness today—the attempted drone incursions over Pakistani cities, the sharpening of border tensions, and the lengthening shadow of proxy warfare—are not isolated occurrences. They represent, rather, the next movement in that wider geopolitical contest whose pieces are arranged upon the global board. The incidents of the past fortnight alone suggest that the region now stands at a perilous crossroads, where even a minor spark may serve as the harbinger of a far larger conflagration.

Crossing the Red Line: Afghan Taliban Drone Incursions and Pakistan's Security

It is against this strategic background that the present discussion must be understood. What follows is not merely a tale of a handful of drones traversing contested skies; it is another calculated move within the grander game of international rivalry, a game in which the destinies of entire regions—and the interests of nuclear-armed states—may be quietly placed at stake.

The pages of the subcontinent's past bear eloquent witness to a recurring truth: this land has seldom been free from the interplay of power, politics, and ideology. When historians recount stories of borders in this part of the world, they do not speak merely of lines traced upon a map. They speak of the destinies of nations, the delicacy of diplomacy, and the ceaseless negotiation of power.

The geographical character of South Asia reflects these layered realities with striking clarity. Tribes dwelling in the shadow of mountain ranges, states spread across fertile plains, and the strategic interests of distant powers frequently become entangled in a pattern so intricate that, at times, the air is filled with the fragrance of cooperation—while at others it is darkened by the acrid scent of gunpowder.

At various moments in its long chronicle, the region has served as the stage upon which empires have risen and fallen. At other times it has been the meeting point of civilisations whose encounters opened new intellectual horizons. Yet through this long historical passage one truth has remained unmistakable: whenever the fires of conflict have been kindled across these frontiers, their flames

have seldom remained confined to the battlefield. They have spread into the political climate and the social fabric alike.

Relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan form part of this larger historical continuum. On the one hand lies a shared religious and cultural heritage; on the other, the persistent complexities of frontier politics. Over the past several years, clouds of tension have periodically gathered between the two neighbours. Yet recent allegations concerning drone incursions have propelled this uneasy relationship into a new and potentially hazardous phase.

Drone technology, one might say, has become the silent instrument of modern warfare. At a glance it resembles nothing more menacing than a mechanical bird, yet the moment it takes flight it sends ripples of concern through the chambers of international politics. In recent days, alleged drone strikes attributed to Afghan Taliban elements over several Pakistani cities—most notably Rawalpindi, Kohat, and Quetta—have once again illustrated a sobering reality: the face of war in the modern age has changed.

Where once artillery and infantry dominated the theatre of battle, the skies are now shared with technological emissaries—drones that hover unseen yet carry consequences far beyond their size. Though the reported attacks appeared limited in their immediate scope, their political and diplomatic implications are considerably deeper. The intrusion of such aerial systems has stirred debate not only within military circles but across the broader political and social landscape.

The present report, therefore, seeks to examine these incidents with both historical perspective and analytical care—exploring their background, their causes, and the potential consequences they may hold for a region already poised upon a delicate and uncertain balance.

In the conduct of statecraft there exist certain principles which nations regard not merely as policies but as emblems of their dignity. These principles are often described in the language of diplomacy as “**red lines**”—limits beyond which patience ceases to be a virtue and restraint yields to necessity. The reported attempts to launch drone attacks against several Pakistani cities are now widely being interpreted within precisely this framework. For Pakistan, the matter is not simply the intrusion of a handful of unmanned machines into its airspace; it carries the weight of a symbolic message. Every sovereign state establishes certain inviolable thresholds concerning its security. When an external actor crosses those thresholds, the issue ceases to be merely a military challenge—it becomes a test of national honour itself.

The gravity of the episode is heightened by a simple historical observation. In the past, tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan have, for the most part, remained confined to remote frontier regions. Yet when the shadow of a dispute stretches beyond those rugged borderlands and falls upon the walls of great cities, its meaning changes profoundly. What had once been a purely military question acquires psychological and political dimensions. It is in this broader light that Pakistan has viewed the alleged drone operations attributed to the Afghan Taliban. Within the corridors of power in Islamabad, an unsettling question has begun to echo with growing urgency: if a neighbouring authority can dare to target Pakistani cities directly, does this not signify that the political landscape of the region is entering an altogether new phase?

Following the incidents reported on Friday, Pakistani authorities declared that the attempted drone strikes had been intercepted and neutralised in time. Yet reports that several civilians were injured by falling debris inevitably stirred public anxiety. The episode also revived a deeper and more troubling question: whether the evolving technologies of modern conflict may in future render Pakistan's urban centres vulnerable to similar incursions.

Thus the event cannot be interpreted solely as a limited military operation; it was also, unmistakably, a signal—one that has compelled Islamabad to recognise that the strategic currents of the region may be shifting. It brings to mind an old maxim of statecraft: when the vigilance at the frontier weakens, the gaze of the adversary soon reaches the city walls.

Pakistan responded with sharp condemnation, making it unequivocally clear that the targeting of civilians was wholly unacceptable. In the view of Pakistani officials, the Afghan Taliban had crossed a boundary that cannot lightly be ignored. Official statements from Pakistan emphasised several fundamental points.

First, that Afghan territory must not be permitted to serve as a base for terrorism against any neighbouring state.

Second, that the targeting of civilians is categorically unacceptable under any circumstances. Third, that Pakistan retains the full and unquestionable right to defend its citizens.

These declarations are not merely expressions of national sentiment; they echo the principles of international diplomacy and the doctrine of sovereign responsibility. Under established norms of international law, if a state's territory is used as a platform for attacks against another country, the injured state may regard such actions as hostile and is entitled to take measures in self-defence.

There is also a historical dimension to this position. In the past, Pakistan has repeatedly urged that Afghan soil should not be allowed to serve as a sanctuary for the banned organisation Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan. Should the Afghan Taliban themselves now appear to be directly implicated in actions against Pakistan, the situation inevitably becomes far more complex. Embedded within Pakistan's policy is a fundamental conception of state responsibility: that the duty of a government extends not only to guarding its borders but also to safeguarding the lives and property of its citizens.

According to Pakistan's military media wing, the events of 13 March involved an attempt by Afghan Taliban elements to target the cities of Rawalpindi, Kohat, and Quetta using several drones. Military officials explained that the aerial devices were neutralised through two distinct defensive methods. The first method, commonly described as **"soft-kill" technology**, involves disrupting a drone's control system by jamming its electronic signals, thereby rendering it incapable of completing its mission.

The second method, known as **"hard-kill" technology**, entails directly targeting and destroying the drone before it can reach its intended objective.

Although the drones failed to strike their targets, fragments of wreckage reportedly caused injuries to several civilians, including children. The incident serves as a stark reminder that in the age of technological warfare even relatively small weapons may generate disproportionately large consequences.

While it is reassuring that the attempted attacks were thwarted, a more pressing question inevitably arises: how did these drones reach Pakistani airspace in the first place? That question points to a sobering truth about modern conflict. In earlier eras danger usually appeared at the frontier; today it may arrive silently through the skies.

For their part, the defence authorities of the Afghanistan asserted that their drones had successfully struck an important Pakistani military installation and damaged a command centre there—an account that stands in stark contradiction to Pakistan's version of events. In such circumstances, it is not uncommon for both sides to become participants in an **information war**. In the modern world, narrative itself has become a weapon. Statements, claims, and counterclaims often exert a political impact that rivals—or occasionally surpasses—the tangible outcomes of the battlefield. In that sense, the conflict is being waged not only in physical space but also within the realm of perception.

Within Pakistani society, therefore, a question now commands intense public debate: have the Afghan Taliban effectively extended the theatre of confrontation from remote border zones to Pakistan's major urban centres? If that indeed proves to be the case, it will signify a transformation in the character of future conflict. Wars would no longer remain confined to remote frontiers and isolated outposts; metropolitan centres themselves might increasingly fall within the range of unconventional attacks. Such a development could represent the prelude to a broader and more dangerous confrontation.

For security institutions—and equally for systems of civilian defence—this possibility presents an entirely new challenge. To cross a red line, in the language of strategy, is to pass a point beyond which the path back to restraint grows perilously narrow.

Military analysts note that many of the drones involved appear to be commercially available systems that can be acquired with relative ease on the open market. Their characteristics are straightforward yet troubling: low cost, the capacity to carry a modest explosive payload, and the ability to strike within a limited but operationally useful range. These devices represent a disquieting trend in contemporary warfare. Because they are comparatively easy to obtain or assemble, they have increasingly fallen into the hands not only of states but also of non-state actors across the world.

Thus, the humble drone—small in size, modest in cost, yet formidable in implication—has become one of the defining instruments of twenty-first-century conflict, reshaping the geometry of war in ways that strategists and statesmen alike are only beginning to fully comprehend.

The authorities of the Afghan Taliban have maintained that these operations were undertaken in retaliation for alleged Pakistani air strikes. Lacking a conventional air force in the traditional sense, the Taliban have, by necessity as much as by design, turned toward drone technology as a substitute instrument of aerial capability. In the asymmetrical conflicts of the modern age, where weaker actors must often improvise against stronger adversaries, such technologies offer a relatively accessible means of projecting force beyond immediate frontiers.

Two principal varieties of drones are said to have been employed. The first consists of so-called **suicide drones**—unmanned aerial devices designed to strike a target and destroy themselves upon

impact. The second involves **quadcopters**, four-rotor drones broadly inspired by technologies that have emerged from the defence industries of Israel. These are typically used for surveillance or for short-range tactical strikes, offering mobility and precision in confined operational environments.

The increasing prominence of such systems in regional conflicts is not without precedent. During the confrontation between India and Pakistan last May, it was widely alleged that Israeli operators had deployed similar drone technologies remotely from Indian territory. At the time, bold claims circulated in certain strategic circles suggesting that these advanced “kamikaze” drones—self-destructive upon impact—were so sophisticated that even the technological defences of their closest allies, including the United States, possessed no reliable countermeasure. Such assertions were accompanied by the confident suggestion that only a handful of drones might suffice to inflict decisive damage upon Pakistan.

Yet events unfolded in a markedly different fashion. Pakistani defences reportedly succeeded in neutralising dozens of these devices—some accounts placing the number near sixty-nine—while others were brought down intact, allowing their technological features to be examined. In doing so, Pakistan effectively punctured what had been portrayed as an aura of invincibility surrounding the system. The operational centre from which certain drone activities were believed to be coordinated was subsequently targeted and destroyed, an episode that further deepened the shadow of technological rivalry now hanging over the region.

According to one foreign military analyst, it remains possible that the Taliban acquired many of the components used in their drones from external markets. In the contemporary global economy of technology, such components are rarely confined within national borders. Some observers suggest that the parts may have been assembled within Afghanistan itself; others speculate that clandestine networks could have facilitated assembly inside Pakistan. A further possibility is that key elements of the technology were transferred through smuggling channels that traverse the porous frontiers of the region.

There are also scattered reports that external specialists may have assisted the Taliban in refining their drone capabilities. Independent verification of such claims remains difficult, yet the broader geopolitical context makes them difficult to dismiss outright. In South Asian politics, the long and often bitter rivalry between India and Pakistan has consistently been a central factor shaping regional alignments and covert engagements.

Although the recent drone attempts caused no large-scale destruction, their psychological effect within Pakistan has been unmistakable. The reason lies not in the magnitude of the damage but in the precedent it appears to set. For the first time, the Afghan Taliban were perceived to be attempting strikes against major Pakistani urban centres. In strategic affairs, symbolism can at times prove as consequential as physical impact.

Recent political developments have only added to the atmosphere of suspicion. During a visit to Israel by the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, expressions of support for closer engagement with Afghan authorities were widely interpreted by some observers as evidence of a broader strategic alignment. Whether such interpretations are justified or exaggerated remains a matter of

debate; yet within Pakistani strategic discourse the belief persists that external actors may seek to exploit regional tensions to their advantage.

It is an old maxim of diplomacy that when two neighbours quarrel, a third often finds an opportunity to advance his own interests quietly. In the perceptions of many within Pakistan's security establishment, the possibility of indirect involvement by outside powers—particularly India and Israel—cannot be lightly dismissed. At the same time, Pakistan's military tradition has long emphasised the principle of responding at a time and manner of its own choosing, rather than under the pressure of immediate provocation.



Further reports suggest that the Taliban may also be exploring the development of a missile capability with a potential range of between two and three hundred kilometres. Should such a programme materialise, it could introduce a new and unsettling variable into the strategic balance of the region. The delicate equilibrium of South Asian security—already shaped by nuclear deterrence, ideological rivalry, and fragile borders—would become still more complex.

Statements attributed to the Afghan Defence Minister Mullah Yaqoob have added another layer of tension. He reportedly warned that if Kabul were attacked, retaliation could extend even to Islamabad. Such remarks were widely interpreted not merely as military rhetoric but as a calculated political signal—one that further strained relations between the two states.

Yet one practical question continues to perplex analysts: how did these drones reach the vicinity of Islamabad at all? The Afghan frontier lies at a considerable distance from the Pakistani capital. Their appearance so far inside Pakistani airspace suggests several possibilities. They may have been launched from within Pakistan itself, operated through clandestine networks, or remotely controlled from across the border while navigating concealed flight paths. For Pakistan's security institutions, the implications of each possibility are serious.

Strategic analysts generally agree on one point: the Taliban are unlikely to match Pakistan in conventional warfare. Pakistan possesses far greater military resources, organisational structure, and technological capacity. The Taliban's comparative advantage lies elsewhere—in guerrilla tactics, the use of irregular networks, and forms of asymmetric warfare that avoid direct confrontation. Large-scale military engagements would therefore offer them little strategic benefit.

Nevertheless, some analysts speculate that the Taliban could possess a stockpile of hundreds of drones. If that assessment proves accurate, the risk of further incursions cannot be dismissed. For Pakistan, this prospect introduces a new layer of concern within an already complex security environment.

Initially, India appeared reluctant to attach significant importance to the emerging confrontation. Yet

more recent developments have prompted renewed scrutiny. Certain observers now argue that India may view the evolving tensions as an opportunity to exert indirect strategic pressure upon Pakistan, potentially through the dynamics of proxy conflict. Indeed, statements from India's foreign ministry criticising Pakistani actions in Afghanistan as acts of aggression were sharply rebuked by Islamabad, which dismissed the remarks as both unnecessary and hypocritical.

For many experts, the dispute does not appear likely to fade quickly. Pakistan insists upon decisive action against the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, while the Afghan Taliban appear unwilling to concede to those demands. As both sides hold firmly to their respective positions, the possibility of mediation by a third party has increasingly been discussed.

Recent reports indicate that China has begun quiet diplomatic efforts aimed at reducing tensions between the two neighbours. Beijing's interest is neither surprising nor purely altruistic. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan occupy important positions within China's broader economic and strategic projects in the region, and stability between them is therefore a matter of considerable significance for Chinese policy.

Thus, relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan—shaped by decades of historical complexity—now appear to stand at a delicate and uncertain juncture. The drone incidents themselves may seem limited in scale, yet their implications extend far beyond the immediate events.

They serve as a reminder that in the contemporary world, wars are no longer fought solely with artillery and rifles. They unfold simultaneously across the domains of technology, narrative, and diplomacy. Should prudence fail to prevail in the councils of both nations, what began as a series of isolated incidents could gradually evolve into a prolonged confrontation—one capable of igniting a wider fire whose flames might spread far beyond the borders of the two states and cast their shadow across the entire region.

Yet if the path of prudence and reflection is chosen, it remains possible that the present crisis may one day open the way to a new horizon of peace. History, when read with patience rather than passion, teaches us a profound truth: wars are not always concluded by the sword; more often they are resolved by the quieter triumph of judgement and foresight. The survival of nations, in the final reckoning, rests not solely upon strength of arms but upon wisdom, restraint, and the measured exercise of power.

The pages of history repeatedly remind us that conflicts between nations seldom arise in sudden isolation. Beneath the surface of every confrontation lie years—sometimes decades—of preparation, rivalry, and the intricate entanglement of global interests. The growing tension between Pakistan and Afghanistan must therefore be understood within this broader and more complex frame.

At first glance, the attempted drone incursions originating from Afghan territory may appear to constitute only a limited military episode. Yet when examined more closely, they resemble merely a single move within a much larger political game. It is a chessboard upon which powerful states advance their interests with calculated deliberation, while regional actors—sometimes knowingly, sometimes unwittingly become pieces within a contest whose ultimate design lies far beyond their

immediate horizon.

The role Pakistan has played in the region in recent years has not gone unnoticed. Its efforts to prevent the slide of Iran toward the brink of civil war, its operations against militant networks, and its disruption of several designs associated with proxy warfare have all constituted interventions of considerable consequence. Such actions inevitably disturbed certain covert strategic designs pursued by external actors. It is therefore hardly surprising that Pakistan now finds itself confronted with a renewed form of pressure.

The renewed activity of militant groups operating from Afghan territory, the reorganisation of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, and the use of modern technologies to penetrate borders all testify to a broader transformation in the character of conflict. Warfare is no longer confined to the trenches of frontiers or the clash of conventional armies. It now unfolds in multiple theatres simultaneously—in the skies where drones drift silently, in the digital networks through which narratives are shaped, and in the informational battles that mould perception across societies.

Another reality cannot be ignored. This region of South Asia contains two nuclear-armed powers. Should tensions continue to escalate unchecked, the consequences would not remain confined to minor frontier clashes. They could develop into a crisis of global significance. For this reason, some analysts have begun to warn that the trajectory of events, if left unmanaged, might gradually incline toward the shadow of a potential nuclear confrontation.

Yet history also presents another, more hopeful dimension. Again and again, it has shown that when crises reach their most dangerous intensity, they sometimes become the very point from which new paths to peace emerge. When the fog of confrontation begins to lift, nations often rediscover a simple but enduring truth: that wisdom and restraint carry greater strength than displays of raw power.

Pakistan and Afghanistan are bound together by the immutable realities of geography. Their destinies have long been intertwined by mountains, trade routes, culture, and history. A perpetual hostility between them would not only harm both nations but would endanger the stability of the entire region. It is therefore imperative that the heat of emotion be tempered by the cooler winds of diplomacy, and that the present tensions be prevented from hardening into a conflict capable of engulfing the wider region.

For if the verdict of history had been determined solely by artillery and missiles, the world would still be wandering through the endless darkness of war. Yet the true judgements of history have most often been rendered by intellect, prudence, and the quiet authority of reason.

That, indeed, is the deeper lesson concealed within the dust of the present crisis: that the true test of power is not fought upon the battlefield alone, but in that decisive moment when a nation, standing upon the very threshold of war, still possesses the wisdom to choose the path of reason. There are moments in history that rise above the level of mere events and become echoes engraved upon the conscience of an age. The clouds that gather today upon the horizon of South Asia are not

simply clouds of gunpowder; they are the mists of a global politics in which the great halls of power have too often treated the future of humanity as pieces upon a chessboard.

To interpret the growing tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan solely through the narrow lens of border skirmishes or isolated drone incidents would therefore be to diminish the truth. What we are witnessing is another calculated move within a wider geopolitical contest whose unseen players seek to shape the destiny of the region in accordance with their own designs—sometimes in the name of counter-terrorism, sometimes through the theatre of proxy warfare, and sometimes through the subtle instruments of informational influence.

Yet history bears witness to another enduring reality. When nations pass through moments of severe trial, the true character of their resolve is revealed. The resilience and foresight with which Pakistan has navigated the crises of recent years suggest that it is capable of meeting not only the test of battle but also the more demanding trial of prudence and statesmanship.

To have helped avert a potential civil war in Iran, to have dismantled complex networks of militancy, and to have frustrated designs that threatened the stability of the region—these were not trivial achievements. They inevitably unsettled certain players upon the global chessboard. It is perhaps for this reason that Pakistan now finds itself standing at the threshold of yet another trial.

The new storm rising from Afghan soil may appear, on the surface, as little more than the flight of a few drones. Yet the political tempest concealed behind it possesses the capacity to engulf the entire region. If the embers of this confrontation are not extinguished in time, the present tensions could evolve into a wider conflict whose shadow might extend even toward the spectre of nuclear confrontation.

But there is also another truth inscribed in the chronicles of history: however formidable the forces of intrigue, deception, and coercion may appear, it is ultimately the nations sustained by unity, conviction, and collective resolve that emerge with honour from the storms of adversity.

The soil of Pakistan has endured many trials before. At times it has been thrust into the flames of terrorism; at others it has faced attempts at economic isolation or diplomatic marginalisation. Yet each time the passage of events has demonstrated that the spirit of this nation is not easily broken. If, therefore, the architects of geopolitical manoeuvres imagine that conspiracies and proxy conflicts can compel Pakistan to yield, they may well be forgetting a lesson that history has repeated through the ages: the strength of nations lies not merely in their weapons, but in the steadfast resolve of their people.

This, then, is the moment at which the leadership of the region must confront a decision of profound consequence: whether to advance further along the perilous road of hostility and war, or to choose instead the path of prudence and diplomacy, thereby bequeathing to future generations the promise of a more secure tomorrow. For once the gates of war are opened, the flames seldom remain confined within the narrow limits of frontiers. They spread outward, consuming not only the immediate combatants but the entire region that lies within their reach. Yet if the lamp of wisdom is

lit in time, the very crisis that now darkens the horizon may yet herald the dawn of a new and more durable peace.

In the tribunal of history, the judgement of nations is rendered not solely upon the measure of their strength but also upon the depth of their foresight. The days ahead will therefore determine which actors upon this South Asian chessboard prove to be little more than expendable pieces—and which, through the exercise of wisdom and restraint, succeed in inscribing a new chapter upon the ledger of history.

Whenever the destinies of nations are written upon the horizon of time, they are not determined merely by the clang of swords or the thunder of artillery. They are shaped in that solemn moment when a people, standing before the storm of adversity, refuse to allow the flame of their resolve to be extinguished. Today the lands of South Asia stand at precisely such a crossroads, where each passing hour carries within it the seed of tomorrow's verdict.

The winds that rise from the mountains of Afghanistan, the drones now hovering above the skies of Pakistan, and the hidden stratagems conceived in distant councils of global power—these are not isolated accidents of history. They are signals within a larger contest in which the merchants of power advance their pieces across the board in pursuit of interests that seldom acknowledge the human cost.

Yet the court of history has rarely shown favour to arrogance sustained by force alone. The palaces of ancient tyrants have crumbled into dust; the empires of once-mighty rulers have vanished into the shifting sands of time. What endures is the nation that preserves within itself the strength of faith, unity, and collective resolve—one that keeps alive the lamp of hope even amid the darkest trials.

The story of Pakistan itself bears witness to this truth. Across the decades it has faced repeated attempts to undermine its stability and challenge its very existence. At times it was thrust toward the flames of terrorism; at others it endured the pressures of economic constraint or the designs of diplomatic isolation. Yet on each occasion the people of this land demonstrated that nations endure not by weapons alone, but by the power of shared conviction and collective will.

If, therefore, certain actors upon the global chessboard imagine that proxy conflicts, drone incursions, and covert intrigues can weaken Pakistan beyond endurance, they may well be overlooking a lesson that history has repeated through the centuries: the strength of nations does not lie merely in the arsenals they command, but in the courage and resilience of their people.

The present hour thus demands a choice from the leadership of the region. Will they allow the fires of animosity to burn more fiercely, or will they summon the wisdom to dispel the darkness through the light of reason? For if the door to war is flung open even once, the flames it unleashes may spread far beyond the confines of disputed borders, threatening the stability of the entire region.

Yet if prudence and insight prevail, the present crisis might become the starting point of a new historical chapter one in which nations turn from hostility toward cooperation, and in which the region is illuminated not by the fires of conflict but by the light of peace.

Time, after all, is never a silent witness. It records the choices of nations with unerring fidelity upon the pages of history. The days that lie ahead will reveal who, upon this South Asian board, proves to be merely a transient piece—and who, through wisdom and foresight, succeeds in shaping a new narrative upon the horizon of history.

For perhaps this is the final lesson that nations must remember: wars are seldom won solely upon the battlefield; they are first won in the hearts of a people. And the nation whose spirit is sustained by conviction and purpose is one that no army of history can easily defeat.

Friday, March 20, 2026

Blood in the Shadow of Democracy

Conscience on Trial

At times, the annals of history are inscribed not in ink but in blood — in episodes so grievous that they shake the human conscience and compel us to re-examine the ancient scales by which justice is weighed. The harsher realities of contemporary Indian politics stand as a sombre mirror to such wrongs, whose gravity has scarred not only the Sikh community but the moral sensibilities of the wider world. The tragedy of 1984 endures in the Sikh heart as an unhealed wound, a sorrow that time has neither softened nor erased. In that cataclysm, more than two hundred thousand Sikhs were slain, their only alleged offence being the assertion of constitutional rights which, in any civil polity, ought to have been inviolable.

The assault upon the Golden Temple — a sanctuary that embodies not merely the spiritual radiance of the Sikh faith but a universal message of peace — marked a moment of profound moral rupture. To bombard so sacred a place was to trespass against the most elementary principles of religion, decency, and human dignity. Thousands of Sikh men, women, and children perished. Yet among the cruellest ironies was the reported selection of a Sikh general to command the operation — a decision that seemed designed to deepen the wound by forcing a nation to behold its own hand turned against itself.

Nor did the machinery of coercion halt there. In the years that followed, accusations arose that efforts were made to tarnish the Kashmiri movement for self-determination by recourse to stratagem and misdirection. During the visit of President Bill Clinton to the region, Sikhs were brutally shot at Gurdwara Chatti Singhpora in Jammu, an atrocity swiftly attributed to Kashmiri militants. To many observers, the episode appeared as a grim tableau in which state power, clandestine intrigue, and international diplomacy converged in a most disquieting alliance — a drama in which truth itself seemed imperilled.

Under mounting international scrutiny, a three-member investigative committee was convened. It included Justice (Retd.) Ajit Singh Bains, Chairman of the Punjab Human Rights Organization; Sardar Inderjit Singh Jaijee, Convenor of the Movement Against State Repression; and Lieutenant-General (Retd.) Kartar Singh Gill, associated with both bodies and possessed experience in military command and human rights advocacy alike. Following its inquiry, the committee is reported to have held the Indian external intelligence agency, Research and Analysis Wing, responsible. Efforts were allegedly made to suppress the findings; yet truth, though often obscured, is seldom extinguished, and the report entered the public domain beyond India's borders.

Taken together, these episodes have been cited by critics as evidence of how a government animated by an exclusionary Hindutva ideology may, beneath the formal vestments of democracy, subordinate human dignity to political expediency. The sacrifice of two hundred thousand Sikhs, the desecration of the Golden Temple, the bloodshed at Chatti Singapura, and the labyrinthine manoeuvres that followed stand, in this telling, as stark reminders that when power, religion, and politics are fused without restraint, the individual life may become tragically expendable. Such historical deceptions

and alleged conspiracies serve as a warning to the global conscience: that without the vigilant defence of justice and human rights, liberty risks becoming a hollow abstraction.

World politics has often been likened to a great, shadowed tree, its branches heavy with influence, stratagem, and designs conceived beyond the public gaze. It is also a gilded ledger upon whose pages the contest between blood and justice is faithfully recorded. In that theatre of veiled manoeuvre, an episode unfolded in a New York courtroom that startled observers across continents.

There appeared before the court a fifty-four-year-old man, Nikhil Gupta, whose testimony cast light upon what critics describe as one of the darkest boughs of that tree. Gupta alleged that the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi had orchestrated, through intermediaries and hired assassins, a plot to carry out a killing on American soil, furnishing the requisite resources and direction. The disclosure, if sustained by judicial scrutiny, lays bare a design in which the elemental principles of sovereignty and human dignity are subordinated to the calculus of power — a spectacle that unsettles the moral equilibrium of any civilised order.

Gupta, aged fifty-five, pleaded guilty to three grave offences: providing financial support for murder, conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire, and money laundering. He faces a potential sentence of up to forty years' imprisonment. The alleged target was Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, an American citizen and a prominent advocate of the Khalistan movement — a campaign that envisions a separate Sikh homeland and commands fervent support among segments of the diaspora as well as within India itself.

In court, United States Attorney Jay Clayton declared that Gupta had conspired to murder an American citizen on United States territory solely because that citizen exercised his lawful right to free expression. The statement stands as a sober reminder that even within free societies, external powers may seek to cast long shadows over fundamental rights. The lamp of liberty, though resilient, may flicker when confronted by the gusts of geopolitical ambition — yet the architecture of justice, if steadfastly upheld, can still admit the clarifying light of law.

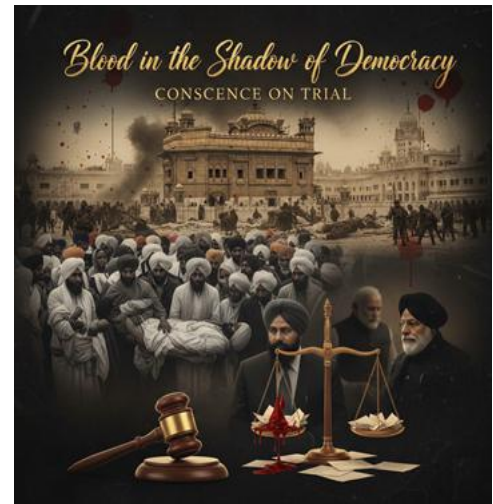
Gupta, it is said, imagined himself shielded by the presumed protection of powerful patrons, believing that proximity to authority would render him immune to consequence. Yet the law has a way of dispelling such illusions. In this instance, the processes of justice drew back the curtain, placing him before the mirror of his own deeds and at the threshold of accountability, as though a lantern had been lit along a darkened road.

International media have treated Gupta's confession as judicial corroboration of a plot extending to the highest reaches of political authority. If these proceedings bear out the allegations, they will mark a moment at which the intricate byways of global politics are illuminated with uncommon clarity. It is, perhaps, one of those rare junctures when history pauses — and inscribes, in unmistakable script, the austere syllables of truth.

India has formally designated Pannun a terrorist; he, for his part, describes himself simply as an activist. The Sikhs constitute scarcely two per cent of India's vast population, yet among certain circles there persists the aspiration for a separate homeland — a longing sustained by memory,

grievance, and an unextinguished sense of nationhood. Across the diaspora, voices are raised in favour of Khalistan, a cry that its adherents present not as sedition but as the expression of a collective temperament marked by endurance and resolve.

According to the prosecution, in May 2023 an Indian government employee, Vikas Yadav, is said to have tasked Gupta with arranging the killing of Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. The alleged planning unfolded in meetings in Delhi, where the outlines of the plot were sketched. Yadav, it is reported, served within India's Cabinet Secretariat — a precinct that houses offices of the Research and Analysis Wing. The tableau, as described in court papers, resembles a dark web of political intrigue, its strands stretching from bureaucratic corridors to foreign streets.



Acting, it is alleged, upon Yadav's direction, Gupta made contact with an undercover American officer posing as a hired assassin. In a drama worthy of the most intricate statecraft, the officer played his part, receiving from Gupta personal details of the intended target — home address, telephone numbers — the mundane coordinates of a life rendered perilous by geopolitics. It is an enduring parable of law that where deceit burrows deepest, justice keeps its vigil.

Prosecutors further contend that, following the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada, Gupta furnished the supposed hitman with a list of additional targets. Ottawa, citing these allegations, levelled sharp criticism at New Delhi; India rejected the charges in the strongest terms. Thus, the affair passed from the realm of covert design into the open forum of diplomatic contest, where accusation and denial contend beneath the stern gaze of international scrutiny.

Pannun himself read law at Punjab University in Chandigarh during the 1990s, imbibing politics as readily as jurisprudence. After pursuing further studies in the United States, he founded Sikhs for Justice, an organisation advocating the creation of Khalistan — a campaign cast by its supporters as the latest chapter in a protracted historical struggle. To sympathisers, it is the embodiment of an idea whose colours are carried not only in Punjab but across continents.

On 6 May 2024, Canadian police arrested three Indian nationals in connection with Nijjar's murder. Nijjar, president of the Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara in Vancouver, had been shot dead on 18 June 2023. The arrested men — Karan Brar, Karanpreet Singh, and Kamalpreet Singh — hail from different districts of Punjab. The arrests suggested, at least to Canadian authorities, that the alleged conspiracy was neither solitary nor incidental, but networked and deliberate.

By 14 September 2023, relations between Canada and India had reached a fevered pitch, shaken both by the killing and by the suspension of trade discussions. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau publicly alleged the involvement of agents of the Indian state, precipitating a diplomatic rift of uncommon sharpness. It was a moment in which politics and morality collided in full public view.

During the G20 Summit in New Delhi, tensions surfaced unmistakably. Mr. Trudeau's departure was delayed by technical difficulties, an episode freighted with symbolism amid the wider discord, and Canada formally paused bilateral trade negotiations. Statements from Ottawa confirmed that commercial dialogue would be suspended. In global affairs, as ever, each gesture carries consequence; each move alters the board upon which nations play.

Reports spoke of a heated exchange between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Mr. Trudeau, in which Sikh separatism and diplomatic grievances were debated with candour. To New Delhi, the growing international profile of Sikh separatist activism — and occasional acts of vandalism against Indian diplomatic premises abroad — was a source of deep displeasure. To Ottawa, alleged foreign interference in domestic affairs struck at the very core of sovereignty. It was a scene of high political drama, every syllable weighted with implication, revealing once more the perennial contest between authority and resistance.

Mr. Trudeau asserted that India's actions amounted to interference in Canada's internal politics. The episode opens a contentious new chapter in the annals of global diplomacy, raising searching questions about power, influence, and the rights of minorities in an interdependent world. International politics, like chess, demands foresight; each move reverberates beyond the immediate square upon which it is played.

This sequence of events stands as a stark testament to the manner in which political, religious, and diplomatic forces are refracted in the mirror of human rights and justice. Each incident reminds us that truth, however encumbered, cannot indefinitely be concealed from the light of law, and that the conscience of the world, though sometimes slow to stir, is seldom permanently asleep.

The blood-stained chapters of 1984, the allegations of clandestine plots abroad, and the recurring charges of repression together compose a narrative that critics interpret as evidence of democratic forms strained by majoritarian impulse. The assault upon the Golden Temple and the massacre at Chatti Singhpora endure in historical memory as warnings of how state power, when entangled with sectarian animus, may trespass upon human dignity. Whether viewed as tragedy, as controversy, or as contested history, these events remain inscribed upon the public record.

For the Sikh community, they are wounds; for the wider human family, admonitions. To obscure their reality would be to dim the lamp of history itself. Allegations concerning the designs of the Research and Analysis Wing, whether in relation to plots on American soil or to attempts to discredit movements for self-determination, underscore the perils inherent in the abuse of power. Wherever authority is unmoored from accountability, injustice is never far behind.

The nations of the world would do well to recall that democracy is not sustained by the mere recital of its name, but by the vigilant protection of minority rights and the scrupulous observance of law. In the court of history, these episodes will remain on record; and those who hold aloft the standard of truth will not forever be silenced. The sacrifice of multitudes, the blood of innocents, and reports once suppressed yet later revealed all testify to a single enduring proposition: that oppression may strike deep roots, but it cannot extinguish truth.

Thus, the lesson endures. Power, politics, and religion — formidable though they are — cannot erase the inherent dignity of human life. The ray of justice may at times seem faint beneath gathering shadows, yet it persists. And it is to that persistent light — rather than to the transient glare of power — that history, conscience, and posterity ultimately render their allegiance.

Thursday, March 26, 2026

Asiya Andrabi: A Question History Cannot Dismiss

A Woman, A Cause, A Confinement

Kashmir is no mere name; it is a wound—one that, instead of healing with the passage of time, has only deepened, layer upon unquiet layer. If ever a chronicle were inscribed upon the pages of history in ink distilled from tears, it would surely be the chronicle of Kashmir. Its snow-clad summits stand not only as emblems of beauty, but as silent sentinels to centuries of sorrow. When the winds course through its valleys, they do not merely herald a change in season; they carry with them the echoes of cries, the laments of separation, and the heavy freight of unfulfilled longing.

This is a land where childhood matures beneath the shadow of fear, where youth dissipate into unanswered questions, and where old age lingers upon the threshold of waiting. Behind every door lies a story; within every eye, a buried dream; within every heart, an unspoken ache. Kashmir is not simply a demarcation upon a map—it is a living condition, an unremitting trial, a case yet unresolved in the austere court of history.

Amidst this enduring tragedy, there emerge figures who stand, resolute, against the current of their age. Asiya Andrabi is one such figure—a name that has come to signify not merely an individual, but an idea, a defiance, a question rendered in human form. Her story conducts us to a place where judgement yields to perception; where one must not merely hear but listen with the full weight of conscience.

For over seven decades, Kashmir has remained the crucible of political, geographical, and human crisis in the subcontinent. It is not merely a territory, but a living tragedy—one in which generations are born, come of age, and inherit the burdens of those before them. When the wind stirs through its frost-laden valleys, it unsettles not only the branches of trees but also releases the long-held sighs, muffled sobs, and half-uttered prayers of a protracted past. Here, beauty and anguish breathe in uneasy unison: the waters of its lakes may be limpid, yet within the human breast there surges a restlessness long denied repose.

This conflict has not only sustained tensions between two nuclear powers, Pakistan and India, but has also profoundly altered the lives of millions of Kashmiris. Within this fraught landscape, certain names within the Hurriyat leadership have assumed prominence—among them, Asiya Andrabi, who emerges as both a significant and a contested figure. To some, she is an emblem of resistance; to others, a locus of controversy. Yet beyond these competing portrayals lies an incontrovertible truth: she is a woman whose life has unfolded as a prolonged narrative of struggle, sacrifice, and sorrow. Her life transcends the confines of individual biography; it has come to embody an era, an ideology, and a continuous struggle.

Born in the 1960s into an educated family in Kashmir, Andrabi received her early education in Srinagar before pursuing studies in the sciences. Yet the trajectory of her life altered decisively as she bore witness to the mounting political unrest and popular disquiet in the region. It was not long

before she came to believe that the question of Kashmir demanded not only political articulation but also an ideological framing. This conviction would, in time, furnish the foundation of her public life. The turbulence of the 1980s and 1990s—marked by the rise of both armed and unarmed movements—drew her more deeply into active resistance. This was a period in which the Kashmiri youth, in particular, found themselves profoundly shaped by currents of dissent and mobilisation. Against this backdrop, Andrabi founded Dukhtaran-e-Millat in the 1980s—an organisation that would prove a defining chapter in her life.

Conceived as a vehicle to mobilise Kashmiri women, foreground Islamic identity, and organise political resistance against Indian rule, Dukhtaran-e-Millat sought not merely to represent women as passive victims, but to recast them as active participants in resistance. In doing so, it advanced a distinctive model—one that attempted to reconfigure gender roles within the broader movement. Unlike many contemporaneous groups, it drew women directly into the political and ideological sphere. Andrabi herself maintained that the role of women in any struggle for self-determination was not ancillary, but indispensable.

The roots of the Kashmir dispute lie in the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, after which the region became a contested territory. United Nations resolutions spoke of the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination, yet this pledge has remained unfulfilled. In international law—most notably within the Charter of the United Nations—the principle of self-determination is recognised as fundamental. Yet, as so often in the theatre of global politics, principle yields to expediency.

Kashmiri leaders, including Andrabi, have consistently asserted that the people of Kashmir possess the right to determine their own future—a claim grounded in the language of international law. The Government of India, by contrast, has characterised such movements as secessionist and inimical to the integrity of the state. It is this enduring contradiction that has perpetuated Kashmir as a site of unresolved conflict.

Legal proceedings were initiated against Andrabi under statutes including the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and provisions of the Indian Penal Code. According to the National Investigation Agency, her activities were deemed prejudicial to the sovereignty of the state. The UAPA, a stringent legislative instrument designed to counter terrorism and anti-state activity, has, in the view of critics, at times been deployed against political dissent as well.

Yet Andrabi's struggle has never been confined to the political sphere alone; it has also been deeply ideological. Her speeches reveal a pronounced interweaving of religious and national identity. Over decades, she has articulated her position through oratory, writing, and public protest, frequently participating in rallies in support of Kashmiri rights. The religious inflection of her rhetoric has led many to regard her as an ideological leader, even as others have subjected her to critique. It is, however, precisely this dimension that distinguishes her from many of her contemporaries: she presents the movement not only as a political cause, but as one undergirded by ideological and religious conviction.

The Government of India has instituted multiple legal proceedings against Asiya Andrabi, the most prominent of which was brought under the auspices of the National Investigation Agency. She was

convicted under provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and sections of the Indian Penal Code and sentenced to life imprisonment. Her associates, Sofi Fehmeeda and Nahida Nasreen, were likewise condemned to lengthy terms of incarceration, reportedly extending to three decades. Thus, the machinery of the state, invoking the imperatives of sovereignty and security, has dealt with these figures in the full severity of the law.

Her husband, Qasim Faktoo, himself a recognised figure within the Kashmiri movement, has spent decades behind bars, similarly accused of activities deemed inimical to the Indian state. His prolonged imprisonment has, in certain human rights circles, been regarded as emblematic of deeper concerns—raising questions not only of justice, but of duration, due process, and the very architecture of legal fairness. It is said that he has endured the rigours of confinement—privation, isolation, and the slow erosion of time—yet has not recanted his convictions.

Imprisonment, in such circumstances, is not merely a juridical penalty; it is a psychological crucible. Both Andrabi and her husband have endured extended periods of solitary confinement, facing limited facilities, medical challenges, and prolonged separation from their families. These conditions inevitably invite scrutiny when measured against the universal standards of human rights: whether the treatment of detainees accords with the principles that the modern world so often professes to uphold. Organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have, in analogous cases, raised their voices; yet, in Andrabi's case, some critics discern either a notable restraint or a muted response.

Such silence—or perceived reticence—may arise from a confluence of causes: political sensitivities, the pressures exerted by regional powers, or the perennial difficulty of securing reliable information in contested terrains. Yet the question persists with an uncomfortable insistence: why does the global conscience appear, at times, so selectively engaged? For, in principle, the defence of human rights admits of no hierarchy of suffering; it demands a consistency that transcends expediency.

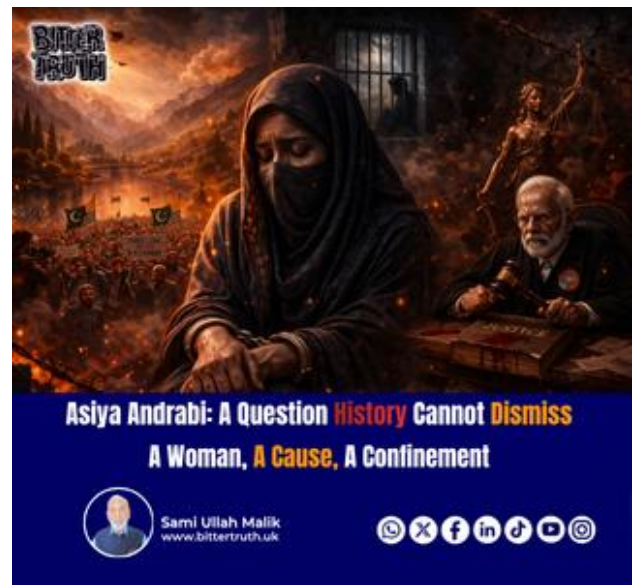
The Kashmir question, after all, is not merely a regional dispute; it is a deeply entangled problem within the wider fabric of international politics. Great powers, guided by interests as much as by ideals, have often chosen discretion over declaration. In such a climate, human suffering is frequently relegated to the margins, and those who endure it—among them figures like Andrabi—may find themselves isolated upon the global stage, their voices echoing into a disquieting void.

Asiya Andrabi herself remains a profoundly contested figure. To some, she is an emblem of freedom; to others, a standard-bearer of resistance; still others associate her with extremism. The truth, as is so often the case in protracted conflicts, resides somewhere in the interstices between these competing narratives. To apprehend her struggle fully requires an appreciation of Kashmir's intricate political, religious, and social tapestry—and, above all, a willingness to entertain more than one perspective.

Yet there is an additional dimension that lends her story a particular gravity: she is a woman who has traversed a path seldom walked. Her struggle is not solely political; it is also deeply human. It is a narrative of sacrifice, of endurance, and of emotional cost. Hers is not merely the story of an activist,

but of a mother, a wife, a daughter—roles that anchor her not in abstraction, but in the intimate realities of life.

One may imagine that, in her youth, her aspirations were not unlike those of countless others: a life of tranquillity, a home suffused with warmth, the laughter of children, the quiet assurance of a secure future. Yet the unrest that permeated the streets of Kashmir—the reverberation of slogans, the pervasive climate of fear—altered the trajectory of those dreams. She could not remain a silent spectator. She asked questions—and, in time, became a question herself: one to which the world has yet to furnish a definitive answer.



The founding of Dukhtaran-e-Millat was not merely an organisational act; it was, in essence, a declaration—a pronouncement that Kashmiri women would no longer remain confined to the domestic sphere but would assert their place within the unfolding of history. Andrabi gave voice to those long-rendered voiceless, instilling the notion that silence itself might constitute a form of complicity, and that to speak was, at times, an obligation. Yet every voice exacts its price—and hers was paid in the currency of freedom.

The bars of a prison are not fashioned of iron alone; they are forged also from time itself. They sever the individual from loved ones, from aspirations, and, at times, from the very sense of self. Andrabi has spent years within such confines, where each passing day assumes the weight of an age, and each night stretches into an unbroken stillness.

Consider, for a moment, the anguish of a mother unable to feed her children with her own hands, to rest her palm upon their heads, to wipe away their tears. What measure of sorrow inhabits such a condition? The walls of a prison may absorb her silent weeping, but where, one wonders, do the cries of the heart find their release?

And then there is her husband—Qasim Faktoo—another life, another confinement, another long vigil. A marriage reduced to fleeting encounters, where words are often exchanged through glances, and silence itself becomes a language. It is not merely the story of a single household; it is, in truth, the story of many. Yet theirs appears more acute—its sacrifices more exacting, its solitude more profound, its waiting more prolonged.

Where, then, stands the world that proclaims its allegiance to human rights? Where are the voices that rise, unwavering, against injustice? Are some stories rendered so quiet that they pass unheard, or are certain silences so heavy that they deter even the will to listen? This is not a question that pertains to Andrabi alone; it confronts all who profess a belief in justice.

The nights in Kashmir are long. When darkness settles upon its snow-laden mountains, time itself appears to falter. In some prison cell, one imagines, a solitary figure may look upward—towards the distant firmament—and wonder whether freedom might one day draw as near as the stars.

Therein lies a strange and haunting paradox: the sky is free, the birds are free, the wind is free—yet man remains confined. His dreams are confined, his desires are confined, his very life held in abeyance.

The story of Asiya Andrabi compels us—almost against our will—to pause and reflect. It unsettles, it disquiets, it presses upon the conscience with an insistence that cannot easily be ignored. It asks, with quiet but unrelenting force: do we indeed inhabit a world governed by justice, or merely one that professes it?

This is not an essay of verdicts. It does not presume to pronounce guilt or innocence, nor to marshal arguments in favour of one side over another. It is, rather, a human story—one inscribed in tears, tempered by patience, and tested by the long and unyielding passage of time.

When a woman relinquishes the ordinary comforts of life in service of an idea, she ceases to be merely an individual; she is transfigured into a symbol. So, it is with Asiya Andrabi. To some, she embodies hope; to others, resistance; to yet others, the persistence of an unresolved conflict. Yet one truth remains inescapable: her story will be heard. For truth, however deeply buried, possesses a peculiar tenacity—it has a way, in the end, of making itself known.

And perhaps, on that distant day, the sighs that ride upon the winds of Kashmir may yet be transmuted into prayers; tears may soften into smiles; and the harsh architecture of confinement may recede into the gentler province of memory. Until then, the story endures—alive in hearts, in words, and in those eyes that moisten upon encountering it.

Yet reflection alone is not sufficient. There arises, inevitably, the question of responsibility—of what ought to be done. It may be argued that international human rights bodies should assume a more active and visible role. A neutral investigative commission under the auspices of the United Nations, empowered to conduct independent inquiries, could lend clarity where ambiguity now prevails.

Organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch might, through detailed reporting, draw wider global attention to the matter. The international community, acting in concert, could exert pressure to ensure greater transparency in legal processes, while independent observers might be dispatched to monitor conditions within places of detention and to safeguard the rights of prisoners.

States, too, are not without agency. Pakistan, for instance, may choose to raise the issue more forcefully within diplomatic forums, to collaborate with international non-governmental organisations in amplifying human rights concerns, and to engage global media in presenting the case with greater coherence and urgency. There remains also the possibility—however complex—of pursuing recourse through international legal mechanisms, guided by the counsel of experts in international law.

Yet beyond the realm of policy and prescription lies a more elemental truth: this is not merely a political narrative; it is a human one. A woman confined for years behind bars. A husband whose life has been spent in incarceration. A family, gradually dispersed by the attrition of time. Together, they direct us towards a question both simple and profound: is justice, in truth, equal for all?

The case of Asiya Andrabi offers but a single aperture through which to glimpse the wider condition of Kashmir. It reminds us that behind every political dispute stand human beings—with their dreams, their sorrows, their fragile but persistent hopes. The question of Kashmir, it may be contended, cannot approach resolution until the fundamental principle of self-determination is meaningfully addressed, and until all parties approach the negotiating table with seriousness of purpose. Without a sustained commitment to justice, transparency, and human dignity, such stories will continue to arise—and the world may continue, uneasily, to look on.

Time will pass. Borders may shift; maps may be redrawn. Yet there are stories that resist erasure. The story of Asiya Andrabi is one such narrative—one that endures even as it collides against the hard walls of confinement, that speaks even in silence, that finds resonance in every heart attuned to the language of suffering.

It compels us, finally, to interrogate our own moral bearings. Is justice contingent upon power? Are human rights merely rhetorically flourishes, or do they possess a tangible, enforceable reality? And, most searchingly of all, does the world truly hear every cry of the oppressed—or are some voices consigned, irrevocably, to silence?

Kashmir remains as it has long been—beautiful, and burdened. Its lakes retain their clarity, yet one suspects that beneath their still surfaces lies the trace of unwept tears. Its mountains stand in their accustomed majesty, yet within their shadows linger dreams that await fulfilment.

And somewhere, within the dim confines of a prison cell, a woman endures—sustained by conviction. Time has not wearied her; solitude has not broken her; confinement has not circumscribed her thought. In that endurance lies her strength; in that strength, her story.

This, then, is not a declaration, but an invitation—to feel, to reflect. If, in reading it, there stirs within the heart even the faintest tremor of sorrow, if the eye is momentarily clouded, or the mind provoked to question—then perhaps its purpose is fulfilled.

For there are stories that are not merely heard—they are felt.

Saturday, March 28, 2026

The Mirage of Power: Beneath the Surface of a Changing World

A Quiet War: Power, Illusion, and the Making of a New Order

This world—once a confluence of civilisations—now appears to be receding into a wilderness of competing interests. There was a time when caravans passed through these lands singing the hymns of peace, and the lamps of knowledge and wisdom burned brightly in every direction. Today, however, the air is tinged with the acrid scent of gunpowder, and clouds of rising smoke obscure the very visage of humanity. Outwardly, all seems routine—news bulletins, official statements, the measured cadences of diplomacy—yet beneath this veneer of calm there stirs a disquiet so profound that it bears the unmistakable forewarning of a gathering historical tempest.

This is not merely an age of wars; it is, more insidiously, an age of narratives—narratives that veil reality and estrange mankind from its own discernment. We are told that wars are waged in the name of peace, that interventions are undertaken for stability, and that destruction itself is but a prelude to reconstruction. Yet one cannot help but ask: if all this is indeed for peace, why does unease haunt every corner of the globe? If it is for stability, why do the very foundations of human existence seem to tremble?

This is where a story begins, which at first glance seems to be a combination of contrasting elements, but in reality is made up of different colors of the same design. A design in which a centralised power aspires to draw the entire world into its orbit—an idea often encapsulated in certain circles as the “One World Order.” This is no mere political phrase; it is a vision wherein a singular force seeks to consolidate its hold not only over resources and economies but even over thought and consciousness itself. At this juncture, the heart quivers and the soul poses its most searching question: has humanity truly become so helpless that a handful of powerful hands may decree its destiny? Has the world arrived at a turning point where interest has supplanted justice, and power has eclipsed morality?

A glance through the pages of history reveals that this is no novel tale. In every age, powers have arisen that sought to perpetuate their dominance by moulding the world in their own image. Yet the present moment is distinct in that this process has grown more organised, more subtle, and more pervasive. Wars are no longer confined to battlefields; they are waged across the domains of economy, energy, information, and technology.

It is important to understand recent global developments against this backdrop. They are not isolated but part of a continuum — a carefully orchestrated strategy aimed at gradually gaining control of the world’s resources, regardless of the cost, regardless of how many regions are reduced to ashes. The sages of old have long said that the world is but a mirage: what appears is seldom real, and what is real often remains unseen. Contemporary politics seems to reflect that very illusion. What we are shown may not be the truth; and what is true has perhaps been deliberately concealed from our sight.

This essay is, therefore, an attempt to pierce that mirage—to strip events of their outward обол and discern the reality that operates beneath. For until we apprehend the truth, we can neither form

sound judgement nor chart a prudent course for the future. It is, in essence, a lament for a world shrouded in mist, wandering in restless search of justice and equity.

In every epoch of history, the emergence of a new power has provoked an instinctive reaction from the old. Whenever the clouds of politics gather densely upon the horizon, attention is invariably drawn to the flash of lightning rather than to the accumulating heat within the clouds themselves. Today, too, a new storm seems to be rising—one that outwardly manifests itself in the tensions surrounding Iran or Israel, yet whose deeper layers lie concealed elsewhere. As in ages past, when an ascending power approaches the thresholds of the prevailing world order, established powers respond—often unconsciously, yet decisively.

Such is the condition of our time. Here, Iran dominates the discourse; there, Israel commands the headlines; yet the caravan of reality passes silently through these avenues towards an altogether different destination. The contemporary global landscape is a living embodiment of this principle. What appears to be illuminated before the public eye often serves to obscure the true paths beneath. History teaches us that international politics resembles a vast chessboard: the pieces move in full view, yet the real intent lies hidden behind the curtain.

It is my purpose here to reveal, through the prism of two events, the deeper logic of this global strategy. Let us look not merely at the events themselves, but at the connections that bind them; not at the clamour, but at the silent design that underlies it. In doing so, I shall attempt to lift the veil from the geographical, economic, and political complexities that shape the strategies of global powers—particularly the interplay between China's economic ascendancy and the dynamics of global energy supply—so that more meaningful conclusions may be drawn.

The United States conducted a controversial operation in Venezuela, which resulted in the arrest of President Maduro. At first glance, it seemed like a political coup. In reality, it was a calculated blow to an economic artery. When Maduro was removed, the world declared it a victory for democracy. Applause erupted in some quarters. Legal measures were taken in others. Yet scant attention was paid to a more fundamental question: where did the true impact of this change fall?

Few people stopped to consider who the real consumer of Venezuelan oil was. The answer is obvious: China. Venezuela had been supplying tens of thousands of barrels of oil a day to fuel China's vast economic engine. With Maduro's removal, that pipeline was effectively severed, and the flow of energy abruptly stopped. Venezuelan oil was not just a commodity. It was the lifeblood of China's industrial body. Stopping that flow was like drying up the source of a river.

History, it must be remembered, rarely changes its course with great difficulty. Rather, it changes silently—and by the time humanity wakes up, the map has already been redrawn. This was not a mere political ploy. It marked the beginning of a broader strategy to contain China's growing economic influence. It stands as a reminder that the struggle for power is never limited to political maneuvering but is deeply intertwined with the ebb and flow of economic power.

The case of Iran is another link in the same chain. The measures taken against Iran have sent shockwaves of fear and anxiety around the world. Some saw them as attempts to neutralize the

nuclear threat. Others condemned them as violations of international law. Yet the essential question remains: whose lifeline was really affected? Once again, the answer points to China. Iran has been a direct supplier of large quantities of oil to keep China's economy afloat. This supply disruption has not only disrupted global energy flows but also limited China's trade momentum and put it in a state of uncertainty.

One could say that two important springs of China's economic caravan have suddenly stopped. This recalls an old metaphor: if the roots of a tree are deprived of water, its branches cannot bear fruit for long. It seems that China's economy is now going through a similar crisis. These two events, although seemingly unrelated, are actually connected within the same strategic design – an attempt by world powers to curb China's growing economic, political, and geopolitical reach.

The theory outlined by Ray Dalio is not merely analytical. It is a principle drawn from the depths of history: when a rising power approaches parity with an established power, conflict is inevitable. The rivalry between Germany and Britain sparked the devastation of World War I. Japan's clash with the United States in the Pacific sparked the second, which culminated in the devastating nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The long shadow of the Cold War – cast by the emergence of the Soviet Union as America's rival – completely reshaped the global order. And now, as Russia shows signs of rising again, the Ukraine crisis looms like a noose around its neck.



China now appears to be moving at this historic pace—and the process is already underway. The great powers of the past are beginning to recognize with calculated precision the vulnerabilities within this vast and emerging engine of global trade. China's burgeoning economy, and its expanding stake in the global oil market, stand as a modern reflection of an old and immutable law of history. In their determination to preserve strategic pre-eminence, established powers are exerting influence over China's energy lifelines and its arteries of trade. For power, when examined through a more reflective lens, is never merely material; it is inseparable from a deeper civilisational and intellectual contest. It is precisely this contest that has brought the contemporary world order to a moment of profound inflection.

Let us, for a moment, imagine China as a formidable engine—one that powers a vital part of the world's economic machinery. Yet, like every engine, it has an inherent weakness: fuel. While China contributes a significant share of global oil production, its industrial appetite makes it heavily dependent on imports. Its energy survival runs through four primary conduits: Venezuela, Iran, Russia, and Saudi Arabia. When two of these lines are cut, a third is restricted, and a fourth is thrown into uncertainty, the engine inevitably collapses, unable to maintain its full speed and momentum.

In just a few months, a large part of China's oil supply has been affected—yet the global focus, focused on Iran, has obscured a deeper strategic design. This is no trivial economic maneuver. This

is a silent war fought not with bullets but with sanctions, policy instruments, and calibrated political warfare. Thus, beneath the visible theater of events, the true strategy remains artfully hidden.

China's Belt and Road Initiative is far more than a network of trade routes; it is, in essence, a reimagining of global power itself. Stretching from Beijing to the heart of Europe, this intricate web signifies a fundamental truth: he who commands the channels of commerce holds the pulse of the world. Through railways, ports, and pipelines—modern echoes of the ancient Silk Road—China has extended its economic reach deep into the European continent. The objective is unmistakable: to secure influence over Europe's trade corridors, and thereby to assume a commanding position within the architecture of the global economy.

The subtle yet discernible inclinations of nations such as Germany, France, and Italy suggest that Europe, albeit gradually, is recalibrating its orientation—edging away from the United States and, cautiously, towards China. For Washington, this shift rings like a warning bell—one that speaks not only of competition, but also of potential strategic erosion. The rising posture of these European powers is already altering the delicate balance on which global power rests.

If energy is the fuel of this unfolding competition, technology is its blade—and Taiwan is its driver. As a center of advanced semiconductor production, Taiwan has become the beating heart of the 21st-century economy. Whoever commands that heart effectively commands the machinery of modern technological civilization. Both the United States and China want to bring that pulse under their sway. The United States' position is ambiguous, while China's claims to sovereignty make conflict inevitable. Here, there is little room for compromise. The clash of interests is too stark, too uncompromising. Indeed, it is here that the potential for a decisive clash is greatest—this island is, perhaps, destined to become the central theater of great-power rivalry.

Yet it is not simply a matter of coercing China. There is a lasting reckoning of American industrial and defense interests in this unfolding drama. War, throughout history, has never been the sole focus of destruction. It has also been a source of profit for certain powers. Every explosion, every crisis in the Middle East, echoes through the arms markets in the Gulf — testimony to a system in which conflict feeds an economic circulation measured in billions. Thus, the machinery of global strategy turns in tandem with the wheels of industry. Where materialism rules, humanity is marginalized, and expediency dominates.

When these threads are woven together, a coherent strategic pattern emerges—one that reveals a sixfold design underpinning American policy:

- *To restrict China's energy supplies;
- *To disrupt and recalibrate its trade routes;
- *To consolidate influence across critical regions;
- *To retain Europe within its strategic orbit, thereby limiting Sino-European integration;
- *To sustain the war-driven economic cycle, to profit from the arms trade;
- *And to weaken China before any potential conflict over Taiwan.
- *What appears scattered, in fact, gravitates around a single axis.

These scattered events on the world map are just chapters in a single unfolding story. Venezuela, Iran, Russia, Europe, and Taiwan represent separate fronts, yet the fundamental contest is one: to contain China's economic and geopolitical rise. It is a war fought less with weapons than with minds—a contest not just for territory, but for the architecture of economic order, technological supremacy, and global authority. Like a seasoned boxer who weakens his opponent by cutting off water and food, so too do world powers operate on a global scale—tightening the very resources that sustain power.

When history delivers its verdict, it does so without mercy. It pardons neither the powerful nor the meek. It asks only who understood the truth, and who chose to ignore it. Today, the world stands at a decisive juncture where silence itself may be guilty, and ignorance is a danger. We live in an era in which the control of resources is no longer a mere economic concern. It has become a basis for power. Energy, trade, technology—these are no longer tools of development alone, but rather weapons of control, wielded by those who seek to extend their reach across the globe.

It may be an uncomfortable truth, but it is a truth: in this relentless competition for power, humanity is often trampled underfoot. Settlements that once teemed with life are reduced to rubble. Dreams that once adorned imaginations dissolve into smoke. And amidst this devastation, a silent question lingers in the air: is this the world that man once imagined?

Democracy, once considered the authoritative voice of the people, has in many places played the role of a mask, behind which policies are made in the name of public welfare, but in reality serve the interests of a privileged few. It is this paradox that unsettles the conscience: that a system that aims to protect human freedom can, in certain circumstances, become an instrument of its subjugation.

In the words of the wise, the world is but a clear field where each individual must prove his point. He who understands only the surface is deceived. He who recognizes the inner reality comes closer to the truth. The need of the hour, therefore, is to awaken this deeper insight—to question, to ponder, and to peer beyond the superficiality of the headlines into the layered meanings that lie beneath.

It is also true that every dark night is followed by dawn. Yet dawn does not arrive unbidden; it must be summoned—through the lighting of lamps, the awakening of consciousness, and the courage to recognise truth. If mankind resigns itself to the role of a passive spectator, history will trample it with the same indifference with which it has trampled others.

This essay does not claim to deliver a final verdict; rather, it extends an invitation—to think, to reconsider, to perceive the world from a renewed vantage point. For what transpires across the globe is seldom accidental; it is part of an unfolding continuum. And if this continuum proceeds unchecked, the day may not be far when the world's resources, its economies, and even its modes of thought are concentrated within the grasp of a few.

History does not repeat itself in the same form. It resurfaces in new ways. Nations that fail to heed its cues are swept away by its current. This reflection is a modest attempt to awaken that awareness — so that we can look beyond events to the forces that animate them. So that we listen not only to

the noise but also to the silence in which truth often resides. For in global politics, truth is often hidden, and events that seem disconnected are often connected by a coherent strategic design.

In the final analysis, mankind still retains the power of choice. It may lose itself in illusion, or rise in pursuit of truth. It may remain a silent spectator or awaken and form its own judgement. For history belongs not only to the powerful, but also to those who recognise truth and stand—amidst the ashes of broken dreams—with the resolve of awareness and the courage of awakening.

And perhaps this is that very moment—when we must decide where we stand.

Tuesday, March 31, 2026

An Age on Trial

History's Verdict

This is an age in which history appears to have quickened its pulse—an age where the events of centuries seem compressed into years, and the decisions of years into fleeting moments. It presents itself, at first glance, adorned with the gilded slogans of progress, democracy, human rights, and global concord; yet beneath this resplendent veneer there unfolds a quieter, more insidious contest—one that gnaws at the very sinews of civilisations, economies, and ideas. Herein lies the central tragedy of our time: that amid proclamations of light, the shadows deepen and take firmer root.

Ours is not merely a time in which history is written; it is etched in lines that seem almost to smoulder. Humanity has stretched its reach to the moon yet has proven curiously incapable of securing peace upon its own earth. This much-celebrated epoch—garlanded with the rhetoric of unity and advancement—reveals itself, upon closer scrutiny, as a portrait of profound unease, shaped by an unrelenting struggle for power, advantage, and dominion.

If one were to imagine history as a living organism, the present moment would register as a fever: its heartbeat accelerated, its breath unsettled, its gaze haunted by an indistinct but unmistakable apprehension. Global politics has long since ceased to be a measured exercise in principle, treaty, and diplomatic decorum; it has become, rather, an open theatre of contest, where power speaks plainly and interests contend without disguise. Words have assumed the character of weapons, narratives have hardened into battlefronts, and information itself has become an instrument so potent that it may refashion reality in its own image.

The modern world stands at a precarious juncture, where decisions are no longer confined to the chambers of state but are forged in fields, markets, and behind the carefully drawn curtains of media spectacle. Truth is recast into narrative; falsehood is dignified as strategy. The annals of history bear sombre witness: whenever power has cast aside the restraints of morality, humanity has paid the price in blood.

The present essay is, therefore, an earnest attempt to apprehend this intricate and elusive global landscape. It seeks not only to probe the deeper currents beneath recent political events, but also to illuminate those hidden forces, ambitions, and stratagems which, though seldom visible, exert a decisive influence upon the making of the world. It is not a mere aggregation of facts, but a journey of thought—one that invites the reader beyond the outward contours of events to a more searching encounter with their concealed realities.

What follows is, in essence, both reflection and remonstrance: not simply a political analysis, but an intellectual protest—a mirror held up to our age, in which its true countenance may be discerned. It does not merely inform; it provokes, urging the reader to think, to weigh, and to question. For this is no hour for silence, but for understanding—and for making understanding possible.

It is, at once, a question and a warning. A question—whether the world we perceive is indeed the world that is presented to us; and a warning—that failure to comprehend the spirit of our age may cost us not only the present, but the future as well.

This troubled era, in which politics has shed its moral essence and been reduced to a competition of power, bears the undeniable marks of those critical junctures in history when events cease to be mere events and instead become the instigators of destiny. Ours is an era that proclaims itself one of progress and harmony, but beneath its surface there is a turmoil born of civilizational tensions, strategic rivalries, and the relentless pursuit of interests. If history is likened to a river, we stand at that deceptive juncture where the surface appears calm, even as powerful undercurrents swirl beneath.

Within the context of this contemporary global disquiet, the present discourse advances a reflective and analytical proposition—one that endeavours not only to unravel the layers of modern politics but also to identify the forces, intentions, and latent dangers that operate behind the scenes. It aspires, through a union of literary grace and intellectual depth, to offer the reader not merely information, but insight.

It is not so distant a memory that, upon the horizon of global politics, the first presidency of Donald Trump rose like a sudden and disquieting sun. That moment did not merely signify the outcome of a democratic process; it marked, rather, the beginning of a perceptible shift in the balance of global power. Even at that time, it was suggested that this was no ordinary political transition, but the prelude to a gathering storm—one whose depths concealed the ominous possibility of a wider conflagration.

During that period, American foreign policy appeared to depart from the measured traditions of diplomacy, adopting instead a posture of assertive unilateralism. In the more combative dimensions of this approach, one discerned a preference for force over deliberation, for confrontation over restraint. Coupled with this was the strategic alignment with Israel, and the influential proximity of figures within the inner circle, forming a triangular dynamic whose vectors seemed, in no uncertain terms, oriented towards the Muslim world.

Heightened tensions with Iran, unwavering support for Israel in the Middle East, and a visible disdain for international institutions—all pointed towards the emergence of a new style of governance on the global stage. For the perceptive observer, it was not difficult to foresee that, unchecked, such a trajectory might lead the world towards a far more dangerous confrontation. To cast Iran as the point of ignition, while entangling Sunni states in sectarian rivalries, bore the unmistakable imprint of a calculated design—a strategic chessboard upon which the weakening of the Muslim world appeared a central objective.

When such phenomena first entered the public domain, they were met with skepticism in the Western world, especially among American audiences. To many, such analysis seemed exaggerated, even conspiratorial. Donald Trump was seen as an unconventional but effective leader. There is an important distinction here: the West often presents its policies in the language of democracy, peace,

and development, while the East suffers the consequences on its own soil. It is this distortion of perception that gives rise to disagreement – not just of opinion, but of self-understanding.

Thus arose the question: if a country such as Pakistan could contemplate nominating Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize, and its leadership could credit him with averting nuclear war in South Asia, why entertain such apprehensions? Yet this question, in truth, reveals less about the validity of the concern than about the intellectual gulf that persists between Western narrative and Eastern experience—a gulf that continues to shape the discourse of our divided world.

History possesses, among its many attributes, this inexorable quality: that sooner or later, it delivers its verdict. And so it came to pass. Rather than restraining the unfolding tragedy in Gaza Strip, Donald Trump lent unequivocal support to Israel—thereby rendering unmistakable the affinity between himself and Benjamin Netanyahu, as though they were but two faces of the same coin.

When the suffering in Gaza reached its most harrowing intensity and the conscience of the world stood by in mute observation, it became painfully evident that the language of human rights, so often invoked, had been reduced to a mere instrument of political convenience. Trump's overt endorsement of Israel only deepened this realisation: that in the theatre of global politics, morality enjoys no permanent station—it is, at best, subordinate to interest.

As the spectre of a possible strike against Iran began to gather form, and the Middle East once again appeared poised upon a powder keg, the familiar invocation of American democracy was deployed to suggest that no president could unilaterally plunge the nation into war. Yet the practice of politics proved less reassuring than its theory. In the event, such assumptions were not merely tested but overturned, as the very democratic norms so frequently extolled were brushed aside with disquieting ease.

The composition of Trump's second administration offered a revealing indication that moderation would yield to a more strident disposition in the making of policy. The individuals assembled were not merely practitioners of governance, but exponents of a worldview in which confrontation was not a last resort but a preferred instrument. Institutions such as the United States Congress—long regarded as the citadels of democratic restraint—appeared, in practice, diminished, even ineffectual. The initiation of hostilities without its sanction stood as a stark reminder that institutions, for all their constitutional dignity, may falter before the force of determined personalities. A conflict extending beyond a fortnight was not merely an episode; it was a declaration—that the world had entered a new and more volatile era of contention. Such a trajectory is fraught with peril, for when institutions are enfeebled, decisions cease to be anchored in deliberation and become instead the captives of impulse and expediency.

Within this charged atmosphere, certain figures assume particular prominence. Senior officials within the American security establishment—among them those entrusted with defence and intelligence—embody a synthesis of military experience and ideological conviction, wherein elements of religious partiality and martial assertiveness appear intertwined. Statements and positions articulated by segments of the leadership suggest that this conflict is not confined to the material domains of geography or economy but extends into the realm of ideas and belief. Alarming discourse surrounding Al-Aqsa Mosque, coupled with overtly hostile rhetoric towards Muslims,

signals a narrative that risks recasting political disagreement as civilisational confrontation—one that may divide the world along confessional lines.

Ours is an age defined, ostensibly, by the abundance of information; yet abundance does not guarantee veracity. The role of the media, in this regard, is both decisive and disquieting. Where certain facts are obscured and particular narratives amplified, public opinion is gradually moulded in accordance with that design. It is for this reason that the emergence of alternative accounts so often produces astonishment: not because the truth is new, but because it has long been withheld.



When the backgrounds and affiliations of influential figures were more closely examined, the disclosures proved startling to many. In particular, reported connections with organisations such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Bharatiya Janata Party prompted a telling silence—one that betrayed, perhaps, an unspoken recognition that prior understanding had been confined within narrow bounds.

Within Pakistan, a certain indulgent disposition towards Trump has, at times, been discernible—rooted less in careful analysis than in his rhetoric critical of India. Yet the maxim that “the enemy of one’s enemy is a friend” has seldom proved reliable in the calculus of international relations. In truth, there are neither permanent allies nor immutable adversaries—only enduring interests. It is a curious paradox that while criticism of Trump finds ready expression within the United States, he is, in some quarters of Pakistan, presented as a sympathetic figure. The notion that his mockery of Narendra Modi renders him a well-wisher is, upon closer reflection, a rather disarming simplicity. Global politics is not governed by sentiment, but by the cold arithmetic of advantage.

In due course, a number of observers conceded that the media had distanced them from the fuller truth. Such admissions serve as a sobering reminder that in the modern world, the dissemination of information has itself become a weapon, and the concealment of truth a calculated stratagem. The wars of our time are no longer waged for mere tracts of land, but for the resources that lie beneath them. Oil, gas, and other reservoirs of energy constitute the true prizes over which great powers contend. In this regard, Iran occupies a position of undeniable strategic significance, and the prospect of conflict appears intimately connected with this reality.

The intervention in Venezuela, followed by the expected talk about Iran, can be read not as isolated events but as successive expressions of a single strategic design. The acquisition of energy reserves, in fact, represents a modern incarnation of imperial ambitions. The provisions outlined within the US National Security Strategy offered no ambiguous signal: that such developments were neither accidental nor improvisational, but rather deliberately designed.

When a state’s own policy documents declare an intention to deprive its adversaries of critical

resources, it amounts, in substance, to a declaration of conflict—albeit couched in the tempered idiom of diplomacy. A careful reading of such doctrine reveals a clear objective: the securing of energy dominance at the expense of rivals. The strike against Iran in March 2026 stands, in this light, not as an aberration but as the logical execution of policy.

Yet a war directed against Iran cannot remain contained within its borders. It has already begun to draw the wider region into its orbit, with consequences reverberating across the Middle East and beyond, unsettling the global economy itself. Oil prices, trade routes, and political alignments alike bear the imprint of this upheaval. Concurrent anxieties surrounding Al-Aqsa Mosque and attempts to draw Muslim-majority states into the conflict, suggest the contours of a far more expansive design.

Modern warfare is not fought with weapons alone, but with art. Through so-called “false flag” operations, responsibility for an event can be falsely attributed, thus providing a pretext for escalation. Such actions are extremely dangerous, as they blur the distinction between truth and falsehood. Elements within the Iranian leadership have characterized certain attacks in these terms, while concerns have also been expressed about Turkey and Pakistan—though, in some quarters, a lingering complacency persists.

Within the US Senate, the description of Pakistan’s missile program as a threat—along with a conspicuous silence on India—can be seen as less than impartial. An exercise in strategic pressure versus an assessment. Such selectivity illustrates a broader reality: that the rules set by major powers often serve their interests. Excluding India from such scrutiny indicates a pattern of double standards, which reveals the inherent fragility of the international system.

The political trajectory of Tulsi Gabbard offers, in its own way, a telling illustration of how individuals may recalibrate their ideological positions in alignment with evolving interests. Her departure from the Democratic Party and subsequent association with Republican circles contributed to the shaping of a narrative calibrated to particular strategic ends. Reported links, financial support, and political alignment involving the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Bharatiya Janata Party further demonstrate that ideological affinities, no less than material interests, play a consequential role in the grand design of global politics.

The war against Iran has, paradoxically, revealed a measure of unintended consequence—one that may be counted, if cautiously, among its few constructive effects. Across the world, the once-entrenched sectarian fissures appear, if not wholly erased, then at least perceptibly diminished. The long-standing divide between Shia and Sunni, long exploited as an instrument of discord, has, under the pressure of a common crisis, receded into the background. In its place there emerges the faint but discernible outline of a broader consciousness—one in which individuals begin to conceive of themselves first as members of the faith, and only thereafter as adherents of particular schools or traditions.

Europe, meanwhile, finds itself suspended in a state of profound ambivalence. Bound by alliance to the United States, yet apprehensive of the war’s far-reaching consequences, it hesitates—torn between loyalty and prudence. Notwithstanding this hesitation, there persists an evident effort to frame the conflict within a religious narrative, thereby securing public assent. For when policy falters

in persuasion, it often seeks refuge in the language of belief.

The region of Baluchistan, by virtue of its formidable geostrategic significance, has drawn the attentive gaze of global powers. Any substantial change therein would reverberate far beyond its borders, unsettling the delicate equilibrium of the wider region. It is not inconceivable that, in pursuit of a sustained military presence, this territory might be rendered a focal point of intervention. Should such designs come to fruition, the balance of power in the region would stand gravely imperiled.

History offers a consistent lesson: that external incursions seldom succeed without first finding purchase in internal frailty. Where societies harbor elements of betrayal or weakness, the path of the adversary is markedly eased. The cultivation of networks within Iran and Lebanon exemplifies the manner in which internal vulnerabilities may be harnessed by external forces. The prospect of strategic control over Chabahar and Sistan and Baluchistan raises the specter of a geopolitical constriction—one in which Pakistan might find itself increasingly encircled.

Iran's political system, in this regard, exhibits a certain resilience born of structural foresight: a mechanism for continuity of leadership that endures even under severe strain. It is this provision that has enabled the state to withstand sustained external pressure without succumbing to institutional collapse.

The strike upon Diego Garcia, followed by a flurry of diplomatic maneuvers, reflects the intricacy of a contest in which each move is calculated with deliberate care. Recent developments suggest that this conflict is waged not solely upon the battlefield, but equally within the corridors of diplomacy. Alternations between escalation and negotiation are not contradictions, but components of a single, coherent strategy.

The question that now presents itself with renewed urgency is this: what course shall Pakistan pursue at so delicate a juncture? Within this unfolding drama, it occupies a position of considerable consequence. With prudence and foresight, it may yet safeguard its own interests while contributing to regional stability. Its relations with Iran and China, together with the imperative of internal cohesion, will weigh heavily in determining its future trajectory.

All these conditions point, with gathering clarity, to a world poised upon a difficult threshold—subjected to a trial both severe and defining. Should the Muslim world and the Western nations alike fail to exercise wisdom, unity, and discernment, history may once again repeat its harsher lessons. The hour demands not passive spectatorship but active comprehension: that we apprehend the nature of our circumstances and determine our course accordingly, lest the flood of time carry us away unresisting. It calls for judgment over impulse, for long-term vision over transient gain. For those nations that neglect the lessons of history are seldom spared its discipline—and its instruction is rarely gentle.

When history delivers its verdict, it entertains no pleas in mitigation. It regards neither strength nor weakness in themselves but asks only how humanity has exercised its agency—whether with understanding, justice, and integrity, or otherwise. The present age stands upon precisely such a testing standard. The conflicts we witness are not merely contests over borders; they are struggles

of narratives, of ideas, of interests—within which the distinction between truth and falsehood grows ever more obscure. Each party claims the mantle of righteousness, yet in the ensuing contention it is humanity that suffers most grievously. Economies tremble, societies fracture, and an atmosphere of pervasive uncertainty settles across the globe.

One must remember that the wheel of history does not pause. It turns, it judges, and in due course it reflects mankind back upon itself. The age through which we now pass is no fleeting disturbance; it is the prelude to an era whose consequences will shape the destinies of generations yet unborn. And yet, even in the deepest shadow, there remains some glimmer of light. It is at such moments that nations must look inward, acknowledge their frailties, and chart a renewed course upon firmer intellectual foundations. Unity, foresight, and wisdom—these are the pillars upon which a secure and dignified future may yet be built.

These wars, these narratives, these alliances and enmities—though they may appear transient, their effects are enduring. If humanity continues to privilege interest over conscience, if power persists in trampling justice, and if nations allow themselves to be guided by passion rather than reason, then the future may well prove darker than the past. To dismiss the present moment as a passing crisis would be a grave misjudgment. This age has not come merely to pass—it has come to test, to awaken, and to remind us that survival belongs only to those who can discern the pulse of their time.

And yet, the lamp of hope has not been extinguished. In every troubled age, there arise voices—however few—that stand in quiet defiance of the encroaching darkness. The imperative, therefore, is clear: that we come to know ourselves, learn from history, and determine our course with clarity, insight, and unity. In the final reckoning, the decision rests with us. Shall we be swept along by the current of history, or shall we summon the resolve to alter its course? For the generations to come will inherit not only the consequences of our actions but will bear witness to the choices we have made—and history, as ever, will not delay in pronouncing its judgment.

Time itself presents the question; the answer is ours to give. Should we fail to answer it wisely today, tomorrow's history will not be inclined to absolve us.

Thursday, April 2, 2026

The Mask of Falsehood, The Unveiling of Truth

Secrets, States, and Silent Wars

A World Unmoored: Power, Deception, and the Quiet Theatre of Modern Conflict

Time, in its onward march, has never been a creature of constancy. At moments it breathes in the gentle airs of concord, and at others it is seized by tempests of disorder, losing even the semblance of its own equilibrium. The present global condition bears unmistakable testimony to this unease. We inhabit an age in which those ensconced within the chambers of power speak the language of peace, yet—behind the measured cadence of diplomacy—there operates a more intricate loom, weaving designs in which truth is too often ensnared and suffocated.

This report is, therefore, an attempt—however modest—to disentangle that web. It seeks not merely to recount events, but to situate them within a wider intellectual and historical frame, where the echoes of the past, the reverberations of the present, and the forebodings of the future converge into a single, reflective narrative. It is written in the conviction that the reader ought not to remain a passive consumer of headlines, but rather an engaged inquirer, capable of discerning the deeper currents that shape the visible world.

There was a time, not altogether distant, when the conduct of politics was thought to embody a certain equilibrium—a balance between prudence and principle. Today, that equilibrium appears grievously impaired. The chessboard of international affairs has grown more obscure: the moves are concealed, the intentions labyrinthine, and the consequences increasingly ruinous for the commonwealth of mankind. One is compelled to observe that global politics has drifted into a vortex wherein the distinction between right and wrong is no longer clearly apprehended, and where, behind the courteous smile of diplomacy, there glints the unmistakable edge of the dagger.

It is in this fraught and ambiguous climate that the reported exposure by Pakistan's security institutions of an alleged Indian false-flag design assumes significance beyond the ordinary. This is not merely an episode in the shadowy annals of intelligence work; it constitutes, rather, a moment of considerable historical consequence. For if substantiated, it represents not only the averting of a potentially grave escalation in the region, but also a contest of minds and methods—a diplomatic and intellectual engagement whose implications extend far beyond the immediate theatre. It is, indeed, the kind of revelation that compels reflection, not only within the region but across the wider conscience of the international community.

Such revelations remind us that the most productive conflicts of our time rarely take place in the open. Instead, they unfold in the quiet recesses of planning rooms, in the coded exchanges of unseen actors, and in the calculated ambiguity of statecraft. According to security sources, Pakistan's intelligence apparatus has succeeded in decoding secret Indian communications – a breakthrough that speaks not only to technical prowess, but also to a depth of analytical acumen, institutional discipline, and strategic foresight. It is essentially confirmation of the principle that in the modern era, knowledge has become a decisive instrument of timely, precise, and well-defined power.

One might say that a veil has been lifted: that secrets, long concealed within the dense fabric of strategic design, have been brought into the clarifying light of scrutiny. For in contemporary conflict, it is no longer the weight of armaments alone that determines outcomes, but the mastery of information—its acquisition, its interpretation, and its judicious use. In this respect, the reported success represents not only a defensive advantage, but an assertion of intellectual primacy: the capacity to anticipate an adversary's design and thereby to forestall its execution.

History, if it teaches anything, teaches us that false-flag operations are no novel contrivance. They belong to that darker repertoire of statecraft in which deception is elevated to an instrument of policy, and falsehood is dressed in the garments of legitimacy. The purpose is as old as it is pernicious: to mislead public opinion, to manufacture consent, and to furnish a pretext for actions that might otherwise invite censure. From the annals of Europe to the theatres of the modern Middle East and South Asia, such stratagems have recurred with unsettling regularity.

It is within this historical continuum that current concerns must be addressed. Reports suggesting a renewed readiness for such practices inevitably raise concerns. For they amount to the deliberate construction of a narrative—a staged event—designed to attribute culpability elsewhere and thus justify escalation. Particularly troubling are the indications that released prisoners may be used as instruments in such a design. If true, this is not simply a violation of legal principles but a profound affront to the moral sensibilities upon which any civilized order must rest.

To use those already rendered vulnerable as pawns in a larger political contest is to cross a threshold beyond which the language of ethics begins to lose its meaning. It is here that politics, stripped of its moral moorings, reveals its most disquieting aspect: the reduction of human beings to expendable pieces upon a board of strategy. No calculus of national interest, however expansively construed, can wholly absolve such a descent.

The logic underlying such a course is, unfortunately, familiar. By engineering an incident and attributing it to an adversary, it becomes possible to inflame tensions, stir up emotions, and disrupt ongoing efforts at reconciliation. The old maxim—commit first, blame later—has accompanied, in various ways, many of history's gravest mistakes. Yet in an interconnected world, where instability spreads with alarming frequency, such tactics carry far greater immediate risks. What begins as a calculated movement can end in chaos beyond the control of its founder.

Nor should it be overlooked that such tactics are often part of a broader design: to force an adversary into a state of strategic distraction, to spread his capabilities across multiple fronts, and thus to erode his effectiveness. This is a classic principle of warfare, transposed to present-day realities. Yet history advises caution, as such maneuvers have often produced unintended consequences in achieving their intended objectives.

In the final analysis, what emerges is a picture that is both clever and instructive. It reveals a world in which the tools of deception have become more sophisticated, the stakes more dangerous, and the margin for miscalculation is increasingly narrow. And it points above all to the enduring truth that in the contest between power and principle, it is not always the former that wins the more lasting victory.

The Burden of History and the Peril of Power: Alignments, Intrigue, and the Fragile Promise of Peace

Where the pages of history speak with any authority, they speak to a recurring pattern: that operations of deception—those now commonly termed “false-flag” manoeuvres—are by no means innovations of the present age. Rather, they belong to a lineage of stratagems that have, time and again, cast long shadows over the conduct of states. Incidents such as Chittisinghpura, the Mumbai attacks, Pathankot, and more recent episodes of violence in Kashmir have all, in varying degrees, attracted lingering questions—questions that refuse to be neatly settled within official narratives.

Nor has this unease been confined to the subcontinent. Allegations, at times substantiated and at others fiercely contested, have surfaced on the international stage, including those concerning the targeting of Sikh figures abroad. The reported admissions of individuals such as Nikhil Gupta have only served to deepen the disquiet, lending credence to the proposition that covert operations—operating in the penumbra of deniability—remain an enduring instrument of geopolitical contest. Taken together, these episodes suggest a disconcerting truth: that in the theatre of global politics, ethical restraint is too often relegated to the margins, while expediency assumes the centre.

Recent pronouncements and policy gestures have further unsettled an already delicate regional equilibrium. New alignments appear to be forming, while older understandings show signs of strain, if not outright dissolution. The geometry of power is being redrawn before our eyes, and with it the assumptions that once underpinned international stability. It would seem that the world is entering a fresh geopolitical chapter—one in which alliances are less fixed, loyalties more contingent, and calculations increasingly governed by immediate advantage rather than enduring principle.

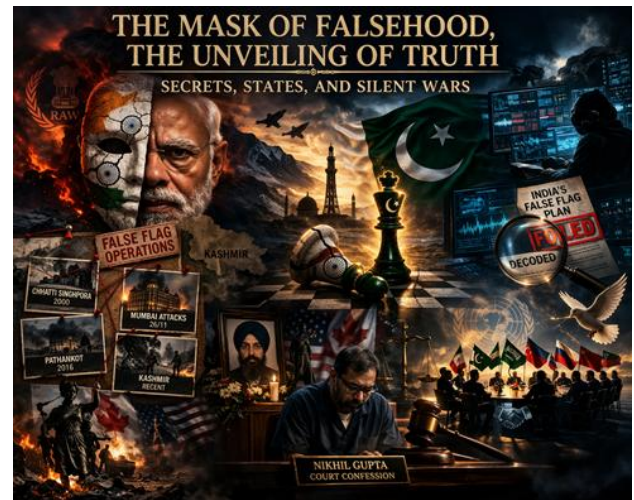
Within this changing landscape, statements attributed to elements of the Indian military leadership, which signal support for Israel’s stance towards Iran, have introduced an additional element of tension. Such pronouncements, whether strategic or declarative, have consequences that are out of their immediate context. They risk entangling regional disputes in broader global hostilities, thus exacerbating the volatility of an already volatile environment. One is left with the unpleasant impression that, in the pursuit of strategic leverage, the wider balance of the region is being tarnished with insufficient regard for its fragility.

Against this backdrop, the response from segments of the Iranian and Palestinian leadership appreciating Pakistan’s role has a particular diplomatic significance. It suggests Pakistan’s gradual emergence as a state capable, at least in some quarters, of balancing principles with prudence. Expressions of trust – however rhetorically constructed – are rarely extended without calculation. They are more often the product of sustained engagement and a consistent posture of moderation. If such trust is indeed taking root, it could be read as a modest but significant shift in the region’s diplomatic narrative.

Equally noteworthy is the convening of dialogue-oriented initiatives within Pakistan, drawing participation from regional actors including Saudi Arabia and Turkey. In an era too readily defined by confrontation, even tentative steps towards structured dialogue carry a significance that ought not to be dismissed. Should such efforts acquire continuity and depth, they may yet mark the beginnings

of a more constructive regional ethos—one in which contest is tempered by conversation, and rivalry moderated by restraint.

The supporting indicators attributed to Russia and China further complicate, yet further reinforce, this emerging picture. They point to a more pluralistic world order, one in which unilateral imposition of will—however gradual—is shifting toward a more distributed and negotiated balance of influence. Whether this trend matures into a stable order remains to be seen. Yet its emergence is itself indicative of a system transition.



Meanwhile, within India, critical voices on foreign policy conduct suggest that external currency is inseparable from internal scrutiny. Disagreements—expressed through political competition and public debate—are not in themselves signs of weakness. Yet they signal that consensus is neither automatic nor certain. Where policy is perceived as weak, or the exact costs are disproportionate to its gains, it is inevitable that questions will arise—questions that can shape both direction and tone over time.

Reports of attempts to revive proxy dynamics through neighbouring theatres, including Afghanistan, add yet another layer of concern. Such approaches, rooted in indirect engagement and strategic outsourcing of conflict, have historically produced consequences far exceeding their initial design. To revisit them, in a region already burdened by instability, is to risk reopening chapters whose outcomes are neither easily contained nor readily reversed.

In contrast, the apparent failure of attempts to create internal chaos within Iran—whether through overt pressure or more subtle means—illustrates a counter-lesson: that states with internal cohesion and public legitimacy are not easily freed from external design. Where internal structures maintain flexibility, external interventions—however sophisticated—face limitations that cannot be wished away.

The posture of the United States, marked at times by a tension between declaratory commitment to dialogue and the simultaneous application of pressure, illustrates the complexities—and contradictions—of contemporary statecraft. Such dualities, while not unprecedented, carry reputational costs. For when policy appears to oscillate between engagement and coercion, it risks eroding the very trust upon which durable agreements depend.

Developments in the Arab world also reflect growing anxiety. Statements and gestures that are dismissed or perceived as disproportionate have contributed to a perception—fair or otherwise—that outside powers continue to privilege selected interests at the expense of a more even-handed approach. The Middle East, long accustomed to turmoil, once again appears to be on the verge of significant change.

However, it would be a mistake to describe these dynamics in purely military terms. Increasingly, the lines of competition extend to the economic sphere, where energy routes, supply chains, and access to resources become strategic instruments. Efforts to disrupt or reorder energy flows—whether from Iran, Venezuela, or elsewhere—speak to a broader contest in which economic resilience is as important as military capability. In this sense, current tensions cannot be understood simply as regional conflicts, but rather as aspects of a broader, systemic contest.

Concerns regarding access to, or control over, strategic resources—particularly in relation to energy and nuclear capacity—further heighten the stakes. Statements hinting at such objectives, when issued in already volatile circumstances, carry the potential to accelerate escalation rather than contain it. The margin between deterrence and provocation, never wide, becomes perilously narrow under such conditions.

In the face of these interlocking pressures, the case for a principled recalibration of global conduct becomes not merely desirable, but imperative. Certain propositions long acknowledged yet insufficiently realised, demand renewed attention: that transparency in international dealings be strengthened; that dialogue and diplomacy be accorded primacy over force; that regional cooperation be cultivated rather than undermined; that international institutions be rendered both effective and impartial; and that the rights and dignity of individuals be upheld as ends in themselves, not subordinated to transient advantage. The role of the media, too, must be exercised with a sense of responsibility commensurate with its influence.

History offers a sober, if ultimately optimistic, piece of advice. Power struggles, however fierce, are rarely permanent. Yet their traces can linger from generation to generation. Our world is filled with suspicion, narrowed by hostility, and shadowed by the constant possibility of miscalculation. And yet, it is equally true that darkness has never proved permanent in the long arc of human affairs.

Renewal remains possible—provided that states act with foresight, that leaders temper ambition with restraint, and that the wider claims of humanity are not wholly eclipsed by narrower designs. If such a reorientation can be achieved—if prudence is allied with principle, and strength moderated by wisdom—then the same world that now bears the scent of powder may yet, in time, be restored to a more habitable condition. For hope, though often subdued, is not extinguished. It endures in the belief that tomorrow need not be a mere continuation of today's disquiet but may instead offer the first light of a more settled and humane order.

The task, therefore, is not to remain passive observers of unfolding events, but to engage—intellectually, morally, and, where possible, practically—in the shaping of a more stable peace. For this is not only the demand of prudence; it is, in the final reckoning, the obligation of our shared humanity.

Monday, April 6, 2026

Secrets Behind Silence

The Quiet Storm of Power

The Critical Hour: A Turning Point in History

This is the pivotal moment, standing at the very edge of which one cannot help but feel that history is on the cusp of a significant shift. It is a juncture where events cease to be mere headlines; they inscribe themselves upon the very fabric of time, determining the destiny of eras yet to unfold.

My friends, the subject we are about to address represents the true point of revolution in this ongoing conflict. Before we delve into its deeper layers and uncover its multi-faceted truths, it is imperative to clarify that this is no conjecture, nor a baseless hypothesis. What is being presented is drawn from credible sources, and we shall acquaint you with each and every aspect of this unfolding reality.

Across the vast expanse of history's canvas, there are moments that emerge not merely as events, but as milestones that forever alter the course of civilizations. There are, indeed, instances within the annals of time when certain moments transcend the ordinary and become defining, epoch-shaping turning points—times when the balance of power shifts, narratives crumble, and the truth, in all its majestic clarity, reveals itself.

These are the moments when the very foundations of power tremble, when decisions are no longer abstract judgments but fateful acts, and when the true nature of nations' strategies is laid bare for all to see. And today, the global landscape presents us with just such a moment—a moment of revolution, where the land of the Middle East stands poised once again to alter the course of world politics, shifting the currents of global power towards uncharted territories.

This crisis is no longer confined to a single nation, region, or isolated conflict. It has now evolved into a far-reaching transformation—one that challenges not only the global dominance of the United States but also casts doubt upon the very moral foundation upon which its authority has been built. This is not a transient crisis, but rather the result of a gradual evolution—an evolution that has long been brewing in the shadows and has now emerged in the form of a tempest. This storm has not only called into question America's military supremacy but also unsettled its moral justification.

The situation has reached a point where Washington's hold is not merely loosening but is on the brink of collapse. At the heart of this crisis lies an ally upon which America once based its regional influence. Ironically, at the very moment when it was most needed, this very ally has risen in opposition. From the American perspective, this is a betrayal so unforeseen that it defies belief. Yet, Iran—a nation that has long adhered to a strategy of patience and calculated restraint—has perhaps been awaiting this moment for far longer than we might imagine.

This is the same Iraq upon which America poured its energy, its resources, and its strategy for two decades. In 2003, the United States invaded Iraq—an invasion that was justified to the world on the grounds of “weapons of mass destruction.” It was presented as an inevitable step, one taken for the greater good, with the argument that Iraq possessed lethal weapons that posed a dire threat to

global peace and humanity. This narrative was so vigorously propagated that the global conscience was swept along in its wake. The media amplified this message to such an extent that a large portion of the world came to believe this distortion of truth. Yet, when the dust of war finally settled, the reality was starkly different. No weapons of mass destruction were found, no immediate threat emerged, no nuclear arsenal had been uncovered. What was discovered, however, were vast reserves of oil—resources that, alongside a once-prosperous nation, lay buried beneath the rubble of destruction.

In the wake of this, the United States embarked upon the costly task of rebuilding Iraq, remaking it in its own image. This was a project in which trillions of dollars were spent—on military training, the establishment of a political system, and the creation of diplomatic infrastructures. Trillions of dollars were invested to establish a new military, rebuild a political framework, and construct the world's largest embassy in Baghdad. All of this was done under the belief that Iraq would be a loyal ally—a belief that has since proven tragically misplaced. Today, that very pillar, which was once seen as a cornerstone of American strategy, is not only shaking but is now riddled with deep fissures. The very assets—those resources, that military power, that political infrastructure—now seem poised against the forces that originally constructed them. Reports indicate that the very bases, built with American capital, are now being used as sites to launch attacks against U.S. forces, and the very individuals trained by Washington are now providing targets to the enemy.

History has once again demonstrated that the loyalties of nations cannot be bought with investments alone. Where the United States relied on power, capital, and military might, Iran chose a different path—a path that, though slower, has proven to be far more enduring. Through quiet, gradual, and cultural influence, Iran strengthened its ties with Iraq—not through billions of dollars in contracts, but through cultural, religious, and familial connections, subtly weaving its presence into the very fabric of Iraqi society.

While Washington built monumental structures, Tehran was building relationships. And now, the fruits of this silent struggle are coming to bear. This crisis is revealing another profound truth: loyalty cannot be purchased with capital alone. The United States built edifices; Iran built relationships. One constructed a framework; the other created bonds within the hearts of the people. In doing so, Iran fostered trust and cultivated a network that has only grown stronger with time. This was not a strategy that demanded immediate results, but rather one rooted in patience, continuity, and shrewdness. And now, as the circumstances shift, it is this strategy that is beginning to show its impact.

This is the war that was fought not with guns, but with relationships. And today, its consequences are being felt with all their intensity. Iraq's political leadership, its security apparatus, and its internal decision-making are no longer immune to this influence. And history bears witness that, in the end, decisions are made by hearts, not by walls.

Iraq's Current Policy: A Silence That Speaks Volumes

The current policy of Iraq—particularly its silence—carries a profound message. Baghdad's silence, which may appear as mere inaction, is in fact a decision in itself. The political leadership of Iraq, especially the Prime Minister, has emerged under the influence of forces whose roots stretch deep

into Tehran. Despite appeals from the Arab League, Iraq has neither condemned the attacks nor announced any investigations, nor called for peace. Those familiar with the subtleties of regional politics understand that sometimes silence speaks louder than words—a declaration that may be too sensitive to voice openly, but whose effects are undeniable.

On the regional level, when Iraq was called upon to denounce the attacks taking place on its soil, its silence spoke volumes. There was neither a statement, nor a denial, nor a response. This silence is, in essence, a declaration—one that does not come from words but is revealed in the course of events. This silence is, therefore, the embodiment of the fact that Iraq has now embarked on a path from which there is no easy return.

When the Arab world demanded that Iraq condemn the attacks occurring on its land, it chose silence. This silence is not merely a void; it is a decision—one that may be difficult to express publicly but whose consequences are manifest. This silence signals that Iraq is now treading a new path—a path where its priorities have shifted and its allegiances are being redefined.

In the past seventy-two hours, the intensification of attacks on American targets appears to be no accident. Iran has openly claimed responsibility for these attacks, and state-run media have described them as part of a well-coordinated military strategy. What was once perceived as the work of "rebel groups" now emerges as a unified military campaign, with Iraqi and Iranian forces seemingly aligned in common cause.

The clearest symbol of this shifting atmosphere is the evacuation order issued by the U.S. Embassy in Iraq. Such an order allows no delay; it demands immediate compliance. The embassy's latest directives highlight the severity of the threat: citizens have been warned not only to leave Iraq but to avoid the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and the Consulate in Erbil, as these locations have now become direct military targets. How tragic it is that a state must now advise its own citizens to stay away from its own diplomatic centers.

Washington's directive for American citizens to leave Iraq immediately is not merely an extraordinary step; the promptness of the embassy's evacuation order serves as a stark reminder of the gravity of the situation. This is not just an administrative measure but a declaration that even the airspace has become unsafe. The only remaining exit is through land borders—toward Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, or Turkey. This is not simply a precautionary action; it is a recognition that the very ground where years of investment were made has now become a stronghold for opposing forces.

Reports suggest that certain state elements are not only failing to prevent these attacks but are, in fact, facilitating them; the defense systems fall silent precisely when they are most needed. The question arises: Is this all-mere coincidence, or is it part of a well-coordinated strategy? This is the moment when even the mightiest of states are forced to retract their steps—moments when history holds them accountable, forcing powerful nations to acknowledge their limits and revealing their true status.

Should the situation continue to deteriorate, the consequences could be even more severe than those witnessed in Afghanistan. While U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan left behind modern

weaponry, the stakes in Iraq are far higher. Patriot missile systems, intelligence frameworks, radar installations, and a geographically invaluable position are at risk. Should these assets fall into enemy hands, it will not merely be a military setback; it will constitute a strategic catastrophe for generations to come.

This crisis is no longer confined to foreign policy alone; its echoes are now being felt within the United States itself. Political circles in Washington are rife with unease, extraordinary anxiety, and deep concern. Numerous American leaders—whether former officials or current political figures—are openly expressing that the present leadership is not only a threat to global peace but is also undermining the very credibility of the United States.



Donald Trump, who once portrayed himself as a strong and decisive leader, has now become the focal point of criticism. Particularly in the wake of Trump's recent speech—which many had hoped would herald an announcement of a ceasefire, a new chapter in the conflict—he once again failed to deliver. His words mentioned peace, yet his actions stood in stark contrast. This contradiction now appears to be a permanent feature of American politics.

In international diplomacy, words hold weight—but it is actions that truly matter. When a state diverges from its commitments, retracts its narrative, and denies its own principles, it is not merely a political failure; it becomes a symbol of moral decay. Trump's rhetoric spoke of peace, negotiation, and stability, yet the practical measures he put forth contradicted these ideals. This dissonance has become a defining characteristic of American foreign policy today.

The Duality of Diplomacy: A World in Crisis

On one hand, there are calls for peace; on the other, military operations persist. One moment, there are proclamations of negotiations; the next, there are new sanctions. This duplicity has not only left the international community bewildered but has also plunged the American populace into a profound moral dilemma. Today, this duplicity is not just eroding America's global credibility; it is sowing disillusionment within its own ranks. The American public, who once saw themselves as champions of democracy, justice, and moral superiority, now find themselves at a crossroads—forced to question the very system they once held as a paragon of virtue.

The most immediate and severe impact of this crisis has been felt within the global energy market. The Strait of Hormuz—a critical artery for the world's energy supplies—has, for all practical purposes, been closed. This disruption has severely impacted global energy availability, and yet another dangerous aspect of this crisis emerges—the impact on the global energy market. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has resulted in the daily disappearance of eleven million barrels of oil from the market—double the amount seen in past major oil crises. Prices are soaring into the stratosphere,

and should this trend continue, the world economy may be thrust into an unprecedented upheaval. This situation is not only a challenge for industrial nations but has already spiralled into an economic crisis for developing countries.

The reality is that the situation today is far more dire than the energy crises of yore. Governments across the globe are scrambling to take emergency measures—fuel rationing in some places, price controls in others, and a swift pivot towards alternative sources of energy. The most striking aspect of this crisis is that it has once again reinforced the trend toward state control. Governments around the world are imposing drastic measures—fuel rationing, price restrictions, and aggressive movement toward alternative energy solutions. The expansion of state control is evident in this growing trend.

When resources are scarce, states inevitably extend their powers. Restrictions on movement, limitations on energy use, and increased government intervention in daily life—these are the symbols of a new era. They signify a reality where states, in times of crisis, expand their authority. There is an eerie resemblance to the pandemic era, with the key difference being that this time, the threat is not a virus but a geopolitical and territorial clash. Mobility restrictions, dependence on state directives, and the regulation of daily life have become the norm, leaving open the unsettling prospect that this may well lead down a path of fascism—another great calamity for humanity.

While many countries are searching for short-term solutions, the United Kingdom has seized this crisis as an opportunity for long-term transformation. With an eye towards alternative energy sources—such as solar power and heat pumps—through the enforcement of environmental policies, and efforts to secure energy independence, the UK is paving the way for a fundamental shift. Other nations, in their own distinct ways, are also striving to manage this crisis. These actions have the potential to reshape the future of global politics. The question remains: can this transformation occur swiftly enough to mitigate the current crisis?

What is unfolding today is not merely a disruption or a crisis—it is the rebirth of the global order, the reconstruction of a new world framework. America's strategic dominance is being challenged, Iran's strategy appears to be yielding results, and the global system is in search of a new equilibrium. The global energy infrastructure, upon which the world has relied for decades, is disintegrating. The strategic architecture that America built in the Middle East is crumbling. Decisions made in Baghdad, Tehran, Washington, and Beijing will set the course for the coming decade.

This is the moment when decisions are not being made solely by governments—history is not merely being written—it is being forged. The world is carving out a new path, one that will ensure that the future is not one in which the fate of humanity rests in the hands of a single individual or state. Perhaps the most crucial question today is this: Is the world ready for this new path?

And, indeed, this may be the most critical question history asks: Is humanity prepared for this new world?

Wednesday, April 8, 2026

Pakistan's Gamble: Mediator in a Brewing Storm

Peace or Peril: The Unfolding Middle East Crisis

The Middle East once again finds itself poised upon one of history's fraught thresholds—where the acrid scent of gunpowder threatens to suffocate the quieter, more fragile whispers of diplomacy. What began as a series of American and Israeli strikes upon Iran has, in the space of little more than a month, outgrown the confines of a regional quarrel. It has unsettled the wider architecture of global politics, disturbed the delicate machinery of the world economy, and cast new uncertainty over the balance of power itself.

For all the supposed sophistication of the twenty-first century, this crisis serves as a sobering reminder that the language of force has not been retired; indeed, it continues to compete—often successfully—with reason, restraint, and negotiation. Yet there is, in this instance, a notable peculiarity: while the theatre of war burns with undiminished intensity, the diplomatic stage, too, is ablaze with urgent and overlapping manoeuvres.

This is no mere contest of missiles and bombardments. Beneath the visible violence lies a dense web of political calculations and strategic designs, not easily deciphered even by seasoned observers. The United States, in particular, appears to be pursuing a dual-track policy—extending the olive branch with one hand while brandishing the sword with the other. It is the familiar doctrine, often described by analysts as “carrot and stick,” whereby inducement and coercion are deployed in tandem. Yet, for all its tactical clarity, the ultimate purpose of this approach remains shrouded in ambiguity, as though obscured by a deliberate and lingering fog.

Iran, for its part, has responded with a combination of restraint, resilience, and calculated defiance. Its posture has not been confined to the battlefield; rather, it has extended into the diplomatic arena, where Tehran has sought to challenge and outmanoeuvre its adversaries with notable composure. Nowhere is this more evident than in its influence over the Strait of Hormuz—a geographical chokepoint of immense strategic consequence. Control, or even disruption, at this narrow passage reverberates far beyond the region, sending tremors through global markets and supply chains alike.

Amidst this intricate and precarious landscape, Pakistan has emerged as a figure of unexpected yet undeniable significance. Bound to Iran by ties of proximity and fraternity yet simultaneously engaged with the United States and the Gulf monarchies, Islamabad occupies a position of rare diplomatic equilibrium. This delicate balancing act—fraught with risk, yet rich in possibility—has conferred upon Pakistan a distinctive role, one that transcends mere observation. The recent flurry of diplomatic engagements in Islamabad, including consultations among regional foreign ministers, suggests that Pakistan may yet evolve from a concerned bystander into a consequential architect of peace.

It is within this broader context that the present analysis seeks to unfold: to examine the underlying dynamics of the conflict, to interrogate the elusive objectives of the United States, to assess the strategic calculus of Iran, and, above all, to consider the prospects and limits of Pakistan's mediatory role. The central question, however, remains as stark as it is urgent: can diplomacy extinguish a fire

that continues to be fed by the very powers professing to contain it, or is the world, once more, drifting towards a prolonged and ruinous confrontation?

More than a month has now elapsed since the outbreak of hostilities following the strikes on Iran. In recent weeks, alongside Turkey, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, Pakistan has assumed a more visible role among those states seeking to arrest the slide towards wider conflict. Pakistan's Foreign Minister has indicated that both Tehran and Washington have expressed confidence in Islamabad as a potential facilitator—a claim echoed, on several occasions, by former President Donald Trump, who has publicly acknowledged Pakistan's constructive engagement.

A particularly consequential development has since lent this crisis a new diplomatic inflection. President Trump has announced his willingness to defer a planned military escalation against Iran for a period of two weeks, reportedly at the urging of Pakistan's Prime Minister, Shehbaz Sharif, and the Chief of Army Staff, Field Marshal Asim Munir. This tentative pause, however, is conditional upon Iran ensuring the immediate, complete, and secure reopening of the Strait of Hormuz. Concurrently, Iranian sources have confirmed that a structured negotiation process—based upon a ten-point agenda—is set to commence in Islamabad.

Such developments illuminate not only Pakistan's growing diplomatic relevance but also a deeper and more paradoxical truth: even at the height of conflict, the door to negotiation is seldom fully closed. That said, Israel has signalled its intention to confine the scope of hostilities, indicating that the conflict will not, at least for now, extend into Lebanon—an assertion widely interpreted as an effort to prevent further regional escalation.

Yet contradictions persist. Washington speaks of serious negotiations with Iran's new leadership, hinting at a possible end to military operations, even as threats and strikes continue with undiminished vigour. Tehran, in turn, has dismissed American proposals as excessive and unreasonable, with Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi repeatedly insisting that no direct negotiations with the United States are presently underway.

In this atmosphere of uncertainty—thick with suspicion, calculation, and competing narratives—the role of Pakistan as a potential intermediary warrants closer scrutiny. What, if anything, stands to be gained by Islamabad in assuming such a role? And what, indeed, does the United States hope to achieve by simultaneously advancing policies of coercion and conciliation?

These are not merely tactical questions; they are, in essence, inquiries into the very nature of power—its purposes, its limits, and its consequences. For if this conflict has revealed anything thus far, it is that even in an age of overwhelming force, victory remains an elusive and often ill-defined prize, while the costs—economic, political, and human—extend far beyond the battlefield, leaving their imprint upon the conscience of the world.

Only hours before these consultations commenced, Pakistan's Prime Minister, Shehbaz Sharif, held a direct conversation with Iran's President, Masoud Pezeshkian—a gesture at once symbolic and strategic, underscoring the urgency of the moment. Of equal consequence is the defence agreement concluded last September between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. By most expert assessments, this

accord does more than deepen military cooperation; it carries within it the potential to recalibrate the regional balance of power. Its central clause—whereby an attack upon one shall be deemed an attack upon both—introduces a latent but formidable dimension to any future escalation.

Pakistan's position, however, is neither simple nor easily categorised. Iran is not merely a distant actor but an immediate neighbour, bound by a 900-kilometre frontier and a long history of cultural and political affinity. Islamabad has consistently referred to Tehran as a fraternal state. At the same time, Pakistan hosts no American military bases, distinguishing it from several Gulf states that have historically played intermediary roles. Crucially, Pakistan remains, for now, outside the theatre of war. This very detachment—combined with its readiness to facilitate dialogue—renders its role both delicate and potentially decisive.

In an era increasingly defined by the slow but unmistakable shift towards multipolarity, regional stability is no longer a peripheral concern but a strategic imperative. Pakistan, despite facing persistent pressures along its eastern and northern frontiers, appears acutely aware of this reality. Its efforts to maintain equilibrium—bringing together disparate actors while striving to prevent the spread of conflict—reflect not merely prudence but a broader vision of regional order. Yet difficult questions loom. Should the conflict deepen, and should Saudi Arabia be drawn directly into the fray, how would Pakistan reconcile its treaty obligations with its present posture of neutrality? The answer, perhaps, lies in a prior question: why has Riyadh thus far refrained from direct involvement?

Beyond the immediate calculus of war and peace lies a more pragmatic inquiry: what does Pakistan stand to gain from its prominent role in ongoing diplomatic efforts? The answer is neither abstract nor rhetorical. For Pakistan, the continuation of conflict would carry grave economic, diplomatic, and security consequences. Rising oil prices, inflationary pressures, and the risk of wider regional war all converge upon its domestic stability. Add to this the complexity of public opinion—largely critical of American and Israeli actions—and the stakes become clearer still. In such a context, the cessation of hostilities is not merely desirable; it is essential. Should Pakistan succeed in facilitating even a partial de-escalation, it would mark a significant triumph—not only for its foreign policy but for its standing within the wider architecture of global diplomacy.

China, too, has entered the frame with measured but unmistakable support for Pakistan's mediatory ambitions. The recent visit of Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Ishaq Dar, to Beijing forms part of a broader diplomatic choreography. For some time now, Islamabad has sought to persuade both Tehran and Washington to return to the negotiating table, even offering to host direct talks on its own soil. While such a breakthrough has yet to materialise, Pakistan has succeeded in constructing a multilateral platform—first by convening the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey in Islamabad, and subsequently by securing Beijing's endorsement. The resulting five-point communiqué, jointly articulated by China and Pakistan, represents a concerted attempt to arrest the conflict and restore a measure of diplomatic coherence.

With this, expectations have inevitably risen. Pakistan, once regarded as an unlikely mediator, now finds itself under intense international scrutiny. The question is no longer whether it can play a role, but whether it can deliver results—specifically, whether it can persuade Iran to engage, however cautiously, with the United States. Many analysts remain sceptical. The deficit of trust between

Washington and Tehran is not one that any single state can readily bridge. Yet a multilateral framework, particularly one that includes China, may offer a more viable pathway. Beijing's considerable influence over Tehran lends a degree of credibility to the process—one that bilateral efforts alone could scarcely achieve.

China's stakes in this crisis are neither incidental nor marginal. As the largest importer of Iranian oil, Beijing has, despite sanctions, continued to sustain Iran's economic lifelines. Official statements from the Chinese Foreign Ministry emphasise principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national security, while reiterating that diplomacy remains the only viable means of resolving disputes. The long-term strategic agreement signed between China and Iran in 2021—spanning defence technology, infrastructure, and cultural exchange—serves as a reminder that this relationship extends far beyond transactional economics. Indeed, for an Iranian economy long constrained by sanctions, China represents something approaching a lifeline.

Trade figures further illuminate this reality. In 2025, bilateral trade between China and Iran reached nearly \$10 billion, excluding substantial volumes of unreported oil exports estimated at over \$30 billion. When accounted for, these figures reveal that energy alone constitutes the overwhelming majority of economic exchange between the two. It is therefore hardly surprising that Beijing views stability in Iran—not to mention the uninterrupted flow of oil through the Strait of Hormuz—as a matter of pressing strategic concern.

Against this backdrop, the prospect of a diplomatic resolution, though difficult, cannot be dismissed as fanciful. Iran possesses a long and, at times, surprisingly flexible history of negotiation. Prior to the escalation triggered by recent strikes, several diplomatic sources suggested that Tehran had shown a willingness to proceed further than many had anticipated. The question now is whether any space for diplomacy remains—or whether the conflict will continue its upward spiral.

Both sides, it seems, are engaged in a dual contest: pursuing diplomatic solutions while simultaneously striving to maximise their respective advantages on the ground. Iran, for its part, appears intent on securing not merely an end to hostilities but credible assurances against their recurrence. The United States, conversely, seeks an outcome that can be presented—both domestically and internationally—as a strategic victory. Yet the distances between their positions remain considerable, and, perhaps more troublingly, the mutual distrust that underpins them shows little sign of abating.

Where, then, might diplomacy begin? The first step must surely be a genuine commitment—however tentative—to the cessation of conflict. Beyond that lies a narrower, but potentially more tractable, area of convergence: the nuclear question. Iran has long maintained that it does not seek to develop nuclear weapons, while preventing such an outcome has been a central objective of American strategy. Here, at least, exists a point of departure—fragile, contested, yet real.



Even so, the success of any diplomatic track will depend in no small measure upon the roles played by external actors. China's influence, though uneven across different players in this conflict, is undeniably significant in relation to Iran. Its involvement could lend credibility and reassurance to any negotiated framework. Pakistan, meanwhile, has already demonstrated a notable diplomatic agility, drawing international attention and, perhaps, cautious optimism. It is for this reason that Beijing appears to view Islamabad not merely as a participant, but as a potentially effective facilitator—one capable, under the right conditions, of nudging adversaries towards the negotiating table.

Whether these efforts will culminate in a meaningful breakthrough remains uncertain. Yet in a conflict defined as much by ambiguity as by aggression, even the faintest prospect of dialogue carries with it a significance that cannot be lightly dismissed.

and in some cases improving—relations not only with the Arab world and Iran, but also with the United States. At the same time, Pakistan is not a distant observer insulated from the consequences of war. As Iran's immediate neighbour, any further deterioration in the situation will inevitably reverberate across its borders. The prospect of instability spilling over—economically, strategically, and even socially—renders the stakes for Islamabad both immediate and profound.

The conflict itself now stands at a perilous juncture. Should diplomacy falter, the options available to Washington may narrow considerably. One conceivable course would be for President Trump to declare a form of symbolic victory—asserting that Iran's military capacity has been sufficiently degraded, while disclaiming responsibility for reopening the Strait of Hormuz. Yet the global economic tremors already witnessed in recent weeks offer a sobering indication of the consequences such an outcome might entail. The alternative—an expansion of the war—cannot be dismissed either, particularly given a pattern of rhetoric that has, at times, veered unpredictably between restraint and escalation.

Reports of more than four thousand American marines advancing towards the Persian Gulf, airborne units held in readiness, and discussions of further reinforcements all point towards a potential intensification. In a scenario of full-scale engagement, one might even envisage attempts to seize strategically significant islands within the Gulf. Yet such ventures would hardly be without peril. Iran has repeatedly declared its readiness for a protracted conflict, and some analysts contend that, in the calculus of endurance, Tehran may be better prepared for a long war than its adversary. The question, then, is not merely whether a ground campaign is feasible, but whether it is sustainable—or, indeed, wise.

Historical parallels with Iraq or Afghanistan offer only limited guidance. A large-scale invasion appears unlikely; a more plausible scenario would involve limited, targeted operations, undertaken perhaps in a moment of strategic impasse—when withdrawal becomes difficult and options begin to narrow. Even then, the risks attached to such an undertaking would be considerable, raising the question not simply of possibility, but of purpose.

Despite Tehran's formal insistence that no direct negotiations with Washington are underway, it would be naïve to assume a complete absence of communication. Indirect channels—particularly

those facilitated by Pakistan—appear to remain active. Both sides have articulated their respective conditions. Yet the much-discussed American proposals, reportedly comprising a fifteen-point framework, strike many observers less as a blueprint for peace than as an instrument of capitulation. Iran's own demands—ranging from control over the Strait of Hormuz to reparations for wartime damage and the removal of American military bases from the region—are, for their part, equally unlikely to find ready acceptance in Washington.

What remains beyond dispute, however, is the scale of the potential consequences. A prolonged conflict would carry devastating implications—not only for the region, but for Pakistan and the wider world. The questions posed at the outset thus return with renewed urgency: what does Pakistan stand to gain from acting as a mediator, and what does the United States hope to achieve by pursuing a strategy that oscillates between coercion and conciliation?

For Pakistan, the calculus is stark. Whether viewed through the prism of economic stability, public opinion, or international standing, the continuation of war represents a net loss, while its cessation offers tangible gains. As for the United States, its objectives remain elusive—obscured by shifting rhetoric and contradictory signals. Yet one conclusion is inescapable: this conflict has already altered the geopolitical landscape. The open discussion of regime change, alongside the emergence of new and tentative alignments, suggests that the region stands at the threshold of a possible reordering.

Whether Pakistan's mediation efforts will succeed—or whether this conflict will instead be remembered as a decisive turning point in global politics—remains an open question.

It is worth recalling that wars are not fought solely upon battlefields. They leave their imprint upon the destinies of nations, the stability of economies, and the prospects of generations yet unborn. The present confrontation between Iran and the United States is not merely a bilateral dispute; it is part of a wider contest of power, the consequences of which may extend far beyond its immediate theatre.

After more than a month of hostilities, neither American objectives have been clearly realised, nor has the conflict moved towards any coherent resolution. And yet, amidst this pervasive uncertainty, one fact stands out with increasing clarity: despite overwhelming force, neither side has secured decisive supremacy. Iran's resilience and America's dual-track strategy have together produced a strategic impasse—a complex cul-de-sac from which no straightforward exit is visible.

It is precisely here that Pakistan's role acquires heightened significance. At a moment when major powers remain entangled in their competing interests, Islamabad has advanced a policy marked by balance and restraint, presenting itself as a plausible intermediary. The path is undeniably fraught—hampered by distrust, divergent agendas, and heightened emotions—but it is not without promise.

For Pakistan, this is not merely a question of diplomatic prestige; it is a matter of national interest in its most concrete form. Rising energy prices, the risk of regional escalation, and mounting domestic pressures all point towards the same conclusion: peace is not a luxury, but a necessity. Should Pakistan succeed at this delicate juncture, it would not only strengthen its international standing but also inscribe a notable chapter in the annals of modern diplomacy.

In the end, the essential question endures: will the world choose dialogue over domination? Will the United States and Iran find the resolve to settle their differences across the negotiating table? And can Pakistan, in this rare convergence of crisis and opportunity, transform mediation into a durable peace?

History, it would seem, is once again in motion. The days ahead will determine whether this conflict is destined to become yet another chapter of devastation—or a decisive turning point towards peace.

The pages of history are turning now—and the coming days will determine whether this war will prove to be another devastating chapter or a decisive turning point towards peace. However, “Fifteen years ago today, my prediction that the important decisions of the future world would be decided with the advice of Pakistan were widely ridiculed,” today the Almighty has given Pakistan that position. [All] praise is [due] to Allah, Lord of the worlds

Friday, April 10, 2026

The Search for Peace in the Shadow of War

One Crisis, Many Narratives

The age is turning upon its hinge, and upon the parchment of history a new inscription strains to be set. The Middle East—long the theatre of civilisations risen and undone—finds itself once more the arena of great-power contest. Time shifts its posture; history, restless in its breast, seems impatient to deliver yet another chapter. That ancient land, where the lamps of learning were lit and caravans of wisdom set forth, now stands tainted by the acrid scent of powder and the tragic spoor of blood. The assaults upon Iran by Israel and the United States have brought world politics to a grave and fateful juncture, casting the region into a vortex wherein each swell conceals a gathering storm, and every decision threatens to determine the tenor of years yet unborn. This is no mere war of arms; it is an encounter of ideas—of power and morality, of interest and principal, of aggression set against the fragile promise of conciliation.

Across the horizon of international affairs there rages a tumult in which the odour of gunpowder mingles uneasily with the finer vapours of diplomacy, and the ceaseless contest for equilibrium of power is everywhere apparent. The ferocity of the strikes upon Iran has placed the Middle East upon the very lip of a volcano; yet, in striking contrast, the quiet but telling diplomacy of Islamabad has drawn the attentive gaze of the world. What appears, at first glance, a theatre of war reveals itself, upon closer inspection, as a crucible in which new standards of global leadership may well be forged.

Amid this turbulence, Pakistan's role emerges as a lamp of guarded hope—a light possessing the rare capacity to illumine pathways through encroaching darkness. The community of nations has begun to concede that Pakistan stands forth as a discerning intermediary: one endowed not merely with the faculty to comprehend the complexities of the hour, but with the prudence required to shape them towards a more temperate end.

The mediatory course charted by Pakistan in this crisis is no stratagem of convenience; rather, it is the echo of a deeper civilisational inheritance—one grounded in reconciliation, balance, and the disciplined exercise of wisdom. Though statements by Iran's Foreign Minister, Abbas Araghchi, suggest that Tehran remains, for the present, disinclined towards formal negotiation, the quiet exchange of messages behind the curtain intimates that the doors of diplomacy are not yet wholly closed. In this intricate tableau, the endorsement of Pakistan's efforts by the United States marks an uncommon and notable development, elevating its role from the merely regional to one of credible global consequence.

The tensions between Iran and the Western powers are no sudden quarrel born of recent provocations; their roots run deep into decades of mistrust, ideological divergence, and competing geopolitical designs. Israel's military initiatives, coupled with unwavering American support, have served not merely to inflame this long-standing dispute but to propel it into a decisive and perilous phase. This is not solely a contest of frontiers, but of narratives: on one side, the assertive confidence of power and a Western discourse inclined towards dominance; on the other, Iran's insistence upon sovereignty and its philosophy of resistance. Between these contending visions lies the ominous spectre of wider devastation.

At such a delicate hour, the diplomacy of Islamabad assumes an importance of uncommon magnitude. The city is no longer merely a seat of administration; it has, in effect, become a crucible of diplomatic engagement. With measured restraint, strategic patience, and a notable clarity of judgement, Pakistan has embraced the path of mediation—reflecting a political acuity not often acknowledged, yet now difficult to ignore. This is a land where, in earlier times, quiet understandings between great powers were wrought in silence; today, that tradition reappears in altered form, yet with undiminished relevance. The eyes of the world are fixed upon it, even as unease stirs in the corridors of New Delhi, where observers find themselves confronted with the disquieting reality that the state they long derided now stands forth as a plausible harbinger of peace.

The international order itself is passing through an interregnum. The unipolar arrangement that followed the Cold War shows signs of exhaustion, yielding gradually to the emergence of a more diffuse, multipolar world. Within this evolving dispensation, the influence of regional powers grows in stature—and among these, Pakistan appears increasingly as a state whose moment may be approaching.

The voice of India's opposition figure, Shashi Tharoor, captures something of this unease. His admission—that India ought to have seized the initiative in peace efforts—reads less as counsel than as a lament for an opportunity foregone. The forward movement of Pakistan, alongside Egypt and Turkey, has rekindled the prospects of peace even as it casts into sharp relief India's diplomatic inertia. History, it would seem, has once again affirmed its stern lesson: that nations inattentive to the demands of their time are apt to find themselves stranded as the caravan of opportunity moves inexorably on.

Pakistan's foreign policy has long possessed a certain refinement—a subtlety rooted in balance, caution, and dialogue. Its fraternal ties with Iran, combined with its strategic relationship with the United States, confer upon it a singular vantage: that of a bridge between estranged powers. It is precisely this quality which lends credibility to any mediator, elevating it beyond mere convenience to the realm of necessity.

Islamabad, therefore, stands today not simply as an administrative capital, but as a centre of diplomatic intelligence and quiet resolve. The meetings convened, the discreet messages conveyed, and the unseen channels maintained all testify to a state prepared to assume a serious and responsible role upon the global stage.

There has always been, in Pakistan's diplomacy, a deliberate equilibrium. It neither surrenders itself wholly to any single bloc, nor permits itself to drift into isolation. It is this moderation that renders it a trustworthy intermediary. The emergence of Field Marshal Asim Munir in such a mediatory capacity is not merely the story of an individual's ascent; it is the expression of a broader national will and institutional coherence. To serve as a bridge between Washington and Tehran is no ordinary undertaking; it is an achievement that enhances Pakistan's political stature and underscores its regional significance. In such moments, history does not merely proceed—it inscribes anew.

The endorsement extended by the United States to Pakistan's mediatory endeavour constitutes a development of no ordinary significance. It is not merely the issuance of a diplomatic communiqué,

but rather an articulation of confidence—confidence cultivated through years of engagement, shared interests, and the slow, exacting labour of strategic familiarity. The disposition of President Donald Trump’s administration in this regard may yet prove a valuable diplomatic asset for Pakistan. Meanwhile, the declaration by Iran’s Foreign Minister, Abbas Araghchi, that Tehran is, for the present, disinclined towards negotiation, may appear at first glance to be a position of unyielding severity. Yet in the subtle grammar of diplomacy, the closing of one door seldom precludes the quiet opening of several windows. It is in the very nature of diplomatic language that denial may carry within it the faintest intimation of assent. The continued exchange of messages—however discreet—attests to the fact that the avenues of engagement have not been entirely foreclosed, and that behind the formal posture, a quieter dialogue persists.

The unease discernible within India in response to these developments is no mere flourish of political rhetoric; it is reflective of deeper anxieties. There are moments in international affairs when the success of one rival becomes an implicit interrogation of another’s judgement. The reaction emerging from Indian quarters bears precisely this character. That certain Indian commentators have described Pakistan’s prospective success as a “diplomatic revolution” is, in itself, a striking and somewhat bitter concession. This is, after all, the very Pakistan so often cast as an object of reproach—now, paradoxically, assuming the aspect of a potential custodian of peace.

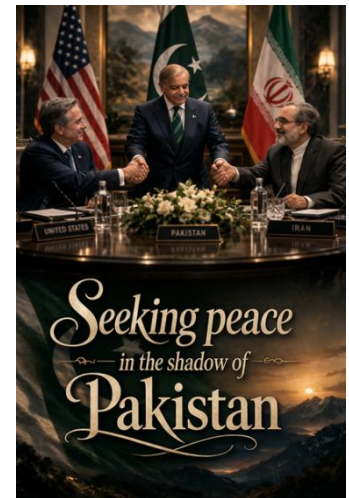
Those who for years were inclined to characterise Pakistan as a failing state now find themselves compelled, however reluctantly, to acknowledge the weight of its role. Should Pakistan succeed in quelling this conflagration, it would signify not merely the cessation of hostilities, but a perceptible recalibration in the balance of global influence. Analysts are of the view that such an outcome would deliver a notable diplomatic jolt to India, compelling a moment of introspection in New Delhi. The remarks of the Indian opposition figure, Shashi Tharoor, amount in essence to an admission—one that speaks of an opportunity missed at a moment of consequence. His observation that India ought to have taken the initiative in peace negotiations serves as a mirror in which the limitations of its recent diplomacy are rendered starkly visible and suggests that a significant strategic opening has been allowed to slip away.

In the estimation of international observers, mediation is no miracle in itself; yet its success can elevate a nation’s standing to uncommon heights. At present, the eyes of the world are fixed upon Islamabad. A city once regarded merely as an administrative capital now assumes the aspect of a diplomatic fulcrum. Each statement, each encounter, each incremental development is subjected to careful scrutiny, as though the city itself had been transformed into a grand stage upon which the drama of global politics unfolds at full intensity. History offers its own testimony: Islamabad has, in earlier chapters, served as a bridge between great powers. It was here that quiet efforts contributed to the rapprochement between Washington and Beijing—an achievement that endures as part of its diplomatic inheritance. That tradition, far from extinguished, appears once more in renewed and contemporary form.

Pakistan’s strategy—anchored in conciliation and equilibrium—renders it particularly suited to the office of mediation. The present convergence of global attention upon Islamabad reflects not only circumstance, but recognition. The support extended by the United States further underscores the degree to which major powers now acknowledge Pakistan’s capacity in this regard. Indeed, this

confidence recalls the role Pakistan played with notable dexterity in facilitating the Doha negotiations between the United States and Afghanistan, an effort that contributed materially to Washington's eventual withdrawal. Such precedents lend both weight and credibility to its present undertaking.

Yet prudence demands that Pakistan proceed with measured caution. It must craft, with clarity and foresight, a comprehensive policy to guide its next steps, lest the confidence reposed by the Trump administration become, in time, a source of fresh trial rather than advantage. To characterise Pakistan's potential success as a "diplomatic revolution" is not merely rhetorical flourish; it is an acknowledgement of the magnitude of the moment. The emergence of Field Marshal Asim Munir as a mediating figure reflects not only individual agency, but the coherence and resolve of the state itself. His leadership speaks to a decisiveness in policy—one that resonates both domestically and upon the international stage. Through sustained diplomatic engagement and active communication with global leaders, Pakistan demonstrates that it is not a passive respondent to crises, but a state capable of shaping adversity into constructive possibility.



India's policy towards the Middle East was, for a considerable period, regarded as a model of balance and circumspection. Its relations with Iran, the Gulf states, and Israel were maintained upon a delicate but deliberate equilibrium. In recent years, however, this balance appears to have been significantly disturbed. A discernible shift has taken place in India's foreign policy orientation; one marked by a diminishing subtlety and an increasingly pronounced alignment in a particular direction. Such a transformation carries consequences, not least in the realm of regional relationships, where nuance is often the currency of stability.

A visible tilt towards one side inevitably erodes the credibility of neutrality. In the aftermath of the strikes upon Iran, India's posture has appeared markedly inclined towards the positions of the United States and Israel. This one-sided disposition has not only called into question its claim to impartiality, but has also recast it, in the eyes of many, as a participant rather than an arbiter. In diplomacy, the loss of balance is akin to a mariner deprived of his compass—direction falters, and the horizon grows uncertain.

This conflict has assumed a character at once intricate and precarious, wherein each step must be taken with deliberation and foresight. The struggle involving Iran resembles a game of high chess—each move calculated, each manoeuvre laden with layered meanings and unforeseen consequences. Israel, the United States, Iran, and a constellation of regional actors occupy the principal squares upon this board. Pakistan, for its part, has assumed the role of mediator—a position at once the most exacting and, if skillfully discharged, the most efficacious. Its relative detachment from the immediate theatre renders the task more arduous yet paradoxically enhances its credibility. The support extended by Washington has furnished Pakistan with that essential currency of diplomacy—confidence—upon which great decisions are ultimately founded. In the conduct of international affairs, equilibrium remains the cardinal principle; those nations that preserve it are those that leave an enduring impress upon the world. Pakistan's present strategy reflects precisely this doctrine,

drawing strength from the confidence it commands and from its unique position between Washington and Tehran.

India, by contrast, appears to have aligned itself from the outset with a particular camp. Its economic entanglements with the Gulf states and its strategic partnership with the United States have inclined it in a discernible direction, a tendency reflected in both its pronouncements and its conduct. Consequently, its role in the present crisis appears constrained, if not diminished. It is a matter of some note that India has not, at any serious juncture, offered itself as a mediator. The absence of confidence reposed in it by major powers speaks, perhaps, to this omission. Thus, rather than emerging as an independent arbiter, India finds itself perceived as an adjunct to a broader alignment. In effect, its policies have placed it not in the position of a conciliator, but as an active associate of one side in the conflict.

Within India itself, a growing current of criticism suggests that its foreign policy has, to some degree, lost clarity of direction. From Gaza to Iran, the relative quietude—or perceived equivocation—of its voice has had a discernible impact upon its diplomatic standing. In the theatre of global politics, silence is seldom neutral; it is often interpreted as a sign of diminished weight.

The critiques emanating from within Indian circles underscore a deeper unease. In matters concerning a significant regional actor such as Iran, silence—or overt partiality—is widely regarded as a diplomatic misstep of consequence. When war stands, as it were, at the threshold, reticence may itself be construed as a form of frailty. In such moments, the contrast between differing styles of leadership becomes unmistakably clear upon the international stage.

Across the region, the balance of power remains in a state of restless transition. Iran's posture of resistance, Israel's assertiveness, and the intervention of the United States have together produced a configuration of notable complexity. Israel remains an indispensable factor in any prospective resolution, while the Gulf states, by virtue of their economic weight and strategic positioning, hold a decisive influence over the trajectory of events. Their calculations and alignments will inevitably shape the contours of the future. The region appears to be moving towards a reconstituted equilibrium, one in which each actor seeks to define its place. In this sense, the present crisis may well inaugurate a new chapter in global politics—marked by shifting balances and the emergence of novel alignments.

Should Pakistan succeed in its mediatory endeavour, the enhancement of its international standing would be both immediate and profound. Such a success would not merely bring an end to hostilities; it would establish a precedent for the resolution of future conflicts. For India, the moment carries the character of a lesson—an illustration of the enduring importance of balance, foresight, and timely decision-making in the conduct of foreign policy.

It must also be recognised that this crisis may serve as a prelude to the reconfiguration of the international order itself. Pakistan's role within it is already conferring upon it a renewed identity upon the global stage. A successful mediation would not only conclude a war but would also furnish a model for the future, demonstrating the enduring value of measured diplomacy. Conversely, it presents India with an occasion for reflection—an opportunity to reassess the efficacy of its present

course. History, as ever, reserves its sternest judgements for those nations that falter at moments of consequence.

The divergence in the styles of leadership between Pakistan and India stands in sharp relief. Where, on the one hand, there is evidence of decisiveness and clarity of purpose—qualities that have reinforced Pakistan's role—there appears, on the other, a measure of hesitation and ambiguity. It is precisely this attribute of leadership—the capacity for resolute action guided by coherent vision—that has, in many instances, altered the destinies of nations.

In the final analysis, it would not be an exaggeration to suggest that Pakistan stands upon the threshold of a new diplomatic epoch. Should its mediation bear fruit, it will signify not merely the cessation of a single conflict, but the inauguration of a new global narrative. For India, by contrast, this moment assumes the aspect of a reckoning—an occasion in which the limitations of its present policies are brought into sharp focus. The wheel of history continues its inexorable turn, and in its present rotation, Pakistan's stature appears, unmistakably, to be on the ascent.

History, in its enduring judgement, remembers those nations that act with discernment in times of trial. Pakistan now stands at such a juncture. The days ahead will determine the ultimate course of this crisis, yet one conclusion already suggests itself with clarity: Pakistan has asserted its presence with unmistakable force. It is not unreasonable to contend that it moves towards a new diplomatic horizon—one in which, should its efforts prevail, the end of war may coincide with the laying of foundations for a reimagined international order. One is left, therefore, with the distinct impression that upon the horizon of history there gathers the light of a new dawn—one in which Pakistan's voice may yet resound as an echo of the world's conscience.

Monday, April 13, 2026

A World Suspended Between Fear and Resolve

Echoes of War, Whispers of Peace

This is no mere chapter in the dry and lifeless annals of politics; rather, it is a tragic inscription etched upon the very breast of humanity itself—an inscription from whose every word one detects the acrid scent of gunpowder, and from whose every line there echoes the muffled lament of suffering souls. What confronts us here is not simply a contest between two states, but a searching trial of the global conscience—one that, despite centuries of civilisation, religion, moral philosophy, and humanist aspiration, still appears prostrate before the idol of power.

The modern world, for all its outward splendour—its triumphs in science, learning, and technological mastery—remains, in its inner constitution, curiously unchanged. Beneath its polished exterior linger the same ancient impulses: the same predatory instincts, the same insatiable thirst for dominion, the same ruthless calculus of interest. Those who preside over the great chambers of power, and who would not hesitate to plunge the world into darkness merely to keep alight the flickering candle of their own advantage, are in truth the principal architects of this unfolding tragedy. These are the forces that wage war in the name of peace, and that fortify their dominions with the very lifeblood of humanity, even while invoking its name.

It is within this sombre and unsettling context that the present conflict transcends the boundaries of a routine diplomatic dispute and assumes the proportions of a global calamity. Here, decisions are not merely political calculations; they are determinations that shape the destinies of peoples and nations. On one side stands the arrogance of power; on the other, the desperate struggle for survival. On one side, the blind game of strategic interest; on the other, the faint yet persistent cry of humanity itself.

Readers would do well, therefore, not to approach this account as a mere report, but rather as a mirror—one in which the deeper truths of our age stand revealed in stark and often uncomfortable clarity. This is a moment of reckoning: a juncture at which we must ask ourselves whether we shall remain complicit in the gathering storm of war or instead choose to tend that fragile yet enduring flame of peace which alone has the power to pierce the darkness and illuminate a path forward. For history bears solemn witness to this enduring truth: whenever mankind has chosen the sword over reason, it has secured not victory, but a more profound and lasting defeat—its own.

Thus, this matter cannot be reduced to the language of diplomatic subtlety. It is, in its essence, a reflection of the intricate and often perilous chessboard of contemporary international politics, wherein each piece signifies far more than its immediate motion—carrying within it the accumulated weight of history, ideology, fear, and ambition.

Nor, indeed, is this simply a disagreement between two nations. It is emblematic of a wider and more intricate condition—a defining chapter in the political narrative of our time, in which power, doctrine, interest, and apprehension are so deeply interwoven that they defy easy separation. It is against this broader canvas that the following analysis is presented, in the hope that readers may

discern for themselves how a world once poised on the brink of catastrophic destruction—mere hours away, it seemed—has yet to fully emerge from the shadow of that peril.

The relationship between the United States and Iran may aptly be likened to a mirror perpetually clouded by the vapours of mistrust. At present, five principal points of contention stand between them—formidable barriers that continue to challenge not only the prospect of agreement, but the very possibility of peace itself.

First, there is the question of Iran's nuclear programme—a matter that has, for decades, resisted resolution. It remains the central axis of dispute, drawing both nations into a prolonged and increasingly fraught confrontation. To the United States, it represents a latent and potentially grave threat; to Iran, it is a sovereign right, an emblem of national dignity and scientific progress. What one perceives as danger, the other proclaims as legitimacy and honour.

Second is the issue of regional influence. Iran's so-called "axis of resistance" is viewed in Washington and Tel Aviv as a persistent and destabilising force. Through its alliances and affiliated groups across the Middle East, Iran has constructed a sphere of influence that it regards as both defensive and necessary. Yet to its adversaries, this network appears less as a shield and more as a source of enduring instability. Here, the disagreement transcends geography and enters the realm of competing worldviews.

Thirdly, there is the enduring burden of economic sanctions. The United States has long wielded these measures as instruments of strategic pressure, while Iran regards them as a form of economic warfare. Their cumulative impact has placed immense strain upon Iran's economy, deepening grievances and reinforcing mutual hostility.

Fourth is the dispute over the Strait of Hormuz—a narrow yet immensely significant maritime passage, through which flows a substantial portion of the world's energy supply. It is not merely a corridor of navigation, but a vital artery of the global economy. Iran asserts a degree of sovereign authority over these waters, while the United States maintains that they must remain international. Thus, a geographical feature becomes the focal point of a far broader contest of power and principle.

Finally, and perhaps most decisively, there exists a profound and deeply entrenched deficit of trust. This absence of confidence transforms every negotiation into an exercise in suspicion. The walls of mistrust between the two sides have risen so high that even dialogue itself appears to collide against them. Every agreement is viewed through a lens of doubt; every assurance is shadowed by questions of intent.

It was against this backdrop that negotiations in Islamabad were convened—heralded, at least outwardly, as a tentative step towards a new dawn. They resembled, one might say, the lighting of a solitary lamp amid a gathering storm. Yet in reality, they marked the beginning of a journey whose destination lay obscured in dense uncertainty. From the very outset, it was evident that immense obstacles stood in the way—obstacles not susceptible to resolution through mere diplomatic pleasantries, nor bridgeable by the fragile architecture of words alone.

Indeed, these negotiations were akin to an attempt to construct a bridge across a turbulent river—its opposing banks distant, and its waters roiled by fierce and unrelenting currents. Beneath the surface lay forces not easily subdued: historical grievances, ideological divergence, and the accumulated weight of years of distrust.

The statement issued by the Iranian Foreign Ministry's spokesman, Esmail Baqaei, serves as a candid reflection of this reality. The talks did not end in absolute failure; yet neither did they approach genuine success. While some areas of understanding were achieved, there remained two or three critical issues—knots, as it were, that resisted all efforts at unravelling. The inclusion of additional matters, such as the Strait of Hormuz, only served to deepen the complexity, introducing new layers of difficulty. Each issue seemed to give rise to another, as though the very act of seeking resolution generated fresh complications.

Thus, the negotiations, though not devoid of effort or intent, ultimately faltered before reaching their intended destination—exhausted, as they were, by the very weight of the challenges they sought to overcome.

At the very heart of this protracted dispute lies Iran's nuclear programme—a central pillar upon which the entire edifice of contention appears to rest. It is, in many respects, an old and wearied narrative, its pages frayed by time and repetition; yet its force has in no way diminished. The United States maintains that, beneath the outward guise of civilian endeavour, Iran seeks to acquire the capacity to produce nuclear weapons—a prospect regarded in Washington as nothing less than a grave and gathering danger. Iran, for its part, rejects this charge with steadfast insistence, portraying its programme as exclusively peaceful and emblematic of its sovereign right to scientific advancement. Thus, what emerges is not merely a policy disagreement, but a deeper struggle between power and apprehension—between America's fear and Iran's aspiration to strength.

The remarks of the American Vice-President, J. D. Vance, conveyed with notable clarity the underlying thrust of Washington's position: assurances must transcend rhetoric and assume tangible, verifiable form. It is not words that are sought, but certainty. In this light, the essence of the negotiations was defined by a singular demand—that Iran must not only refrain from the pursuit of nuclear weapons, but also relinquish the means, infrastructure, and pathways by which such a capability might ever be attained. Written guarantees, enforceable and unequivocal, were deemed indispensable.

This insistence is, at its core, a reflection of profound mistrust. The United States does not repose confidence in declaratory commitments alone; it seeks demonstrable restraint. Yet, by its own admission, such willingness has not thus far manifested itself on the Iranian side, leaving the process suspended in a state of unresolved tension.

Iran, however, remains immovable in its position—firm as a mountain against the shifting winds of external pressure. It contends that, as a signatory to the international framework governing the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, it is fully entitled to pursue the enrichment of uranium for peaceful purposes. This claim is not advanced merely as a technical argument, but as a matter of national sovereignty and dignity. Indeed, its ten-point proposal, presented as a basis for negotiation, seeks

formal international recognition of this right—an effort, in essence, to secure not only acceptance, but legitimacy. In this regard, the issue transcends technicalities; it becomes a question of principle, bound up with the very idea of statehood and self-determination.

Set against this position stands the American framework, markedly more exacting in its demands. Within its multi-point proposal lies the insistence that Iran must bring to an end all forms of uranium enrichment upon its own soil. For Tehran, such a condition is wholly untenable, for it would amount to a surrender of both scientific autonomy and national prerogative. It is precisely at this juncture that the path to compromise narrows almost to vanishing point. The disagreement hardens into a line so starkly drawn that neither side finds it possible to cross without forfeiting what it regards as essential.



In earlier years, there had been a moment—fleeting, yet significant—when such differences appeared capable of resolution. The agreement reached in 2015, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, represented the culmination of prolonged and painstaking diplomacy. It offered a framework whereby limitations upon Iran’s nuclear activities were to be exchanged for the easing of economic sanctions. For a time, it stood as a testament to what sustained negotiation might achieve—a glimmer of hope amid a landscape otherwise marked by discord.

Yet that hope has since faded. The agreement now appears less as a durable settlement than as an unfinished chapter—its promise dimmed by the passage of time and the shifting currents of international politics. What once seemed a carefully constructed bridge now resembles an incomplete structure, abandoned before its purpose could be fully realised.

Compounding these difficulties has been the broader regional climate, in which military developments have cast a long and dark shadow over diplomatic efforts. The ongoing operations by Israel against forces aligned with Iran in Lebanon have exerted a palpable influence upon the atmosphere of negotiation. These actions, like gathering clouds obscuring the sun, have diminished the already fragile prospects of progress. Iran’s leadership has made clear that the reverberations of the battlefield cannot be divorced from the deliberations at the negotiating table; should such hostilities persist, dialogue itself risks becoming a hollow exercise.

Even the announcement of a ceasefire—seemingly a step towards de-escalation—has proved uncertain in its durability. Continued military activity in Lebanon has undermined its credibility, illustrating once again the disjunction between diplomatic declarations and realities on the ground. Indeed, the reports of renewed strikes emerging almost immediately after the departure of the American delegation from Islamabad served as a stark reminder that agreements, however carefully phrased, may prove no more resilient than paper before the force of armed conflict. Words, it would seem, are all too easily undone by the thunder of artillery.

Meanwhile, the Strait of Hormuz remains a focal point of strategic tension—a narrow passage, yet one of immense global consequence. Through its waters passes a substantial share of the world's energy supply, rendering it not merely a geographical feature, but a vital artery of the international economy. Iran's efforts to assert greater control over this passage, including the imposition of charges upon shipping, have provoked sharp objection from the United States, which maintains that such waters must remain open to all. Here, geography and economics converge, and the contest for authority reaches a particularly acute intensity.

Iran, for its part, appears determined not merely to maintain its position, but to formalise it. By advancing new regulatory frameworks and reinforcing its presence, it seeks to translate *de facto* influence into recognised authority. This initiative forms part of a broader regional strategy—one aimed at consolidating its standing and extending its reach within an already volatile environment. Central to this strategy is Iran's network of allied groups across the region. These associations serve as the foundation of what might be described as a forward defensive posture, enabling Iran to project influence while avoiding direct confrontation. Through this network, it engages its adversaries at a distance, shaping the strategic landscape to its advantage. Yet this same system is perceived by the United States and Israel as a persistent and unacceptable threat—one that must ultimately be dismantled. It is in this context that continued military actions, particularly in Lebanon, must be understood.

At the same time, Iran confronts mounting pressures within its own borders. Years of economic sanctions have imposed a heavy burden upon its economy, and signs of public discontent have grown increasingly evident. There is, among many of its citizens, a desire that national resources be directed less towards external engagements and more towards domestic welfare. Yet the imperatives of security and the realities of prolonged confrontation have thus far constrained any significant shift in policy. In the face of what it perceives as sustained external hostility, Iran finds itself compelled to allocate considerable resources to defence, even at the cost of internal strain.

Thus, the internal and external dimensions of this crisis remain inextricably linked—each reinforcing the other and together sustaining a cycle of tension from which escape appears, for the present, uncertain.

Among Iran's foremost demands is the restoration of its frozen assets and the lifting of international sanctions that have, for years, constrained its economic vitality. Yet, from the vantage point of Washington, such magnanimity appears increasingly improbable. With each passing day, the prospect of accommodating this demand seems to recede further into the realm of conjecture. It is precisely at this juncture that the gulf between hope and reality widens most starkly, becoming perhaps the single greatest impediment upon the path of negotiation.

Taken together, these complexities reflect a deeper and more disquieting truth: that the dispute between the United States and Iran cannot be reduced to a mere catalogue of disagreements. It is, rather, an intricate amalgam of ideology, interest, power, and history—so densely interwoven that its tensions reverberate far beyond the immediate parties involved. Nowhere is this more acutely felt than in the Middle East, a region brought perilously close to the brink of upheaval, though the tremors of this confrontation are by no means confined to its borders. Increasingly, voices within the

region speak with candour, alleging that their resources and destinies are being subordinated to the preservation of external dominance.

This is a narrative whose chapters give rise to ever more searching questions, yet whose conclusion remains unwritten. It is a knot not easily untangled—a problem that demands not only the instruments of diplomacy, but also the rarer virtues of trust, foresight, and patience.

The broader tableau reveals an uncomfortable reality: that the world continues to operate, in large measure, upon the calculus of power. The ideals of justice and humanity, though often invoked, have yet to secure their full and consistent expression in the conduct of international affairs. These conflicts, these wars, these relentless diplomatic contests—together they stand as stark reminders that mankind has not wholly transcended the more primal elements of its nature.

And so the question arises, with renewed urgency: how long is this to endure? How long shall the blood of innocents be expended in the name of causes that seldom bear their burden? How long shall human lives be offered up at the altars of power? And how long shall the voice of peace be drowned beneath the thunder of arms?

For those forces in the world that profess a commitment to peace, this is a moment of trial. Silence, at such an hour, it would not merely be a failure of resolve; it would be an abdication of responsibility for which history is seldom forgiving. The demands of the present moment call for action—measured, principled, and resolute. It is incumbent upon these actors to stand, with unity of purpose, as a bulwark against those aggressive impulses that threaten to draw the world ever closer to the precipice.

Peace is not a sign of frailty; it is, rather, the most enduring expression of strength. It is the force that binds nations, nurtures civilisations, and sustains the very fabric of human existence. War, by contrast, is a consuming fire—one that spares neither adversary nor instigator, but ultimately devours both alike. It follows, therefore, that the international community must move beyond the realm of declarations and resolutions, and instead pursue tangible measures capable of restraining those forces that imperil global stability.

It is, moreover, a bitter truth that so long as the politics of interest continues to eclipse the politics of principle, peace will remain elusive—more aspiration than reality. To transform this aspiration into substance requires the reconstruction of the international order upon firmer foundations: justice, equity, and mutual respect.

Humanity now finds itself at a crossroads. One path leads towards conflict, destruction, and decline; the other towards peace, stability, and survival. The choice, stark though it may be, rests with us. Should we persist in inaction, history may yet record that, at the very moment when the world stood ablaze, we chose the role of spectators.

Thus, the call of the hour is unmistakable: that those who would claim to speak for humanity must rise, lend their voices against injustice, and assume their share of responsibility in restoring the world

to a condition of peace. For if we fail to safeguard humanity today, we may find, tomorrow, that there remains little of it left to save.

For the present, the vessel of this crisis drifts amid the turbulent seas of politics—tossed by uncertain currents, its destination obscured beyond the horizon. And yet, even in this gathering gloom, there are faint indications that efforts, seen and unseen, continue to strive for the preservation of peace. The attention of the international community now turns, with cautious expectation, towards those arenas where the unfinished work of ceasefire and reconciliation might yet be brought to completion—transforming what remains an incomplete tale into a testament of peace for the world at large.

Thursday, April 16, 2026

The Quiet Grammar of Diplomacy

From Powder to Parley

When the storm-clouds of global politics begin, however tentatively, to disperse, the lamps of diplomacy are apt to kindle of their own accord. In the intricate and often turbulent theatre of international affairs, there arise, from time to time, moments when the air clears just enough for a faint glimmer of concord to appear upon the horizon. Such a moment has, in recent days, presented itself upon Chinese soil, where Pakistan and Afghanistan convened for a seven-day dialogue—an encounter that was less a routine exercise in protocol than a carefully wrought overture to history itself. It was not merely an exchange of words, but a convergence of intentions; a deliberate attempt to supplant the bitterness of a protracted past with the tempered sweetness of dialogue, and to lay, upon the wounds of yesterday, the balm of possibility for tomorrow.

This tableau was most vividly realised in the region of Ürümqi, where the proceedings unfolded not as a perfunctory diplomatic ritual, but as a quiet illumination within the half-light of history—an illumination that dared to cast its glow upon the uncertain pathways of the future. One might say, borrowing the cadence if not the exact phrasing of Winston Churchill, that this was not the end of discord, nor even its beginning end, but perhaps the end of its beginning. For what transpired was not a mere sitting and rising, but the tentative preface to an era in which the acrid scent of gunpowder yields, however reluctantly, to the subtler fragrance of discourse. It was, in essence, a test not only of language but of resolve—a mirror held up to the intentions of those assembled.

The broader international climate lends this episode an added layer of significance. The ceasefire between the United States and Iran, though momentarily soothing to the global atmosphere, has in truth set in motion a recalibration of power whose consequences are yet unfolding. It was in this shifting context that China, with a deliberation reminiscent of the prudential wisdom so admired by Edmund Burke, seized the moment to exercise its diplomatic acumen. By bringing Pakistan and Afghanistan to a common table, Beijing signalled—firmly yet without ostentation—that the East is no longer content to remain a spectator, but has assumed the mantle of an active architect in the ordering of world affairs.

The pronouncement of a “comprehensive solution” by the Chinese Foreign Ministry is, in this regard, no mere communiqué. It bears the character of a considered doctrine—indeed, a manifesto of sorts—eschewing piecemeal remedies in favour of a holistic strategy. It is a cartography not of fragments, but of totalities; a recognition that the maladies afflicting the region cannot be cured by superficial expedients but demand an engagement with their deeper causes. In this, one detects an insistence that durable peace is not the offspring of transient measures, but of sustained and principled thought.

Pakistan’s role within this unfolding narrative has been neither negligible nor merely ornamental. Its quiet diplomacy during the tensions between Washington and Tehran functioned, in effect, as a bridge—unseen perhaps, yet indispensable—bringing two adversarial forces into a posture, however fleeting, of restraint. If Pakistan’s contribution has been one of subtle facilitation on the global stage, China’s has been that of an assured mediator at the regional level, discharging its office with a

composure that calls to mind the measured prose of Thomas Babington Macaulay. The result has been not only a willingness to converse, but the emergence of a cautiously constructive atmosphere.

In contrast to earlier episodes in the fraught history of Pak-Afghan engagement, the present round of talks has been marked by a discernible sobriety—a steadiness that has, for once, displaced rancour, and a prudence that has tempered uncertainty. It is as though diplomacy, long overshadowed by impulse, has at last asserted its primacy. Yet the essential question persists, and must persist: are these proceedings to be remembered as an exercise in rhetorical dexterity, or as the prologue to genuine normalisation? History, stern and unsentimental, reminds us that agreements derive their longevity not from the elegance of their phrasing, but from the sincerity of the intentions that animate them. Where resolve is steadfast, compacts transcend paper; where it is wanting, even the most artful language dissolves into irrelevance.

Thus, the fate of these negotiations hinges upon that delicate yet decisive axis—between appearance and authenticity, between declaration and deed. Should earnestness and gravity indeed undergird this endeavour, it is not beyond conjecture that the region may yet pass into a new dispensation: one in which differences are not extinguished by force, but reconciled through reasoned discourse.

The negotiations in Ürümqi may be likened to a silent river—outwardly placid, yet bearing within it currents of considerable depth. Their quietude belies a resonance that travels far beyond the confines of the negotiating chamber, echoing across the breadth of the region. According to the Chinese Foreign Ministry, both parties have concurred in seeking a comprehensive resolution to the tensions that have persisted since October of the previous year. This declaration signals a transition—from the expedient to the enduring, from the immediate to the lasting—in the pursuit of peace: a peace not confined to borders, but extending into the very sentiments of the peoples concerned.

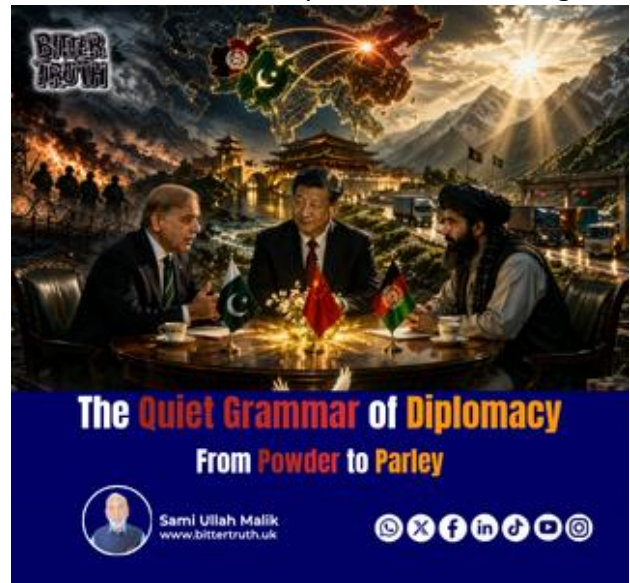
There is, moreover, a certain equilibrium and dignity in the language employed by the Chinese spokesperson—qualities that reflect the higher canons of diplomacy. The mutual pledge to refrain from any action that might aggravate the situation constitutes, in effect, a moral covenant: unwritten, perhaps, yet potent in its ethical force. It is less an announcement than a compact of restraint, animated by the *dux* of patience, prudence, and balance. China's provision of a structured negotiating framework further attests to its intention that this process should not be episodic, but continuous and coherent—an unfolding sequence rather than an isolated event.

It was, moreover, candidly acknowledged in the meeting that the peace of South Asia is inextricably bound to the tenor of relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. To designate terrorism as the principal impediment to this relationship is not merely to assign blame; it is, in effect, to diagnose a long-festering malady—an affliction that has for years been embedded deep within the body politic of the region. Until this canker is confronted and treated at its roots, all endeavours toward tranquillity must remain necessarily incomplete. China's persistent emphasis upon dialogue is thus neither ornamental nor incidental; it is a deliberate affirmation that the instruments of war—however forceful—are ultimately inferior to the patient craft of conversation. The crack of the rifle may impose a momentary hush, yet it is only the cadence of reasoned discourse that can secure a

lasting peace. In this insistence lies a quiet but resolute declaration: that the primacy of argument shall, henceforth, supersede that of arms.

Pakistan's apparent silence in this unfolding drama is, upon closer inspection, neither evasive nor accidental, but rather a considered and purposeful restraint—an eloquent quietude in which deliberation finds its truest voice. In the subtle art of diplomacy, silence is often the most articulate of statements, speaking in tones that words themselves cannot sustain. Such silence is rarely empty; it is, more often than not, clothed in the garments of prudence. It suggests that, behind the visible stillness, a process of careful reflection is underway, wherein each facet of the matter is weighed with meticulous care before any definitive position is pronounced.

Though the negotiations did not, in their present form, command the presence of the highest echelons of leadership, the engagements between ambassadors and the tenor of their measured statements furnish ample evidence that a serious diplomatic process is not only underway but quietly advancing. This is diplomacy in its more discreet incarnation—a continuity of engagement that seldom announces itself with fanfare yet frequently lays the groundwork for decisions of far-reaching consequence. The meetings of envoys and the temperate optimism of their pronouncements are outward manifestations of this quieter enterprise, whose effects, though not immediately conspicuous, tend to unfold with gradual but enduring impact. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to anticipate that subsequent stages may witness the elevation of these talks to a more senior and decisive plane.



On another front, Pakistan's security narrative remains unambiguous and firm. Its ongoing operations against terrorism testify to the fact that it regards this challenge not as a transient political inconvenience, but as a question intimately tied to its very survival. The issue of Afghan soil being utilised against Pakistan is not a passing grievance; it is a long-standing apprehension that has cast a persistent shadow over bilateral relations, and which has now crystallised into a clear and unequivocal demand. As many observers have noted, Pakistan's central contention is both simple and profound: that Afghan territory must not serve as a platform for hostile designs against it. This demand, in essence, is but another expression of its imperative for national security.

Encouragingly, the statements emanating from the Afghan side suggest a parallel recognition of the gravity of the situation. In the measured words of Amir Khan Muttaqi, one discerns not only a note of moderation but a glimmer of hope—that minor differences shall not be permitted to harden into insurmountable barriers. Such sentiments reflect an emerging inclination, on both sides, to privilege cooperation over confrontation. They amount, in effect, to an acknowledgment that while disagreement is natural, wisdom lies in its resolution. Should this spirit of cautious optimism translate into tangible action, it may yet herald the dawn of a more stable and harmonious regional order.

Similarly, the carefully calibrated remarks of Suhail Shaheen, delivered from Qatar, bear the hallmarks of diplomatic finesse. Analysts have observed that the tone of the negotiations, on this occasion, has been notably more tempered and courteous—an evolution that augurs well for the future. It suggests that both nations, while not oblivious to the burdens of their shared past, are nevertheless prepared to turn their gaze toward the possibilities that lie ahead. Even amidst the residue of bitter memory, there is discernible the first tentative step toward a more constructive future.

The tensions of previous October stand as a sombre reminder of how precarious this relationship has, at times, been. Those were moments of profound regret, when hostile forces found opportunity in discord, and when escalation—manifested in aerial strikes and retaliatory measures—inscribed upon the pages of history chapters written, as it were, in lines of blood. Such episodes serve as a stark admonition: that the path of conflict leads inexorably toward devastation. It is, perhaps, the hard-earned memory of these experiences that now inclines both nations toward the negotiating table, imbuing the present talks with a significance that extends beyond the immediate to encompass the healing of past wounds.

The closure of borders and the suspension of trade have likewise exerted a heavy toll, both economically and socially. When commerce falters, it is not merely goods that cease to move, but the very flow of daily life that is disrupted—often with severe consequences for ordinary people. It is this shared realisation that has, in no small measure, impelled both parties back toward dialogue. There is, increasingly, an acknowledgment that economic relations must be insulated, as far as possible, from the vicissitudes of political disagreement, and that mutual prosperity cannot be held hostage to perpetual discord.

Although no formal communiqué has yet emerged, the very duration and continuity of the seven-day negotiations testify to the seriousness with which they were conducted. This was no series of perfunctory encounters, but a sustained and substantive exchange in which both sides articulated their positions with candour. The persistence of dialogue over such a period is itself indicative of a genuine search for resolution—an effort that aspires to move beyond the superficial toward something more durable and consequential.

Pakistan's position, in this regard, remains both clear and consistent: it seeks concrete and verifiable action against militant groups operating from Afghan territory—groups that, for a considerable period, have functioned as instruments of proxy conflict, engaging in acts of violence within Pakistan while openly claiming responsibility for them. This demand is neither rhetorical nor transient; it is rooted in accumulated experience and bound up with the imperatives of internal security and stability. Without meaningful progress on this front, it is difficult to envisage any substantive advancement in the broader relationship.

Pakistan's position with regard to the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan is, by every measure, unequivocal. To designate it as a terrorist organisation, and to insist upon the dismantling of its operational networks, is not merely a matter of policy preference but a prerequisite for the restoration of trust. In pressing this demand, Pakistan articulates not an abstract doctrine, but an imperative rooted in the exigencies of its internal security. A cessation of hostilities, coupled with the effective prevention of cross-

border incursions, constitutes the very foundation upon which any durable peace must be constructed. Yet the decisive test lies not in articulation but in execution. Should these negotiations ascend, in their subsequent stages, to a higher level, it would signify that the initial seed has indeed taken root—an achievement of no small consequence. Failing this, they risk joining the long and sobering catalogue of unrealised efforts that history records with a certain quiet severity.

The challenge, however, does not end with a single organisation. Other militant groups form links in the same troubling chain; and so long as their activities persist, the atmosphere of trust cannot fully take hold. A tangible diminution in their operations would serve as the clearest indication that the negotiations are yielding substantive results, rather than merely rhetorical assurances.

Entities such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda represent a shared threat to the stability of the region. While the operational footprint of the latter may have diminished, the former continues to present an evolving and increasingly complex challenge—one that neither state can effectively confront in isolation. Only through a joint strategy, conceived with clarity and pursued with constancy, can the prospect of lasting peace be meaningfully secured.

Encouragingly, the recent decline in attacks offers a cautiously optimistic signal—an indication that beneath the visible surface, some measure of progress may indeed be unfolding. It is akin to that brief, almost imperceptible calm that follows a storm: a stillness that may yet presage a more profound transformation. Reports of militant elements shifting their positions further reinforce the impression that practical measures, however discreet, are being undertaken, even if their full contours have yet to be publicly delineated.

Afghanistan's proposition that trade be insulated from the vicissitudes of politics is, in its essence, both pragmatic and farsighted. The restoration of border routes would not merely revive commerce but reopen the arteries of everyday life, yielding tangible benefits for the peoples of both nations and creating new avenues of shared prosperity.

In the final analysis, one truth stands beyond dispute: neither Pakistan nor Afghanistan possesses the luxury of a protracted conflict. The burdens—economic, social, and human—are simply too great to be borne indefinitely. Peace, therefore, is not an idealistic aspiration but a strategic necessity—the only viable path toward sustained stability.

Yet history, ever the stern instructor, reminds us that negotiations alone do not suffice. They must be accompanied by sincerity of purpose, the gradual accumulation of trust, and—above all—the discipline of implementation. The recurring dispute over written guarantees has, in earlier efforts, proved a decisive stumbling block, laying bare the underlying deficit of trust between the parties. Pakistan's demand, and the position of the Afghan Taliban, reflect, in essence, two distinct perspectives: the one shaped by the imperatives of security, the other informed by considerations of sovereignty and ideological affinity. It is within this delicate and often contested space that the success or failure of the entire enterprise shall ultimately be determined.

The Ürümqi negotiations thus constitute but the latest chapter in a long and complex story—yet one to which China's mediation has imparted a new dimension and a renewed sense of possibility. Should

this process continue with the seriousness thus far exhibited, it is not beyond the bounds of reason to imagine that a region long beset by turmoil and uncertainty may, in time, be transformed into a bastion of peace and stability. For these negotiations are more than a diplomatic exercise; they are, in their quiet way, an embodiment of hope—and hope, when allied with resolve and realised through action, possesses the rare capacity to alter the very course of history.

Saturday, April 18, 2026

Where Diplomacy Fades and Power Prevails

The First Wars of a New World Order

It is by no means an extravagant conjecture to suppose that the present confrontation between the United States, Israel, and Iran may, in the fullness of time, be reckoned among the earliest great prologue-wars of an emergent world order—one still in the throes of defining its own character, both in thought and in practice. History, in its austere wisdom, teaches us that whenever the balance of global power shifts, its overture is most often inscribed upon the field of battle, whilst its preface is composed within the measured chambers of diplomacy. We stand, it would seem, at such a juncture: an age in which those principles that once underpinned international conduct now appear to fade beneath the dust of time, their authority diminished, their certitude questioned. The wheel of history has, perhaps imperceptibly yet decisively, entered a new orbit—one in which it is no longer the grammar of rules, but the redefinition of power itself, that assumes the decisive voice.

The annals of history bear eloquent witness to a recurring truth: that each new international order is born, not in tranquillity, but in the crucible of conflict. The religious wars of Europe gave rise to the modern conception of the nation-state; the twin cataclysms of the twentieth century laid the foundations of international institutions and a rules-based order. In like manner, the present turbulence may well herald an era in which the calibration of power supplants the authority of principle. We are, in effect, observing the composition of a new lexicon of global politics—one in which the idioms of the past are steadily losing their resonance.

The contemporary scene reflects precisely such a transition. It is an age of unsettling ambiguity, wherein long-standing norms fall away like autumnal leaves, while the values destined to replace them have yet to take firm root. This confrontation, therefore, is not merely territorial or military in nature; it is civilisational, intellectual, and systemic in its implications. The world, it seems, advances—cautiously yet inexorably—towards what might be termed a new *covenant of power*, an unwritten but deeply consequential reordering of the terms by which states engage one another. In the decades following the Second World War, international politics was shaped within a disciplined framework, grounded in law and institutional authority. Though fissures appeared from time to time within this edifice, states nonetheless felt compelled to justify their actions within its bounds. Thus there endured a delicate equilibrium between power and legality—an equilibrium that, though often strained, provided at least the semblance of order. Today, however, that balance appears increasingly fragile, if not altogether imperilled.

Indeed, the post-war order may best be understood as a civilisational compact—an ambitious, if imperfect, endeavour to subject power to moral restraint. It was, in essence, an unwritten covenant, seeking to subordinate force to law. The United Nations, the Geneva Conventions, the International Court of Justice, and a host of multilateral agreements stood as institutional expressions of this aspiration: that war itself might be regulated, and peace sustained through adherence to shared principles. Even when great powers bent these norms to their own advantage, they could not wholly dispense with the need to cloak their actions in legal and moral justification. There persisted, therefore, an implicit acknowledgment that law remained a reference point—a standard against

which conduct might be judged. It was this subtle yet persistent moral compulsion that rendered even the powerful, in some measure, accountable.

Such was the civilised veil that restrained power from descending into unbridled excess. Yet today, that veil appears frayed, its threads loosened, its authority diminished. The tomes of law, once consulted with reverence, now risk relegation to the quiet obscurity of neglected shelves.

In earlier eras, military action was never merely the thunder of artillery; it was accompanied by the careful choreography of diplomacy, the intricate reasoning of legal argument, and the strategic alignment of alliances. War, in this sense, was not a solitary act of force but a comprehensive narrative—one in which each bullet carried an argument, each campaign a justification. The echoes of battle resounded as much in conference halls as upon the battlefield. Public opinion, both domestic and international, was to be persuaded, if not convinced.

In the present Iranian crisis, however, these traditional accompaniments appear markedly diminished. Decisions are no longer forged in the open forums of legal deliberation, but within the guarded precincts of strategic councils and military headquarters. The locus of authority has shifted—from the courtroom to the command room, from the language of law to the calculus of power. It is as though policy is now drafted upon maps of force rather than within the measured lines of legal text. Diplomacy yields ground to strategy; justification to expediency. Actions are weighed less upon the scales of legality than upon the balances of interest. We may well be entering an era in which the very definition of “right” is increasingly determined by the possession and projection of power.

For Iran, such a mode of operation is neither novel nor unexpected. Its modern history attests to a persistent capacity for navigating adversity with a degree of strategic autonomy. Since the انقلاب 1979, the nation has endured sustained sanctions, political isolation, and diplomatic pressure. Yet from this prolonged it has derived distinctive resilience. Traversing decades of constraint, Iran has cultivated methods of survival that lie beyond the formal architecture of the international system. What might appear as from without has, in fact, engendered a form of self-reliance that is at once instructive and enigmatic.

This persistent ideology has endowed Iran with a singular strategic sensibility. Its economic and diplomatic practices have evolved together to create an alternative operational framework. Through informal financial networks, regional alignments, and adaptive trade routes, it has maintained its economic life. In effect, Iran has devised a subsystem alongside the formal world order—a structure capable of operating even within the confines of sanctions. It is an approach that is unconventional in form, but clearly effective in practice: a parallel architecture of resilience, one that exists not against the world order, but in its shadow—breathing, enduring, and, in its own way, quietly self-assertive.

Iran’s oil exports are nothing less than the lifeblood of its economy. That they have endured — indeed, sometimes expanded — under the weight of overwhelming international sanctions is a testament to both strategic ingenuity and any ordinary kind of economic resilience. It is, by any prudent measure, a remarkable feat: that a state so beset by restrictive regimes has nevertheless

maintained, and occasionally expanded, its access to energy markets while maintaining a discernible sphere of regional influence. One is forced to conclude that where determination and purpose are tempered, even sealed doors can yield unseen openings. This is not merely a feat of commercial skill. Rather, it is an expression of political insight of a higher order. It suggests with some force that even the most elaborate architecture of barriers can fail in the face of the steady pressure of national will. Iran has, in fact, demonstrated that where the doors of formal order are barred, apertures can be found—and where apertures are denied, new paths can be carved through the walls themselves.

Within Iran's strategic culture, tension is not merely endured but curated—almost as an art form. Central to this disposition is the doctrine of what might be termed “calibrated escalation”: a measured interplay of patience, deliberation, and psychological pressure. Conflict, in this conception, is neither abandoned nor allowed to rage unchecked; rather, it is modulated with care, intensified only to the point at which the adversary's costs become burdensome, yet restrained so as not to ignite a conflagration that would engulf the wider region. Each response is deliberate, each signal layered with meaning—pressure is applied, yet avenues remain ajar. The objective is not annihilation, but inducement: to bring the adversary, through the weight of accumulated cost, to the threshold of accommodation.

At first glance, such a strategy may seem soft, even temporary. In fact, it conceals a deeper tenacity: the recognition that victory does not always consist in decisive victory, and that, occasionally, the prolongation and management of conflicts can themselves be the cause of success. It is a practice in which every step is considered, every action is communicative. Iran, in this sense, does not simply fight the conflict, but it frames it, shaping its pace and momentum with the strictness of a craftsman.

Israel, by contrast, is clearly animated by a different strategic temperament. Its military doctrine is inclined towards immediacy, decisiveness and, where deemed necessary, preemptive force. In a security environment long defined by existential anxiety and frequent war, it has developed a temperament in which delay is often tantamount to danger. Rapid and forceful action thus becomes not merely an option but a necessity, calculated by its leadership. Within this framework, preemption and the strong use of force play a central role.

It would be incomplete, however, not to observe that such a posture is frequently accompanied by an extensive effort to frame and justify action within the theatre of international opinion. In pursuit of regional predominance, operations of considerable severity have, at times, been undertaken under the rubric of security, with narratives constructed to sustain their legitimacy. Israel's historical experience—marked by persistent threats—has reinforced a belief that survival may demand forms of assertiveness that blur the line between defence and aggression. In this view, the imperatives of security admit little tolerance for moral ambiguity; force, whether anticipatory or retaliatory, becomes a singular instrument in the preservation of the state.

In recent years, particularly in the context of the Gaza and related conflicts, there has been increased scrutiny of Israeli actions in international legal forums. Institutions such as the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court have been included, to varying degrees, in the examination of its conduct. Yet Israel's consistent position has been that its security requirements override other considerations. Increased assertiveness by the United States has reinforced this

position, although not without raising questions about the balance of the broader international system. For where law is perceived to operate unequally, its authority is, by definition, diminished.

The role of the United States in this wider narrative remains both central and paradoxical. It is not merely a participant within the system but its principal architect and long-standing custodian. In the aftermath of the Second World War, Washington helped to erect a comprehensive edifice of institutions, alliances, and legal norms—an architecture that both reflected and sustained its global influence. Through these mechanisms, it codified the grammar of international conduct, shaping the rules by which states would engage one another.



Yet in recent years, a perceptible shift has emerged. When the very architect appears to diverge from the principles it once espoused, the stability of the structure itself invites question. It is a matter of no small consequence: for if the guardian of the order begins to treat its own principles with elasticity, the foundations of that order cannot but tremble. One is thus led to an unsettling inquiry—whether the builder, consciously or otherwise, has set in motion the gradual undoing of its own creation.

The 2003 invasion of Iraq is a striking example of this tension. It marked a moment in which the United States approached, if not crossed, the threshold of open departure from established norms. Yet efforts to recast the institution in the language of unity and collective purpose continued.

Despite deep disagreements over its legitimacy, the campaign was framed within a multilateral framework. The standards were strict, to be sure, but not entirely abandoned. The deviations were present in the words of the pledge itself. There was a subtle moral tension that defined the commitment. In the current conflict, however, even this profound restraint seems to be fading. The measured cadence and diplomatic decorum that once characterized statements of overwhelming power have given way to a more abrasive and colorless register. Language itself has undergone a transformation: it has become sharper, more declarative, and sometimes unbridled. Words now have a battlefield-like intensity—indeed, they can wound deeper than weapons. It is as if rhetoric has also absorbed the scent of gunpowder.

Such a shift is not merely stylistic; it is indicative of a deeper alteration in the temperament of international politics. Expression has become an extension of force and discourse a theatre of contestation. In this evolving landscape, words are no longer solely instruments of persuasion; they are, increasingly, weapons in their own right—swift, unyielding, and, on occasion, heedless of restraint. The change signals, with unmistakable clarity, that the ethos of global politics is itself in transition, moving away from the tempered idiom of principle towards a more austere language of power.

Certainly—here is your passage rendered into **fully refined British English**, preserving the elevated, editorial, and philosophical tone while eliminating all non-English intrusions and further polishing its rhetorical cadence:

In this emergent age, economic instruments have assumed a character strikingly akin to that of the sword. Tariffs, sanctions, and financial pressure are no longer mere tools of fiscal adjustment; they have been refashioned into instruments of political coercion, deployed with increasing candour and, at times, with disquieting severity. The distinction between ally and adversary grows ever more indistinct, as measures once reserved for foes are now, on occasion, directed even towards longstanding partners. What unfolds, therefore, is not a retreat from conflict, but its transformation—into a domain where wars are waged without the discharge of arms, yet whose consequences may prove no less profound than those of open hostilities. It is a silent war, conducted in the ledgers of trade and the circuits of finance, yet capable of producing effects both far-reaching and enduring.

The mounting pressure exerted by the United States upon its own allies underscores a deeper truth: that the internal contradictions of the prevailing international order are becoming increasingly pronounced. The very pillars upon which this edifice rests appear to show signs of strain, even as they continue to bear its weight. When confidence erodes among allies, the foundations of the system are inevitably weakened. And when the architect himself begins—whether by design or neglect—to loosen the mortar of his own construction, it is scarcely surprising that questions should arise as to the durability of the whole. Such a condition intimates a future in which states, bereft of reliable frameworks, may be compelled to chart their own solitary courses in the uncertain waters of global politics.

Iran, for its part, has historically exhibited a notable restraint in the calibration of its responses. Even in moments of acute tension—such as the brief yet consequential twelve-day confrontation has, by and large, observed its self-imposed limits, ensuring that escalation did not exceed a certain threshold. This measured posture was no accident; it reflected a considered strategic judgement, an awareness that the preservation of control within conflict is itself a form of advantage.

Yet in the present crisis, that equilibrium appears increasingly unsettled. The scale and intensity of recent developments suggest a departure from earlier patterns of restraint. In the wake of significant losses to its leadership, Iran's response has broadened in both scope and severity, shaped by mounting pressure and the imperatives of deterrence. The repercussions have extended well beyond the immediate theatre of conflict: from the waters of the Gulf to the critical arteries of global commerce. Disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz have served as a stark reminder that a regional confrontation may, with alarming rapidity, reverberate across the global economy. A single spark, it would seem, possesses the capacity to unsettle entire markets, to disturb the delicate machinery of international supply, and to expose the profound interconnectedness of the modern world.

Meanwhile, the major powers observe and interpret these developments through the prisms of their own interests. For Russia, rising energy prices present a tangible economic opportunity; for China, the unfolding crisis constitutes something akin to a strategic laboratory—a setting in which to discern how far international norms may bend, and in which direction the axis of power may ultimately

incline. Each actor, in its own way, seeks to extract advantage from the prevailing disorder, drawing conclusions that may shape future conduct.

Europe, by contrast, appears in this drama as a more subdued presence. Despite earnest diplomatic endeavours, it finds itself cast less as a decisive participant than as a contemplative observer. Its diminished role reflects a broader reality: that its influence within the architecture of global politics has, in recent years, shown signs of attenuation. It is as though, upon the chessboard of international affairs, its pieces remain in place yet lack the motion necessary to alter the course of play.

Ultimately, the question that emerges with increasing insistence is whether the existing international order has reached the limits of its vitality. This confrontation is not merely a regional contest; it is, in essence, a test of the very framework that has governed global relations since 1945. Should power come to displace principle as the organizing logic of international conduct, the world may find itself entering an era in which law yields to force, and restraint to expediency. In such a landscape, states will be guided less by shared norms than by the imperatives of survival, interest, and capability.

History offers sober counsel in this regard. It reminds us that when principles lose their authority, conflict seldom remains contained. Periods marked by the erosion of norms have, more often than not, presaged instability and disorder. Should the present structure continue to weaken, we may witness the emergence of a global environment in which the discipline of law gives way to the dominion of power alone.

And when the light of law grows dim, the shadow of power lengthens—until it encompasses all, even those who once stood as its custodians. Taking together, these developments present a portrait not only of contemporary geopolitics but of the contours of a possible future: uncertain, intricate, and fraught with peril. The world, it would seem, stands upon the threshold of a new epoch—one defined as much by its dangers as by its latent possibilities.

Tuesday, April 21, 2026

When Trust Collapses

War in the Shadows

In the long and intricate march of human history, there arise certain moments which are not merely events, but turning points—great hinges upon which the gates of destiny swing. These are the hours when an age is compelled to interrogate itself; when civilisation, as though before an unflinching mirror, must confront the lineaments of its own countenance; and when mankind is summoned to decide whether it shall stand as the heir to light or languish as the captive of darkness. Our present world, it must be said with sobriety, stands upon such a precipice—where the air is thick with the odour of gunpowder, yet the fragile breath of humanity persists, sustained, almost improbably, by hope.

This essay is not a mere assemblage of words, nor an exercise in rhetorical ornament. It is, rather, an intellectual summons—a voice that rises from the annals of history and reverberates through the chambers of our present age. It is at once a lament for our times and an intimation of their possible redemption. Herein reside the cruelties of politics and the sufferings of humanity; the arrogance of power and the quiet supplication of peace. It is a canvas upon which the stark contradictions of our era are neither concealed nor softened but presented with all their unsettling clarity.

The reader who ventures into these lines will find himself not as a detached observer, but as a participant in a drama whose stakes are nothing less than universal. It is a narrative in which every human destiny is entwined, every heartbeat accounted for, and the future of generations yet unborn silently inscribed. Such a text does not merely invite perusal; it demands reflection, feeling, and, above all, judgement. For there are moments in history when silence itself assumes the character of complicity, and when a single voice, rightly raised, may alter the course of events.

The politics of the modern age carries within it a peculiar disquiet—as though civilisation wears a composed smile upon its lips, while in its eyes flicker the tremors of unspoken dread. Upon this vast chessboard of power, where nations pursue their interests with calculated precision, principles, morality, and even solemn international covenants are too often reduced to little more than parchment relics. It is a grim tableau: a game in which the pieces are human lives, and the moves determine the fate of entire destinies. When we turn the pages of history, we find, with disquieting regularity, that the voice of reason is drowned beneath the clangour of arms.

The recent conflict involving the United States and Israel against Iran must be understood as part of this broader continuum—one link in a chain whose tightening rings now encircle not merely the Middle East but the wider world. It is not simply a war; it is a moment of consequence, a threshold from which the trajectory of global history may well be deflected. Its reverberations have unsettled not only the political equilibrium of the region, but the intellectual and strategic balance of the international order itself.

In the reflections that follow, we shall endeavour to approach this question not as a sequence of events to be catalogued, but as a phenomenon to be interpreted within a wider civilisational and intellectual frame. Here, politics shall be considered in its full gravity, and history in its instructive

depth—woven together in such a manner that the profundity of thought, the elegance of language, and the seriousness of historical insight may converge, as rivers merge into the vastness of the sea. May this conflict prove the harbinger of a nuclear arms race? This is no ordinary question of policy, nor a passing subject for speculative analysis; it is, rather, a fundamental inquiry into the conditions of human survival itself. When, in the councils of power, the notion takes root that peace is secured not by moral restraint or diplomatic accord but by instruments of annihilation, then the lamp of civilisation is left flickering at the mercy of the winds. When nations lose faith in the assurances of diplomacy and the structures of collective security, they are driven—almost inexorably—towards those means which promise immediate and absolute protection.

Nuclear weapons have thus come to symbolise this ultimate guarantor of security. The actions of the United States and Israel vis-à-vis Iran may, on the surface, be framed as measures of containment; yet their deeper implications may prove altogether contrary. For they convey, whether intended or not, a silent but potent message to the world: that without power, one remains vulnerable. Such a perception, once internalised, has the capacity to ignite a perilous race—one in which each nation seeks to arm itself with nuclear capability, and in so doing, propels the world once more into the shadow of a Cold War—albeit one marked by greater uncertainty, heightened danger, and diminished restraint.

Indeed, this posture may be likened to a profound deception visited upon the world; yet within it lies a message of grave consequence for weaker and middle powers alike: secure yourselves, whatever the cost—even if that cost be borne by humanity itself. It is at this juncture that the logic of a nuclear arms race begins—born of fear, nurtured by mistrust, and destined, if unchecked, to culminate in devastation.

More than a month has passed, and yet the echoes of this conflict have not diminished; rather, they have grown in amplitude and reach. These are not merely reverberations of ordnance, but the spreading atmosphere of fear, suspicion, and uncertainty that now envelops global politics. The full implications of this war remain, as yet, indistinct; but the shadows gathering upon the horizon suggest the approach of a far greater storm.

Experts in nuclear non-proliferation have already begun to voice their concerns: that not Iran alone, but other nations as well, may arrive at the conclusion that conventional arms and diplomatic engagements no longer suffice. More troubling still is the lesson that may be drawn—that without the possession of nuclear weapons, sovereignty itself stands imperilled. Such a notion strikes the very foundations upon which the architecture of international peace has been constructed over decades. It is here, at this fragile juncture, that the foundations of global order appear to tremble. For when states come to believe that survival rests not upon justice but upon القوة, then the law of the jungle reasserts itself in all its brutal clarity.

For decades, the United States has been cast—both by itself and by its allies—as a guarantor of security, a sentinel standing watch over those within its strategic embrace. Yet recent developments have introduced a fissure into this carefully constructed image. As retaliatory strikes from Iran reached into the territories of Middle Eastern states, the question has grown ever more insistent: is the United States, in truth, a reliable custodian of its allies' security? From the United Arab Emirates

to Saudi Arabia, several countries have found themselves exposed to the blows of Iranian reprisal, their vulnerability laid bare before the world.

This unfolding reality has given rise to profound intellectual and strategic reorientation—something approaching a quiet revolution in the calculus of statecraft. Nations, increasingly disillusioned with the assurances of external guardianship, are turning inward, seeking in self-reliance the security they no longer trust others to provide. It is a transformation in which reliance upon another's shadow comes to be seen not as prudence, but as an admission of weakness. In such a climate, the pursuit of indigenous nuclear capability may come to be framed not as a matter of choice, but as a necessity—indeed, the most emphatic expression of sovereign autonomy.

There is, in this, a certain bitter irony—almost a tragic inversion of intent. A war ostensibly waged to prevent Iran from acquiring the bomb may, in its consequences, serve to propel it towards that very objective. This paradox is hardly novel in the annals of politics; history bears repeated witness to the tendency of powerful nations to engender precisely those outcomes they profess to avert. Time and again, the application of force has served not to resolve crises, but to deepen and complicate them. Iran's leadership now stands before a grave and consequential question: whether, in the name of survival, it must embrace the very path it has long resisted. Should it do so, it would mark not merely a regional transformation, but a profound failure of the international political order.

Indeed, the present crisis is not the product of a single decision, nor the accident of a moment; it is the culmination of a long sequence of misjudgements. Negotiations were underway, possibilities remained open, and diplomatic avenues had not yet been exhausted. Yet the intoxication of power eclipsed the counsels of prudence, and the path of deliberation was abandoned. In this, we are reminded of an enduring truth: that war is, in essence, the failure of diplomacy. When dialogue ceases, the language of weapons begins—and it is a language invariably written in blood. War, more often than not, is the confession of politics' failure; and when politics collapses, it is humanity that lies buried beneath its ruins.

Saudi Arabia has already signalled, with notable candour, that should Iran acquire nuclear weapons, it would feel compelled to follow suit. This declaration is not merely a statement of intent; it is a warning—one that carries the potential to draw the entire region into a perilous spiral. What we may be witnessing is the beginning of a chain reaction, a sequence in which one state's actions beget another's. The spectre of a "domino effect" looms large, where nations, one after the other, move towards nuclear armament—until a single spark sets ablaze the entire forest, and the region is transformed into a vast repository of latent destruction.

Iran's nuclear programme has long stood at the centre of international scrutiny. Though it remains a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, doubts have persisted regarding the true nature of its ambitions. At its core, this issue is less about technology than about trust—and trust, in the theatre of global politics, has become an increasingly scarce commodity. Once eroded, it is not easily restored; and in its absence, every action appears suspect, every assurance insufficient.

Iran maintains that its programme is intended for peaceful purposes; yet the levels of uranium enrichment and the challenges surrounding inspection regimes have weakened the credibility of this

claim in the eyes of global powers. The resulting mistrust is not merely a reflection upon Iran, but an indictment of the fragility of the international system itself. The central question, therefore, is not simply what Iran asserts, but why the world remains unconvinced. The answer lies buried within the complex psychology of global politics: are international laws applied universally, or are they interpreted at the convenience of the powerful?

The decision of the United States in 2018 to withdraw from the nuclear agreement marked not merely a unilateral policy shift, but a moment of profound consequence for global trust. It signalled—to Iran and to the wider world—that agreements, however solemn, are not immutable. In so doing, it weakened the very foundations of diplomatic engagement and narrowed the space for peaceful resolution. It was, in many respects, a moment in which history forfeited an opportunity—an opportunity that might, perhaps, have averted the descent into conflict.

It is worth recalling that while Iran possessed the technical capacity to develop nuclear weapons, it had not, in practice, crossed that threshold. This is a fact often overlooked in the prevailing discourse. It suggests that, up to a point, Iran exercised a measure of restraint—whether in deference to international pressure or in adherence to certain principles. Yet the recent conflict may well alter this disposition. Should such a transformation occur, responsibility cannot be assigned solely to Iran; rather, it must also be borne by those whose actions have compelled it towards reconsideration—chief among them the United States and Israel, whose resort to force may have set in motion precisely the trajectory they sought to prevent.

Military strikes may succeed in demolishing facilities, but they cannot extinguish knowledge, nor can they obliterate the intellectual capacities upon which such programmes ultimately depend. It is not concrete and steel alone that sustain a nuclear endeavour, but the scientific expertise of scientists and the resilience of a nation's human capital. Iran retains within itself the means to rebuild, to recover, and to advance once more. Bombardment may delay, but it cannot decisively destroy. Nations, like peoples, possess the remarkable ability to rise from their own ashes—drawing from ruin not defeat, but renewed determination.

And herein lies perhaps the most sobering reflection of all: that in seeking to suppress a possibility, the world may inadvertently be nurturing its realisation.

For many years, the United States has been presented as a steadfast guardian of its allies—a power whose protective reach extended across continents, assuring stability to those within its orbit. Yet recent developments have cast a long and troubling shadow over this assumption. As nations across the Middle East found themselves exposed to Iranian reprisals, an urgent and disquieting question arose: can the United States still be regarded as a reliable guarantor of its allies' security? From the United Arab Emirates to Saudi Arabia, states once sheltered beneath this strategic canopy have discovered, to their unease, the limits of its protection.

Out of this situation has emerged a profound shift in strategic thinking—indeed, something approaching a quiet revolution in the philosophy of state security. Increasingly, nations appear inclined to relinquish their reliance on external powers and to turn instead towards self-sufficiency. The realisation is dawning that to stand perpetually in the shadow of another is, in essence, to

concede one's own vulnerability. In such a climate, the acquisition of domestic nuclear capability may come to be framed not as a discretionary ambition, but as an imperative necessity—the most conspicuous expression of sovereign independence.

There is, in this development, a striking and almost tragic irony. A war ostensibly undertaken to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons may, in its ultimate consequences, propel it towards precisely that objective. Such paradoxes are not unfamiliar in the realm of politics; history bears ample witness to the tendency of powerful nations to produce, through their own actions, the very outcomes they seek to forestall. Time and again, the application of force has complicated rather than resolved the problems it was intended to address. Iran's leadership now confronts a question of profound gravity: whether it must, in the interest of survival, adopt the very course it has long resisted. Should it do so, it would stand as a grave indictment of the failures of international politics.

This crisis is not the product of a single moment, nor the consequence of an isolated decision; it is the culmination of a long succession of miscalculations. Negotiations had been underway, possibilities remained alive, and diplomatic channels were still open. Yet the intoxication of power eclipsed prudence, and the avenues of reason were abandoned. One is thus reminded of a sombre truth: that war is, in its essence, the failure of diplomacy. When dialogue falls silent, the language of destruction begins to speak—and it is a language invariably inscribed in blood. War, more often than not, is an admission of political failure; and when politics collapses, it is humanity that lies buried beneath its ruins.

Saudi Arabia has already declared, with notable clarity, that should Iran acquire nuclear weapons, it would feel compelled to follow the same path. This pronouncement is more than a policy statement; it is a warning—one that carries the potential to draw the entire region into a dangerous and escalating contest. What may begin as a single **اقدام** could swiftly evolve into a chain reaction, as other states, driven by fear and necessity, adopt similar measures. Such a sequence evokes the spectre of a “domino effect,” wherein one nation's decision precipitates another's, until a single spark is sufficient to set an entire forest ablaze. In such circumstances, the region risks becoming a vast repository of latent destruction.

Iran's nuclear programme has long occupied the centre of international scrutiny. Although it remains a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, doubts have persisted regarding the nature and intent of its activities. At its core, this issue is less a matter of technical capability than of trust—and trust, in the arena of global politics, has become a rare and fragile commodity. Once broken, it resists easy restoration; and in its absence, every action is viewed through a lens of suspicion.

Iran maintains that its programme is devoted to peaceful purposes. Yet the levels of enrichment achieved and the challenges surrounding oversight have weakened the persuasiveness of this claim in the eyes of the international community. This prevailing mistrust reflects not merely upon Iran,



but upon the frailty of the global system itself. The essential question, therefore, is not simply what Iran asserts, but why the world remains unconvinced. The answer lies within the complex psychology of international relations: are global rules applied with uniformity, or are they interpreted according to the convenience of the powerful?

The decision of the United States in 2018 to withdraw from the nuclear agreement marked a decisive and deeply consequential turning point. It was not merely a unilateral act, but one that inflicted lasting damage upon the fabric of international trust. It conveyed to Iran—and to the wider world—that agreements, however solemnly concluded, are not necessarily enduring. In so doing, it constrained the possibilities of diplomacy and weakened the credibility of negotiated settlements. It was, in many respects, a moment in which the international order suffered a loss of moral authority—one whose effects continue to be felt to this day. It was also a moment in which history allowed another opportunity to slip away—an opportunity that might conceivably have prevented the descent into conflict.

It is important to note that while Iran possessed the technical capacity to develop nuclear weapons, it had not, in practice, crossed that threshold. This is a significant fact, too often overlooked. It suggests that, to a certain extent, Iran exercised restraint—whether in response to international pressure or in adherence to certain principles. Yet the recent conflict may well alter this posture. Should such a transformation occur, it would be neither accurate nor just to assign responsibility solely to Iran; rather, it would also rest with those whose actions have compelled it to reconsider its position—most notably the United States and Israel, whose resort to force may have driven Iran towards the very course they sought to prevent.

Military strikes may succeed in destroying physical installations, but they cannot extinguish knowledge, nor can they erase intellectual capacity. It is not infrastructure alone that sustains such programmes, but the expertise of scientists and the resilience of a nation's intellectual foundations. Iran retains within itself the capability to rebuild, to recover, and to advance once more. Bombardment may delay progress, but it cannot eliminate it altogether. Nations, like individuals, possess the capacity to rise from adversity—to draw strength from ruin, and to pursue their مقصد with renewed determination.

Thus, the most sobering realisation is this: that in seeking to avert one danger, the world may inadvertently be cultivating another—perhaps greater, and far more enduring.

The restriction of access for international inspectors has served only to deepen suspicion, and in so doing has introduced a further and most disquieting complication into an already volatile situation. In the aftermath of the strikes, the diminished presence of external oversight constitutes a development of grave concern. For without transparency, trust cannot take root; and in the absence of trust, peace itself dissolves into little more than a mirage. Where openness recedes, suspicion advances; and where suspicion takes hold, the path to confrontation becomes not merely possible, but perilously likely.

Should Iran cross the threshold into nuclear capability, the consequences would extend far beyond the decision of a single state. It would constitute a psychological and strategic upheaval for the entire

region. The Middle East—already burdened by sectarian tensions, geopolitical rivalries, and the competing ambitions of great powers—may find itself drawn into a new and dangerous contest. It would be a race in which each nation, seeking to escape the shadows of insecurity, turns towards the stark illumination of nuclear arms—an illumination that may, in truth, prove to be a consuming fire. If Iran were to acquire such weapons, it is almost certain that others would follow, setting in motion a chain of events difficult, if not impossible, to arrest—like a breached dam whose waters surge uncontrollably in every direction.

What distinguishes this prospective race is that it will not unfold in open declaration, but in silence, ambiguity, and calculated concealment. Each state, uncertain of its neighbour's intentions, will quietly augment its own capabilities. Thus, will emerge a chain of mistrust, each link bound to the next, its fragility such that a single miscalculation might suffice to bring the entire structure crashing down.

It must be recalled that the world already counts nine nuclear-armed states—the United States, Russia, China, France, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, India, Israel, and North Korea. That, even in such a landscape, the desire for nuclear capability continues to spread is both troubling and instructive. It signals, with unsettling clarity, that the framework of non-proliferation is under strain. When so many states regard such weapons as indispensable to their security, it becomes increasingly difficult to persuade others to abstain.

his tendency is not confined to the realm of governments alone; it has begun to take root within public opinion. In countries such as South Korea, Turkey, and Poland, surveys reveal a growing inclination among citizens to view nuclear capability as essential to national defence. This is not merely a political phenomenon, but a psychological one—the shadow of fear cast across the collective mind, inclining societies towards extraordinary and often perilous conclusions.

An additional and significant transformation must also be noted: nuclear weapons are no longer perceived solely as instruments of military power, but as emblems of national prestige and sovereign independence. It is this altered perception that lends further momentum to their pursuit, rendering it at once understandable and deeply hazardous.

A profound contradiction lies at the heart of the present order. When the great powers themselves continue to expand their arsenals, by what authority can they restrain others? The actions of states such as China and France in augmenting their nuclear capabilities serve to reinforce this troubling dynamic. They send a clear and unmistakable message: that participation in this race is not merely tolerated, but, in effect, legitimised. Such inconsistency erodes the moral authority of the international system, exposing the dissonance between principle and practice.

China's rapid military expansion, coupled with France's evident determination to modernise and strengthen its nuclear forces, illustrates a stark reality—that within the arena of power politics, the space for ethical restraint is steadily contracting. When the most influential nations themselves advance along this path, smaller states are furnished with a compelling, if troubling, rationale: that survival may well demand imitation.

This evolving situation poses a formidable challenge to the global order. It weakens the principle of non-proliferation and gives rise to a new and uncertain equilibrium—one defined less by stability than by the constant recalibration of competing powers.

The modernisation of nuclear arsenals represents another deeply concerning development. Though often presented as a measure of defensive refinement, it in fact increases the likelihood of their use. Advances in technology have rendered such weapons faster, more precise, and more devastating. This is no mere evolution; it is the emergence of a new and more perilous face of destruction. It is, in truth, a contest in which even the victor stands to lose.

More troubling still is the underlying impulse to render these weapons “usable”—to transform them from instruments of deterrence into tools of practical deployment. Such a shift would mark a profoundly dangerous turning point in human history. For once weapons are conceived as usable, the threshold for their employment is inevitably lowered.

The erosion of arms control agreements further compounds this danger. The demise of the New START treaty has created a void—one which, if left unaddressed, may imperil global stability and usher in a renewed arms crisis. This agreement once served as a pillar of balance and confidence between the United States and Russia. Its collapse has removed a crucial restraint, leaving both nations free to expand their arsenals without effective oversight. This absence of constraint is not merely a bilateral concern; it is a matter of global consequence, for it accelerates the very dynamics of competition that such agreements were designed to contain.

At the heart of this unfolding crisis lie three principal forces, each contributing to the drift towards proliferation. The first is the apprehension surrounding China’s rapid industrial and strategic ascent—a rising power that appears to regard nuclear capability as integral to its expanding influence. The second is the conduct of Russia in the war in Ukraine, which has demonstrated that even the implicit invocation of nuclear force may serve as a potent instrument of political leverage. The third is the perceived unpredictability of the United States, whose shifting policies generate uncertainty not only among its adversaries, but also among its allies.

Taken together, these forces create an atmosphere in which insecurity becomes the defining condition of international life. It is this pervasive sense of vulnerability that drives states towards the pursuit of nuclear weapons, reinforcing a cycle that grows ever more difficult to arrest.

Ukraine relinquished its nuclear arsenal, yet this renunciation did not shield it from aggression. Its experience stands as both a cautionary tale and a sobering lesson for other nations. Having surrendered its nuclear capability in reliance upon Western assurances and American guarantees, it nevertheless found itself exposed to attack. Three decades on, it continues to bear the heavy cost of that trust—a cost that remains ongoing and unresolved. This episode marks a significant turning point in international affairs, for it has underscored a disquieting truth: that international guarantees are not always dependable. It is precisely this lesson that has begun to shape the thinking of other states, encouraging a shift towards self-reliance in matters of security.

The contrasting examples of Libya and North Korea illuminate two starkly divergent paths within

global politics. Libya abandoned its nuclear ambitions, only to succumb eventually to external intervention and a tragic fate. North Korea, by contrast, persisted with its programme and remains, to this day, insulated from such an outcome. This comparison lays bare not only the fragility of the international order, but also an uncomfortable reality: that within that order, power often carries greater weight than principle. It is this perception that drives other nations towards the pursuit of nuclear capability.

Yet, for all these concerns, it would be mistaken to regard a nuclear arms race as inevitable. Its course is neither preordained nor beyond human agency. Nuclear weapons are costly, complex, and fraught with danger; not every state possesses the means to acquire them, nor does every state require them. Their pursuit entails not only technical challenges but also profound economic burdens. While current trends may appear to point in that direction, history reminds us that humanity has, on more than one occasion, stepped back from the brink of catastrophe.

The acquisition of nuclear weapons is attended by formidable obstacles—technical intricacies, financial strain, international sanctions, and diplomatic isolation. These very constraints serve to deter many nations from embarking upon such a path. Moreover, collective action by the international community, the revival of agreements, and sustained efforts to rebuild trust may yet arrest this dangerous momentum. It is here that a faint glimmer of hope persists—dim, perhaps, but not entirely extinguished.

All these considerations bring us to a stark and inescapable conclusion: the world stands at a delicate and decisive juncture. The proliferation of nuclear weapons is not merely a military concern; it is a civilisational crisis. Humanity now faces a choice between two divergent paths—one leading towards conflict and devastation, the other towards peace and dialogue. The responsibility for that choice rests with us. History teaches that the arrogance of power is fleeting, but its consequences endure. Should the international community fail to act with wisdom at this critical moment, this nuclear race may well culminate in a tragedy whose burden will fall upon generations yet unborn generations who may judge us harshly for our failures.

And yet, if reason and restraint are given precedence, it may still be possible to extinguish this gathering fire before it engulfs the world. What is required is a return to dialogue, a renewal of trust, and a recognition that the true guarantee of peace lies not in weapons, but within the conscience of humankind. Otherwise, this race will end not in victory for any one nation, but in a shared defeat for neither conqueror nor conquered, but humanity itself diminished.

If this crisis is not treated with the seriousness it demands, it will transcend the realm of states and become a tragedy for all mankind. Yet, if wisdom, foresight, and moral courage are brought to bear, this very crisis may give rise to a renewed global consciousness—one that places peace above power. When history gathers its pages, it records not only events, but also the choices of nations. Future generations will not ask how many weapons were amassed, but how much wisdom, courage, and insight humanity possessed when it stood upon the edge of ruin.

Today, humanity stands at a crossroads. One path descends into valleys of fire; the other opens towards fields of peace. The tragedy, however, lies in the deceptive allure of the former—brilliant in

appearance, seductive in promise, yet hollow within and fatal in consequence. If this illusion is not recognised, the day may not be far when the earth is laden with the weight of destruction, and the sky bears silent witness to human helplessness.

And yet, there is still time. Humanity retains the power to alter the course of its destiny. If compassion is allowed to replace hatred, if reason is elevated above the intoxication of power, if the walls of narrow interest are dismantled and bridges of shared humanity are built—then perhaps this world may once again become a cradle of peace.

This is not merely a piece of writing; it is an appeal, a plea, a call of the age itself. It must not be read and set aside, but carried within the heart, reflected upon in thought, and conveyed onward—for the message of peace endures only when it passes from heart to heart, from one human being to another.

Let us, then, become the custodians of this message—so that those who come after us may say that even in an age overshadowed by destruction, we strove to kindle a light of hope, and that amid the clamour of war, we kept alive the voice of peace.

Thursday, 23 April 2026

The World at the Mercy of a Moment

The Price of Reckless Leadership

History has taught humanity, again and again, a sobering and unmistakable lesson: that decisions made under the sway of power, fame, or private emotion rarely remain confined to the chamber in which they are taken. More often than not, they reverberate far beyond it, shaping the destinies of millions. The chronicles of civilisation are strewn with instances in which haste, wounded pride, or personal grievance—once enthroned in the councils of power—have served as the harbingers of calamity for mankind. Time and again the world has witnessed how the judgement of a single individual, a moment's impulsive sentiment, or an intemperate reaction can alter the course of thousands, indeed millions, of human lives.

In this light, the presidency of the United States is no ordinary constitutional office. It is, in effect, a fulcrum upon which the delicate equilibrium of international order precariously rests. The nation long regarded as the emblem of liberty, justice, and global leadership entrusts to its chief magistrate not merely the stewardship of domestic affairs but a measure of influence that extends across continents and oceans. Every presidential decision may stand poised between peace and war, between life and death, between the fragile promise of hope and the shadow of fear.

It is therefore one of history's more unsettling ironies that warnings once dismissed as the currency of electoral rhetoric have, with the passing of time, assumed the weight of prophecy. The caution voiced by Hillary Clinton—at the time perhaps heard merely as the refrain of a political campaign—now appears, in retrospect, as a remarkably prescient judgement. The volatile temperament, impulsive decision-making, and often cavalier approach to international relations displayed by Donald Trump have, in the eyes of many observers, placed not only America but the wider world at a perilous crossroads.

This essay reflects upon that larger lesson: that leadership cannot safely be entrusted to the fleeting advantages of celebrity or raw political force alone. True statesmanship rests upon a firmer foundation—knowledge, patience, judgement, and an informed awareness of the wider world. The annals of history repeatedly testify that leaders who act from wounded vanity or momentary passion seldom imperil only their own nations; they jeopardise the peace of the international community itself.

During the presidential contest of 2016, Hillary Clinton addressed the American electorate with a warning that carried the unmistakable echo of historical reflection. The decision to commit a nation to war, she argued, is neither simple nor trivial, and it cannot responsibly be entrusted to a temperament governed by impulse or personal grievance. Seen from the vantage point of subsequent events, her words possess a striking resonance.

Across the varied theatres of global politics, the consequences of erratic leadership have frequently been visible. Whether in the tense exchanges with North Korea, the fraught diplomacy surrounding the nuclear programme of Iran, or the ever-smouldering crises of the Middle East, observers have

often detected the unsettling imprint of political volatility. Such episodes serve as a reminder that leadership is measured not merely by authority but by prudence, restraint, and moral responsibility. The election of an American president therefore carries implications far beyond the borders of the republic. The office is not merely a pinnacle of domestic politics; it is intimately bound to decisions that shape the prospects of war and peace throughout the international system. For this reason, Hillary Clinton cautioned during the 2016 campaign that the character and policy instincts of Donald Trump might prove hazardous not only for the United States but for the global order as well.

Her argument was stark in its simplicity: the presidency is not an ordinary political prize but a responsibility of immense gravity. The occupant of that office commands the authority to make decisions whose consequences may determine the fate of nations and the lives of countless individuals.

In her assessment, Donald Trump appeared ill-suited—both emotionally and intellectually—for such a burden. His political discourse, she suggested, seemed too often animated by erratic assertions, personal grievances, and demonstrable falsehoods. To entrust the powers of the presidency to a figure governed by such impulses, she warned, would be to court danger, for it would place decisions of war and peace in the hands of a temperament prone to sudden reaction.

The peril becomes all the more acute when one recalls that the American president also holds authority over the use of nuclear weapons. Should a leader susceptible to anger or personal animosity command such destructive power, the consequences could extend far beyond the realm of conventional political miscalculation.

A glimpse of this danger appeared during the heated exchanges of 2017 between Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un of North Korea. The rhetorical skirmishes—often conducted through social media—generated palpable anxiety across the international community. For many observers, the spectacle illustrated how swiftly volatile language between nuclear-armed states could inflame global tensions.

Similarly, the abrupt repudiation of the nuclear agreement with Iran cast a shadow over America's diplomatic credibility and unsettled the intricate architecture of international negotiations. Such developments seemed, to many commentators, to lend substance to earlier warnings that emotional volatility and thin-skinned leadership could produce risks on a global scale.

Thus the central contention advanced by Hillary Clinton was neither partisan nor trivial. It rested upon a broader principle of political prudence: that a president inclined toward haste, personal sensitivity, and impulsive judgement might inadvertently propel not only his own nation but the world at large into unnecessary peril.

When the authority to command nuclear weapons is joined to such a disposition, the danger ceases to be theoretical. It becomes a matter of immediate and universal concern. The tensions with North Korea in 2017, accompanied by inflammatory public statements, compelled analysts around the world to contemplate the possibility that a moment's anger might escalate into a crisis of global proportions.

In the final reckoning, the lesson offered by history remains both plain and profound. The greatness of leadership lies not in the spectacle of power but in the quiet virtues of knowledge, judgement, and moral restraint. Where these qualities are absent, the sceptre of authority may cease to be an honour and instead become a grave burden—one whose weight is borne not merely by a single nation, but by humanity itself.

The spectre of nuclear peril, however, has never been confined solely to the Korean peninsula. The controversy surrounding the nuclear ambitions of Iran offers an equally instructive illustration of how precariously the balance of global security may tilt when diplomacy is displaced by impulse. In this theatre, too, the policies pursued by Donald Trump were widely regarded as having heightened rather than diminished the prevailing dangers. By withdrawing from the nuclear agreement painstakingly negotiated with Tehran, he reopened a pathway by which Iran might once again advance towards the acquisition of nuclear weapons—an outcome capable of unsettling not merely the Middle East but the wider constellation of international power.

For her part, Hillary Clinton repeatedly emphasised a principle long recognised by seasoned practitioners of statecraft: diplomacy is seldom the product of impatience. It demands patience, steadiness, and the quiet discipline of strategic judgement. In the case of Iran's nuclear programme, the administration of Barack Obama had chosen a path markedly different from the drums of war. Rather than resorting to military force, it pursued a combination of economic sanctions and painstaking negotiations—an approach that ultimately produced a multilateral accord designed to restrain Iran's nuclear ambitions.

The repudiation of that agreement by Donald Trump therefore carried consequences that reverberated far beyond Washington. International confidence in American commitments was weakened; Tehran resumed elements of its nuclear programme; and tensions throughout the Middle East intensified. The delicate architecture of global diplomacy—constructed through years of negotiation—was suddenly cast into uncertainty.

In this context, Hillary Clinton argued that diplomacy often remains the sole avenue by which the world may avert the gravest crises. Patience, continuity of purpose, and long-term strategic planning are the indispensable instruments through which enduring solutions to international disputes are forged. The negotiations surrounding Iran's nuclear programme under Barack Obama stand as a case in point: stringent economic pressure combined with sustained dialogue produced an agreement that, at least for a time, prevented Iran from acquiring nuclear arms.

Had a more impulsive temperament governed the Oval Office at that moment, the outcome might well have been starkly different. A resort to precipitous military action—or even the reckless escalation of rhetoric—could easily have ignited a wider conflagration across the Middle East, a region already fraught with volatility.

Another illustration of the complexities of diplomacy emerged in the negotiations with North Korea. In 2018, Donald Trump engaged in unprecedented summit meetings with Kim Jong Un. Though historic in form, these encounters were frequently accompanied by unpredictable pronouncements and abrupt shifts in tone that left many international leaders uneasy. For observers steeped in the

traditions of diplomacy, the spectacle raised a familiar concern: that delicate negotiations conducted amid theatrical unpredictability seldom yield durable peace.

Indeed, the abandonment of the Iranian nuclear agreement by Donald Trump drew widespread criticism across the international community. By weakening the consensus that had underpinned global sanctions and encouraging Iran to resume aspects of its nuclear programme, the decision contributed to a renewed atmosphere of instability in the Middle East while diminishing America's diplomatic credibility. According to Hillary Clinton, such precipitous measures carry consequences that extend far beyond immediate political advantage; they may imperil the fragile equilibrium upon which international peace depends.



The repercussions soon became visible. In 2019, rising tensions between Iran and the United States threatened vital shipping lanes in the Persian Gulf—arteries through which a substantial portion of the world's oil supply flows. The resulting uncertainty unsettled global markets, drove up energy prices, and imposed economic strain upon numerous nations. Events of this nature appeared to vindicate the earlier warnings that impulsive policy decisions could undermine both international security and economic stability.

Nor were the diplomatic consequences confined to adversaries alone. Relations with allies were also tested. The policies pursued by Donald Trump reverberated across the strategic landscape encompassing Israel, Europe, and other longstanding partners. For years, the Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu had urged Washington to adopt a far more confrontational stance toward Iran. Under the Trump administration, that pressure found a receptive audience, contributing to a more assertive regional posture that many analysts feared would deepen instability throughout the Middle East.

The consequences were not merely diplomatic abstractions. Heightened tensions exposed American interests themselves to greater risk. U.S. military installations across the region faced mounting threats, while attacks on American facilities in countries such as Iraq and Syria became more frequent. Each such episode underscored how swiftly regional crises could escalate into broader confrontations.

One particularly dramatic moment occurred in 2020 with the targeted killing of the Iranian general Qasem Soleimani. The strike triggered an immediate surge in regional tensions and raised the spectre of direct military conflict between Iran and the United States. Many analysts warned that had the crisis unfolded under a leadership more susceptible to emotional reaction, it might have spiralled into a far larger and more destructive confrontation.

Yet the ramifications of volatile leadership were not confined to foreign policy alone. Under Donald Trump, American domestic politics itself grew increasingly polarised and turbulent. Critics argued that his rhetoric and policy style eroded public trust and revealed troubling vulnerabilities within the nation's decision-making institutions. The storming of the United States Capitol in 2021—an event linked by many observers to the incendiary political climate surrounding the outgoing president—cast a shadow over the stability of American democracy itself. To some commentators, it appeared as a stark confirmation of the earlier warnings that an unstable presidency could threaten not only global order but the resilience of America's own constitutional system.

The broader consequences extended into the realm of global economics. Policies pursued during the Trump years, particularly in trade and sanctions, introduced new uncertainties into the international marketplace. Measures directed against Iran and the initiation of a trade confrontation with China unsettled financial markets and complicated global investment flows. The trade conflict launched in 2018 between Washington and Beijing generated a climate of uncertainty that reverberated across multiple economies, disrupting supply chains and dampening investor confidence.

Meanwhile, renewed tensions in the Middle East drove fluctuations in oil prices, further destabilising economic expectations. For many countries already navigating fragile financial conditions, these developments translated into tangible economic losses. The combined effect was a perceptible contraction in global investment opportunities and a widening atmosphere of economic insecurity.

Taken together, these episodes illustrate a sobering truth long recognised by historians of statecraft. Leadership exercised without restraint—guided more by impulse than by prudence—can imperil not only diplomatic stability but the economic well-being of the world itself. And it is precisely for this reason that voices such as Hillary Clinton have insisted that the surest safeguard against war and crisis lies not in displays of bravado but in the quieter virtues of patience, diplomacy, and reasoned judgement.

A further and often overlooked consequence of the policies pursued under Donald Trump lay in the quiet yet unmistakable advantages accrued by the American arms industry. As geopolitical tensions mounted and the spectre of conflict loomed ever larger, the demand for sophisticated weaponry inevitably rose. From a narrowly economic standpoint, such developments proved profitable for segments of the United States' defence sector; yet from the broader vantage point of global stability, the implications were far less reassuring.

The sharpening rivalry with Iran prompted several regional powers to strengthen their military capabilities, often through extensive purchases from American manufacturers. Both Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates acquired large quantities of advanced weaponry from Washington in an effort to reinforce their strategic posture against Tehran. While such transactions served commercial and strategic interests in the short term, they also contributed to an increasingly militarised environment in which suspicion and rivalry were deepened rather than alleviated.

In parallel, the long-standing Iranian policy agenda championed by the Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu found renewed momentum under the Trump administration. With the backing of Washington, Israel's opposition to Iran's regional influence gained additional diplomatic weight.

Yet this alignment also intensified instability across the Middle East, placing several American partners in a more precarious strategic position.

A notable development came in 2020 with the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates—a breakthrough welcomed by many observers as a historic shift in regional diplomacy. Nevertheless, the broader political landscape remained far from tranquil. The enduring dispute involving Palestine continued to generate resentment and unrest, illustrating how diplomatic realignments may resolve one tension even as they aggravate others. In this volatile environment, regional crises multiplied, alliances were tested, and even American military facilities stationed across the Middle East faced heightened risks.

Nor were the repercussions limited to the region alone. The shifting course of American foreign policy created profound dilemmas for its traditional partners in Europe. European governments had invested considerable diplomatic capital in preserving the nuclear agreement with Iran, yet the abrupt withdrawal of the United States left them grappling with a difficult and uncertain strategic landscape. Efforts to sustain the accord were complicated by Washington's unpredictable posture, while the resulting diplomatic vacuum presented opportunities for rival powers such as Russia and China to expand their influence. Thus, a decision initially framed as a matter of national policy reverberated through the wider architecture of international relations, introducing fresh tensions among the world's major powers.

Despite these challenges, Hillary Clinton expressed confidence in the discernment of the American electorate. The United States, she maintained, remained a nation endowed with deep reservoirs of civic awareness, national pride, and democratic responsibility. Given the gravity of global challenges, she believed that American voters would ultimately recognise the stakes and exercise their judgement accordingly.

Events would later offer a measure of confirmation for that belief. In the presidential election of 2020, the electorate of the United States rendered a decision that many interpreted as a response to the turbulence and unpredictability of the preceding years. For observers sympathetic to Clinton's earlier warnings, the outcome appeared to affirm the expectation that democratic societies, though occasionally swayed by momentary passions, retain the capacity for correction.

Looking back upon the record of those years, many analysts contend that the leadership of Donald Trump contributed to a period marked by heightened geopolitical tension, renewed nuclear anxieties, economic uncertainty, and persistent instability across the Middle East. Such developments serve as a reminder that the election of an impulsive or volatile leader may carry consequences extending far beyond the borders of a single nation.

From these experiences several lessons emerge with unmistakable clarity. Responsible decision-making in global leadership is not a luxury but a necessity. Diplomacy and negotiation must remain the preferred instruments of international engagement. The immense authority associated with nuclear arsenals must rest only in the hands of stable, experienced, and judicious leadership. And citizens—whether in America or elsewhere—must exercise vigilance when entrusting power to those who claim to speak in their name.

The crises of the Middle East in particular underscore the need for a coordinated approach among the world's major powers. Durable peace cannot be achieved through unilateral gestures or impulsive strategies; it requires sustained cooperation, careful negotiation, and a shared commitment to stability.

Today we stand as witnesses to a historical moment in which the decisions of a volatile leader have cast long shadows across global politics, economic equilibrium, and human security. The warning voiced by Hillary Clinton therefore appears not merely as a partisan admonition but as a broader historical lesson—one that future generations may well recall as an illustration of how fragile the balance of world order can be.

Her message ultimately speaks to a principle that transcends national boundaries. The selection of leaders is never a trivial act. It is a solemn responsibility borne not only by the citizens of one country but by humanity as a whole, for the consequences of political authority seldom remain confined within national frontiers.

The stewardship of global power—and the fateful decisions between war and peace—must never be governed by impulse, vanity, or personal grievance. They demand instead the steadier virtues of wisdom, patience, and an informed awareness of the world's intricate interdependence. True leadership is not defined by displays of power or the indulgence of personal pride, but by the capacity to shoulder the burdens of history with knowledge, foresight, restraint, and moral responsibility.

Should humanity fail to heed this lesson, history will assuredly return us to the same bitter realisation: that irresponsible leadership threatens not merely the fortunes of a single nation but the welfare of civilisation itself. It is therefore a civic duty—indeed a moral obligation—to resist the ascent of leaders whose passions, ambitions, or personal interests place human life and global peace in jeopardy.

Our task in the present moment is clear. The standards by which leadership is judged must rise above the fleeting allure of power, fame, or emotional appeal. They must rest instead upon reason, experience, ethical conviction, and a profound awareness of humanity's shared destiny. That is the enduring lesson of this age, the warning written into our political history, and the responsibility we bear in choosing the leaders who will shape the future of our world.

Sunday, 26 April 2026

When Routes Speak Louder Than Words

A Corridor—or a Turning of History?

Pakistan's announcement of a trade corridor for Iran—granting access to the ports of Gwadar Port and Karachi Port for the transit of goods—may, at first glance, appear to be no more than an administrative communiqué, a routine gesture of statecraft. Yet in truth it is something subtler and more consequential: the reverberation of a quiet diplomacy, the casting of a small but meaningful stone into the current of history, whose ripples may travel far beyond the moment of its release. Timed as it is with notable precision, it possesses that rare quality in policy by which the course of nations may, at times, be gently but decisively altered.

This is no mere bureaucratic adjustment; it is a calculated move upon the vast chessboard of Asian geopolitics and commerce—one in which prudence tempers ambition, expediency softens resolve, and the long echo of history lends depth to design. Whenever nations have learned to regard their geography not as a static inheritance but as a living instrument, they have transformed roads into destinies and frontiers into avenues of fate.

The decision emerges at an hour when the horizon of the Middle East is thick with the scent of gunpowder; when the waters of the Strait of Hormuz are unsettled by the tempests of power politics; and when the region itself seems to glow with the embers of conflict. Great powers manoeuvre, their pieces shifting restlessly across the global board, and even the arteries of trade have not been spared this disquiet. In such a climate, this initiative appears as a compound of necessity and vision—infused equally with the sobriety of wisdom and the warmth of courage. It is, in effect, an attempt by Pakistan to transmute its geography into an instrument of peace and commerce at a moment when its surrounding region trembles on the edge of conflagration.

Thus, amid turbulent seas, Pakistan's measure assumes the character of a calm harbour; indeed, of a lamp lit deliberately in gathering darkness—one that casts its light not only upon its own path, but upon that of its neighbour as well. It is at such junctures that history, with quiet resolve, begins to inscribe a new chapter. For nations endure not by the sword alone, but by the subtle art of judgement; and it is precisely this faculty that now appears to animate Pakistan's policy.

Under the Ministry of Commerce's "Transit Trade Order, 2026," the declaration of six distinct trade corridors for Iran is not merely a technical delineation of routes. It is, rather, an intellectual enlargement of possibility—a door, long ajar, now opened with intent. It gives practical expression to an enduring truth: that while borders may be drawn upon maps, commerce has ever possessed the ingenuity to transcend them.

Through these corridors, Iran will be enabled to convey its goods to global markets and third countries via Pakistani ports, while likewise employing Pakistan as a secure bridge for imports from the wider world. In so doing, Pakistan has reshaped its geography into something more than territory—it has rendered it a metaphor of opportunity.

These routes are, in a very real sense, arteries; and the lifeblood that shall course through them is

trade itself, that vital fluid which animates economic life. No longer mere tracks of dust, they stand poised to become highways of wealth. The decision reflects a deeper understanding: that commerce is not simply an exchange of goods, but a bridge of confidence between states. It embodies the principle that geography, when guided by insight, may be elevated into destiny. These are not roads alone, but economic veins through which renewed vitality may flow into the region's collective life. In presenting itself as such, Pakistan gestures towards a larger role—that of a connective bridge between East and West, North and South.

Since late February, the ongoing conflict in Iran, coupled with constraints imposed in the Strait of Hormuz, has pressed the Iranian economy into a tightening enclosure, as though constricting its very lifeline. The sea—once a symbol of openness—has, under present conditions, come to signify restriction. When the doors of trade are shut, states lose not only economic momentum but something of their civic spirit. In this context, Pakistan's initiative resembles the opening of a door in a cul-de-sac—a window through which a fresh current of air might yet enter.

It is not merely an economic accommodation, but a statement of principle: an expression, too, of humane consideration and of that broader ethic of neighbourliness which, in its finest conception, transcends geography and assumes the character of moral responsibility. In times of trial, neighbours extend a hand; they do not turn away. It is this dimension that lends the decision its moral weight and invests it with a particular grace of political judgement.

Indeed, beyond the calculus of strategy, there lingers here an echo of a civilisational ethos—one in which proximity entails duty, and solidarity is measured not in rhetoric but in action. When harbours fall silent and the sea refuses passage, it is the pathways of land that must bear the burden of hope.

By long-established global practice, landlocked states depend upon the goodwill of others—particularly their neighbours—for access to trade, their economic life tethered to foreign ports. Iran, though geographically a coastal state, finds itself, under present constraints, reduced in effect to that very condition. Once connected to global markets through its own maritime gateways, it now stands compelled by circumstance to seek alternative routes. And in such an hour, the role of neighbouring states assumes decisive and inescapable significance.

This situation serves as a pointed reminder that geography is never a fixed inheritance; it is a living canvas, continually reshaped by the hand of politics. When the sea withholds its passage, the land, in quiet generosity, extends its embrace. Pakistan's present course is, in essence, an acknowledgment of this enduring truth—that geography, at critical junctures, yields to the imperatives of statecraft. In opening its doors to Iran, Pakistan has, as it were, transfigured its terrain into an instrument of benevolence. In this light, its role is that of a neighbour who, when the hour darkens, chooses not to bar the threshold but to kindle a guiding flame.

Efforts by Pakistan to ease tensions between the United States and Iran had already been quietly under way. Within this broader design, the establishment of a trade corridor appears as a gesture of silent diplomacy—one that speaks less through declaration than through deed. The highest refinement of diplomacy lies precisely here: in its capacity to shape outcomes without recourse to clamour. This initiative may well be regarded as a foundational stone in the architecture of trust upon

which future relations might be constructed. Analysts have, with reason, identified it as a meaningful step in confidence-building, for in the theatre of international relations it is often those measures grounded in practical utility that endure the longest. It recalls the enduring maxim that, at times, unheralded service carries greater force than the most resounding oratory. For politics, when stripped of wisdom, degenerates into mere noise; and Pakistan, in this instance, has introduced a note of discernment into that din.

According to the Ministry of Commerce, this measure is intended not only to invigorate regional trade but to set Pakistan upon the path towards becoming a logistical centre of consequence. The designation of Gwadar, Karachi, and Taftan as transit corridors is, in effect, a declaration of ambition: that Pakistan seeks to evolve from a mere passageway into a nucleus of exchange, converting its geographical position into economic strength. It is, in many respects, the revival of an ancient vision once glimpsed by the caravans of the Silk Road—that this region might stand as a beating heart of global commerce. Today, Pakistan appears to be advancing, with measured resolve, towards the realisation of that long-held aspiration. This timely decision is thus an attempt to convert geography into economic destiny.

The 909-kilometre frontier between Pakistan and Iran is far more than a line of demarcation; it is a meeting place of civilisations, a symbol of enduring connection. Routes such as Taftan, Gabd, and Mand have for centuries borne witness to the passage of caravans and the measured tread of merchants. Once, the bells of camels echoed along these paths; now, they stand on the threshold of transformation into modern arteries of trade, where convoys of lorries shall carry forward the same enduring purpose. The difference lies only in speed, not in spirit—for commerce, by its very nature, unites rather than divides. History, it seems, is reshaping itself in a new mould. This is no mere border; it is an ongoing dialogue between two civilisations—never silenced, only altered in form.

If geography constitutes the opening chapter of destiny, then access is its concluding line. The corridor opened for Iran is, in equal measure, a knock upon the gates of Central Asia. That region, rich in natural endowment yet long deprived of direct maritime access, has been compelled by circumstance to rely upon such avenues of connection. In this respect, Pakistan's initiative carries a dual significance. It is not simply a response to an immediate necessity, but part of a longer strategic design—one that may well position Pakistan at the centre of regional commerce.

Though outwardly devised for Iran, the path extends, in implication, to the historic cities of Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bukhara. These are lands through which, in earlier centuries, flowed caravans laden not only with silk and spice, but with knowledge itself. Should these routes now be recast as modern highways, history may yet repeat its course—this time with greater speed and a far wider reach. When nations come to recognise the latent promise of their geography, distances contract and borders are transformed into pathways. In this sense, the present measure heralds not merely an advantage for a single state, but the dawn of wider possibilities for the entire region.

Nor is this initiative the product of sudden inspiration. It stands, rather, as a continuation of a longer historical trajectory. Agreements between Pakistan and Iran in 2006 and 2008 laid the groundwork for road-based trade and transit arrangements; these earlier undertakings form the foundation upon which the present edifice is now being raised. Such continuity is the hallmark of seriousness in

nations: it imparts stability to the state and strengthens its standing within the community of nations. For it is consistency in policy that underwrites both credibility and endurance.

It must be remembered that decisions of this character do not emerge fully formed; they are the fruit of seeds sown long ago in the soil of history, ripening only when conditions permit. Pakistan, in this instance, has demonstrated not merely a capacity to conclude agreements, but the greater virtue of sustaining them in accordance with changing circumstances. This is, in truth, the distinguishing mark of a living nation. History is not preserved merely for remembrance; it is, when the moment demands, to be rewritten in the ink of action.



In the realm of international relations, trust is the currency that commands acceptance in every market, though it is seldom easily earned. By easing banking conditions for trade with Iran and now extending transit facilities, Pakistan has contributed to the creation of an environment in which mutual confidence may take root. Trade, in its essence, is a language universally understood among nations. This initiative, therefore, is not solely economic but psychological; for nations are bound not only by interests, but by trust. It is likely, too, to foster a spirit of goodwill among the people of Iran towards Pakistan. One might express it thus: when economic activity is allied with ethical purpose, it ceases to be a mere instrument of wealth and becomes instead a means of cultivating enduring relationships. In this regard, the measure conveys, in the idiom of politics, a message both constructive and quietly profound.

Though Iran is richly endowed with energy resources and ranks among the world's foremost producers of oil and gas, the weight of international sanctions has curtailed the full expression of its economic strength. Pakistan, for its part—still reliant upon other Gulf states for the satisfaction of its own energy needs—has sought to maintain a careful and deliberate equilibrium. Its present course reflects a tempered realism: rather than engaging in direct trade, it has chosen the more measured path of facilitation. Herein lies the distinguishing mark of its policy. By refraining from deepening direct entanglement in Iran's energy sector, and instead providing a lawful channel of transit, Pakistan has adopted a course that is at once advantageous and firmly within the bounds of international norms. It is a subtle yet telling dimension of statecraft, wherein principal and interest do not collide but move in quiet concord. One might say, in the idiom of diplomacy, that true prudence lies not in confronting circumstance head-on, but in bending it, with patience and skill, towards one's own design.

When formal banking systems labour under the burden of sanctions, commerce, by its very nature, contrives new pathways for itself. The barter arrangements between Pakistan and Iran stand as a testament to this creative resilience, whereby goods have continued to flow in exchange for goods. It is a reminder that when established avenues are obstructed, alternative routes inevitably arise. What may appear, at first glance, an archaic mechanism reveals itself, upon closer inspection, as a

practical remedy to modern economic constraint. For the wheel of commerce is not turned by currency alone, but by necessity. When coin falls silent, necessity itself acquires a voice, and trade, with quiet ingenuity, composes a new vocabulary of exchange.

An important question nonetheless presents itself: can Pakistan, in the face of global sanctions, legitimately extend transit facilities to Iran? The answer resides within the framework of international law. Under the provisions of the United Nations, the granting of transit rights constitutes a lawful and recognised practice. Likewise, established maritime principles permit the provision of commercial access to a state that, in effect, finds itself constrained as though landlocked. It is upon this legal foundation that Pakistan has grounded its decision, thereby shielding itself from undue external pressure. The measure demonstrates that Pakistan remains attentive not only to its own interests, but also to the primacy of international norms. In more reflective terms, justice is that which stands upon principle, and policy endures only when it does not stray beyond the bounds of fairness.

Notably, the United States has thus far offered no explicit response to Pakistan's announcement. At a superficial level, such silence might appear inconsequential; yet in the language of diplomacy, silence is seldom empty. Indeed, it often conveys more than words themselves. This absence of reaction suggests that Pakistan has proceeded with due regard for legal propriety while also, perhaps, ensuring that major powers were neither taken unawares nor unduly discomfited. The decision, therefore, bears the imprint not of impulse, but of deliberation—measured, calibrated, and quietly assured.

The ongoing conflict within Iran has led to shortages of medicines and essential goods. Through Pakistan's corridors, the delivery of such items—those not subject to sanctions—now becomes possible. This aspect lends the initiative to a distinctly human dimension. Trade, in this instance, is not merely a pursuit of profit, but a means of alleviating necessity. In the language of humane diplomacy, one might observe that silence, when suffused with wisdom, becomes a form of eloquence in itself—requiring not words, but discernment, to be understood.

That no objection has yet been raised by the United States further indicates that the measure falls within an internationally acceptable ambit, consonant with established norms. It is, in effect, a quiet affirmation that legality and prudence have gone hand in hand.

Economic observers have described this initiative as a significant step towards the realisation of Pakistan's long-cherished aspiration to become a hub of regional trade. It is, by any measure, a strategic advance—one whose fulfilment could reshape the economic destiny of the wider region. This vision is not merely aspirational; it is rooted in geographical reality. Pakistan occupies a position where South Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia converge in close proximity. If this location is harnessed with foresight and consistency, it possesses the potential to secure for the region a prominent place upon the map of global commerce. Should the land fully recognise its own station, caravans will not need to be summoned; they will arrive of their own accord, and the routes themselves will come to be known by its name.

With the practical commencement of the Pakistan–Iran transit corridor, the first consignment of

goods has already been dispatched onward to Tashkent in Uzbekistan. This development serves as tangible proof that the project has moved beyond paper into lived reality. The journey of goods from Karachi, passing through Gabd and the Ramidan border into Iran, stands as a symbol of newly opening avenues of trade across the region. It is, in a deeper sense, a symbolic voyage—one that affirms that where resolve is steadfast, distance ceases to be an impediment. For it is action, above all else, that transforms intention into reality; and it is by this measure that nations are ultimately judged—by the extent to which they clothe their aspirations in the substance of deed.

In 2018, Pakistan and Iran arrived at an understanding to establish trade corridors extending, on the one hand, from Iran through to Turkey, and on the other, from Pakistan onwards to China. This arrangement was, in truth, the foundation of a far wider economic lattice—one capable of binding the region into a coherent whole. If Iran avails itself of Pakistan's ports to participate more fully in global commerce, Pakistan, in turn, may gain access through Iran to the markets of Central Asia and, beyond them, to Europe. Such mutual interdependence carries within it the promise of regional stability. In the language of diplomacy, when routes converge, they do more than shorten distances; they bring nations into closer accord.

In years past, Pakistan relied heavily upon Afghanistan for overland access to Central Asia. Yet persistent uncertainty and political strain have rendered that route increasingly unreliable. Since last year, heightened tensions along the Pakistan–Afghanistan frontier have led to the closure of key crossings, severely disrupting trade and compelling Pakistan to seek alternatives. In this context, the opening of a pathway through Iran was not merely expedient but necessary. It offers the prospect of a more secure and dependable corridor—one less vulnerable to the vagaries of political upheaval. For when one door is closed, wisdom lies not in lamentation, but in discerning another entrance within the very wall that obstructs the way.

During periods of disruption in the Strait of Hormuz, several international vessels found anchorage at Pakistan's ports, leading to a marked increase in cargo handling at Karachi Port. The arrival of global shipping underscored a simple yet significant truth: these ports possess the capacity to serve as pivotal nodes in the region's economic life. The rise in commercial activity is thus an early indication that Pakistan is advancing towards its ambition of becoming an economic centre of gravity. With the opening of transit corridors for Iran, this momentum is likely to accelerate further.

Gwadar Port and Karachi are no longer to be regarded merely as coastal outposts; they are assuming the character of vibrant centres of economic exchange—the very pulse by which the body of commerce is sustained. For economic vitality resides in movement; where the flow is arrested, decline soon follows. This initiative, at its core, is an effort to preserve and strengthen that essential flow.

The narrative that unfolds here is not confined to corridors, ports, or agreements alone; it is, more profoundly, the story of a nation's awakening to its own possibilities—a nation striving to convert its geographical position into the substance of destiny. By opening these channels for Iran, Pakistan has not only extended assistance to a neighbour but has also unlocked new avenues for itself. It is a measure in which policy, economy, and moral sensibility converge in notable harmony. More than

an economic undertaking, it stands as a declaration of intent: that Pakistan possesses both the will and the capacity to transform geography into destiny.

Should sincerity of purpose be matched by steadiness of judgement, and should this policy be pursued with continuity and resolve, the prospect is not remote that Pakistan may indeed emerge as a fulcrum of regional trade. And when that moment arrives, history may well record that there was a nation which recognised the latent promise of its land, refined it with care, and ultimately fashioned it into its own destiny. It will mark the point at which geography revealed itself not merely as inheritance, but as a rare and providential endowment—and the soil itself became the author of history.

This decision, therefore, is not simply the opening of a corridor, but the unlocking possibility. Within it are gathered the discernment of politics, the necessity of economics, and the grace of civilisation. A careful reading of history reveals that nations endure not by accident, but by their capacity to convert circumstance into opportunity. Pakistan, through this act, has conveyed precisely that message: that it is not merely a state, but a passage—a bridge between East and West—along which the wider Asian region may yet advance towards a new dawn.

Monday, May 4, 2026

The Gathering Storm in the Middle East

A Region on Fire

On the night of the 28th of February, while in most corners of the world life proceeded with its customary tranquillity, a different drama was beginning to unfold beneath the skies of the Middle East. In the silent hours between Friday and Saturday, the United States and Israel launched a sweeping aerial assault upon Iran. Within the span of only a few hours, a region long accustomed to political turbulence, proxy confrontations, and delicate balances of power found itself drawn once more into the perilous embrace of a new and ominous war.

By dawn the following morning, it had become unmistakably clear that another conflict had been ignited in the Middle East. Iran responded with remarkable swiftness. In retaliation it began targeting Israel and American military installations scattered across the region. What had begun as a sudden exchange of blows soon threatened to assume the character of a broader regional confrontation. Within days the situation had deteriorated so profoundly that it was no longer merely Iran and Israel standing face to face across the lines of conflict; rather, the entire region appeared to be drifting into the gravitational pull of the struggle.

Early reports suggested that Iran's senior leadership had suffered severe losses. News began to circulate that the country's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, along with several prominent figures of the military establishment, had been killed. American and Israeli strikes were said to have claimed the lives of more than a thousand Iranian civilians, among them over one hundred and fifty schoolgirls whose deaths lent the tragedy a particularly haunting dimension. Iran's retaliatory attacks, meanwhile, were reported to have inflicted casualties among Israeli civilians and American servicemen alike.

Yet the boundaries of this war have not remained confined to Iran and Israel alone. In a region already scarred by instability—from Lebanon to Iraq and Syria—the tremors of the conflict have now begun to reverberate across the Gulf states. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates have found themselves standing in the shadow of the confrontation. Iran has announced the closure of the Strait of Hormuz—one of the world's most vital maritime arteries—while simultaneously directing attacks against energy infrastructure, American diplomatic missions, and airports across the Gulf.

As the war continues to widen, the toll in human suffering and economic damage rises steadily. It is therefore both necessary and urgent to ask what consequences this unfolding conflict may hold for the Gulf Arab states and for the wider Middle East.

Two questions in particular present themselves with unmistakable force.

First: why has Iran chosen to strike not only American bases but also what appear to be civilian targets within the Gulf states?

Second: what repercussions might this confrontation carry for relations among the Gulf countries themselves, and for their long-standing strategic partnership with the United States?

The Opening Phase of the War

If one surveys the present situation, the United States and Israel maintain that their strikes have successfully targeted numerous strategic and political sites within Iran. According to their claims, the compound of the Supreme Leader, the command-and-control centres of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and even the presidential complex were among the locations struck and rendered inoperative.

American officials have asserted that more than twelve hundred targets inside Iran were attacked during the first forty-eight hours alone. Iran, however, presents a starkly different narrative. Iranian authorities report that in southern Iran, near the town of Minyab, three missiles struck a school, killing more than one hundred and fifty young students.

Elsewhere, military facilities in Kermanshah and Tabriz were targeted, while naval installations near Bandar Abbas and surrounding coastal areas also came under attack.

Former U.S. President Donald Trump claimed that American forces had destroyed ten Iranian naval vessels and had effectively crippled Iran's naval headquarters.

For its part, Iran had long warned that if it were attacked it would respond not merely in kind but on a broader regional scale. That warning, it now appears, was no idle rhetoric.

In its retaliation Iran launched hundreds of missiles and nearly a thousand drone strikes against American bases across the region—in Israel, Kuwait, Jordan, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

Among the locations reportedly targeted were the headquarters of the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet in Bahrain, the Ras Tanura oil refinery in Saudi Arabia, and Dubai's Jebel Ali port—one of the busiest maritime hubs in the world.

A Question of Foreknowledge

This inevitably raises a pressing question: did the United States not anticipate that Iran would respond in precisely this manner, extending the theatre of war across the wider region?

According to many analysts, the answer is unmistakably yes.

Washington, they argue, had long expected that any direct assault upon Iran would provoke a regional reaction. Indeed, evidence suggests that preparations for such a scenario had already been made. Prior to the outbreak of hostilities, several American military assets were quietly repositioned. Portions of the Fifth Fleet stationed in Bahrain were moved away from vulnerable positions. Aircraft were relocated from the Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, and certain forward operating positions were shifted to more secure locations within Jordan and Israel.

In other words, the costs of war and the possible consequences of escalation had been carefully calculated in advance.

Economic Tremors

While differing accounts continue to circulate regarding the scale of the military damage inflicted on both sides, there is far greater agreement on one point: the economic cost of this conflict is already mounting.

Global oil and gas prices have begun to climb with unsettling speed. Financial markets are responding with growing uncertainty, and investors—ever wary of geopolitical storms—have adopted a cautious posture.

Economists frequently observe that markets react sharply to unexpected shocks but often regain equilibrium once the turbulence subsides. Yet the Middle East possesses a history that makes such optimism uncertain. Wars in this region have a disconcerting tendency to outlast initial expectations.

Unease Among the Gulf States

Within the Gulf states themselves, a new and delicate debate is quietly emerging.

Certain Saudi officials have begun to voice, albeit cautiously, a view that has long lingered beneath the surface of regional politics: that the centrepiece of American strategic thinking in the Middle East is Israel rather than the Gulf monarchies.

Their argument is straightforward. When Israel's security is perceived to be under threat, Washington responds with remarkable urgency. When Gulf states face damage to their infrastructure or economic interests, the response appears less immediate and less emphatic.

Whether entirely fair or not, this perception has begun to generate a subtle yet perceptible sense of resentment. Political systems under pressure often reveal fissures that were previously concealed beneath the façade of stability. In the Gulf today, those fissures are becoming increasingly visible.

Iran's Strategic Calculus

At the heart of the conflict lies a question that is perhaps the most consequential of all.

Iran insists that it is not deliberately targeting the Gulf states themselves. Rather, it argues that it is striking American military bases located within those countries. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has stated that if attacks against Iran are launched from these bases, then those installations inevitably become legitimate military targets.

Yet the reality is more complex than this explanation suggests.

Several attacks have reportedly damaged civilian infrastructure within Gulf countries—airports in the United Arab Emirates, for example, or urban districts in Bahrain. Such incidents are difficult to dismiss merely as accidents.

Many analysts therefore believe that Iran's strategy may be broader in scope. By expanding the economic and political costs of the war across the entire region, Tehran may hope to encourage Gulf governments to press Washington towards de-escalation. If the price of conflict becomes sufficiently burdensome for the region as a whole, pressure may mount for diplomacy to replace escalation.

In this sense, the unfolding war may represent not only a contest of military power but also a calculated struggle over the political endurance of an entire regional order.

Will the Gulf States Enter the War?

Another question of no small consequence concerns the role of the Gulf monarchies: will they themselves be drawn into the conflagration? Their leaders have issued stern communiqués and expressions of alarm, yet thus far they have refrained from direct military engagement.

One explanation lies in the stark arithmetic of capability. However formidable their financial resources may be, the Gulf states do not yet possess the fully autonomous defence capacity required to wage a sustained modern war. Were their military strength entirely self-sufficient, the Middle East would scarcely host the vast constellation of American bases that now dot its shores and deserts. The Al Udeid Air Base, the headquarters of the United States' regional air operations; the Naval Support Activity Bahrain, home to the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet; and a network of American military installations across Saudi Arabia all testify to a reality long understood but rarely spoken aloud: that the security architecture of the Gulf remains deeply entwined with the strategic guarantees of United States.

Yet this dependency carries its own anxieties. The present conflict may well accelerate the militarisation of the Gulf region. In recent years Iran has invested heavily in missile and drone technologies that have altered the strategic calculus of the Middle East. Its Shahed drone systems, capable of ranges approaching two thousand kilometres, place virtually the entire Gulf littoral within striking distance. Such capabilities have compelled Gulf governments to embark upon massive investments in missile defence shields and early warning systems, pouring billions of dollars into technologies designed to intercept threats before they descend upon their cities and oil installations.

But wars, however grand their strategic narratives, are ultimately measured by their human consequences. And it is here that the most poignant dimensions of the conflict emerge.

The Gulf economies are built upon a delicate architecture of global capital and migrant labour. Millions of workers from Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh sustain the construction sites, ports, hospitals, and service industries of the region. Now, with airports shuttered and the spectre of missile strikes hovering over the skyline, thousands of travellers find themselves stranded in a landscape suddenly transformed by war.

Media outlets have begun to relay stories that read less like policy briefings and more like fragments of human tragedy. One American woman, speaking through tears, confessed that she had never imagined she might one day be trapped in circumstances such as these. Another traveller described fleeing toward the mountains in a desperate attempt to escape incoming missile fire. These testimonies serve as sombre reminders that war—whatever the banners under which it is waged—falls most heavily upon ordinary lives.

Are American–Gulf Relations Changing?

In the immediate term, the strategic partnership between Washington and the Gulf capitals appears unlikely to dissolve. The United States remains the pre-eminent security guarantor of the region, its fleets and air wings forming the backbone of the Gulf's defensive posture.

Yet over the longer horizon subtle shifts are already visible. The Gulf states are increasingly seeking to diversify their strategic relationships. Defence cooperation with China, deeper security dialogues with European Union members, and the cultivation of alternative technological partnerships suggest a cautious effort to avoid excessive reliance upon any single power. Such manoeuvres are less an

abandonment of American protection than an attempt to hedge against the uncertainties of a changing world order.

A War Beyond Two States

To interpret the present conflict merely as a military clash between Iran and Israel would be to miss its deeper significance. The Middle East has rarely witnessed wars that remain confined to the ambitions of two states alone. More often they are expressions of a broader contest for regional influence and global balance.



In truth, the history of the region reveals a recurring pattern: almost every major conflict has been entangled with the interests of external powers and the rivalries of regional actors. Since the mid-twentieth century the politics of the Middle East have revolved around three enduring forces—energy resources, the intervention of great powers, and the competition among regional states for strategic primacy.

The current war is best understood within this very framework.

The Strategic Leverage of the Strait of Hormuz

Among the most unsettling developments has been Iran's threat to close the Strait of Hormuz—one of the most vital arteries of the global energy system. A significant proportion of the world's oil exports passes through this narrow maritime corridor. Any disruption to its flow would reverberate through international markets, sending energy prices soaring and potentially unsettling the entire architecture of global trade.

For precisely this reason the United States and its allies have long considered the freedom of navigation through the Strait a matter of strategic necessity. Iran, fully aware of this vulnerability, has repeatedly invoked the possibility of closure as a lever of geopolitical pressure. In the present crisis the same logic appears to be at work: Tehran seeks to convey that threats to its own security could, in turn, unleash consequences far beyond the battlefield.

The War of Narratives

Modern warfare is fought not only with missiles and aircraft but also with images, narratives, and perceptions. The present conflict offers a vivid illustration of this reality.

Iran, Israel, and the United States each present their own account of events—amplifying victories, minimising setbacks, and shaping the story for domestic and international audiences alike. Media channels have become extensions of the battlefield, where the struggle for legitimacy and morale unfolds in parallel with the clash of arms.

Iranian outlets frame the confrontation as a heroic resistance against a formidable coalition of powers. Meanwhile Israeli and American media often portray the campaign as a calculated effort to

degrade Iran's military infrastructure and restrain its regional ambitions. Between these competing narratives lies a complex and contested reality.

The Gulf Model Under Pressure

For the Gulf states that conflict is not merely an external crisis; it carries profound internal implications. Over the past three decades these countries have sought to transform their global image—from austere oil exporters into hubs of commerce, finance, tourism, and technological innovation.

Cities such as Dubai, Doha, and Riyadh stand as monuments to that ambition. Their glittering skylines and sprawling infrastructure projects were designed to attract investors, tourists, and

skilled workers from across the world.

Yet war has a way of unsettling even the most carefully constructed economic models. Persistent instability in the region could prompt international investors to adopt a more cautious stance, while tourism and trade—pillars of the Gulf's diversification strategies—might suffer significant setbacks. It is therefore hardly surprising that Gulf governments appear eager to see the present conflict brought swiftly to an end.

Iran's Strategic Doctrine

To understand the military posture of Iran, one must look to its historical experiences. During the 1980s the country endured the devastating Iran–Iraq War, an eight-year conflict that inflicted enormous human and economic losses.

In the aftermath of that ordeal Iran undertook a fundamental reassessment of its defence strategy. Rather than attempting to compete directly with the conventional military strength of its adversaries, Tehran invested heavily in asymmetric capabilities: missile forces, drone technology, and networks of allied groups across the region.

The result is a strategic architecture that allows Iran to exert influence far beyond its borders. Its missile and drone systems form a deterrent shield, while allied movements provide Tehran with multiple fronts from which pressure can be applied. In the current conflict this doctrine appears clearly visible. Instead of relying solely upon direct confrontation, Iran seeks to exhaust its adversaries through dispersed and sustained pressure across several theatres.

Israel's Preventive Doctrine

For Israel, by contrast, strategic thinking has long revolved around the principle of pre-emption. The country's leaders have repeatedly argued that existential threats must be neutralised before they reach maturity.

This doctrine has guided Israeli policy for decades. It lay behind the strike on Osirak Nuclear Reactor in 1981 and later operations targeting suspected nuclear facilities in Syria. Within this strategic worldview, Iran's expanding missile capabilities and regional alliances represent an intolerable risk.

From that perspective the current conflict may be seen not as an isolated eruption of violence but as part of a broader effort to prevent Iran from attaining a position of decisive military or technological superiority.

The Role of the Great Powers

In nearly every major conflict that has convulsed the Middle East, the shadow of the great powers has loomed large. The present crisis is no exception. The United States is already a direct participant in the strategic contest, yet other global actors—including China, Russia, and the nations of European Union—are observing developments with intense attention.

For China, the stakes are unmistakably economic. Its vast industrial engine depends heavily upon imported energy, much of which flows from the Gulf. Stability in the region, therefore, is not merely desirable from Beijing's perspective; it is essential to the uninterrupted functioning of its economic system.

Russia, meanwhile, has its own reasons for maintaining a presence in the geopolitical theatre of the Middle East. Over the past decade Moscow has carefully cultivated diplomatic and military footholds across the region, seeking both strategic influence and leverage within the wider global balance of power.

It is therefore entirely conceivable that, in the days or weeks ahead, these powers may attempt to play a role in shaping a ceasefire or facilitating diplomatic negotiations. History suggests that when conflicts in the Middle East threaten to spiral beyond control, the great powers rarely remain passive spectators for long.

Possible Scenarios

From the vantage point of the present moment, several possible trajectories for the conflict may be discerned.

The first and most optimistic scenario is that the war remains limited in scope and concludes within a matter of weeks or months. Under such circumstances, both sides might eventually claim victory, presenting the outcome to its domestic audience as a strategic success—before quietly stepping back from the brink.

A second, darker possibility is that the conflict expands and draws additional regional actors into its orbit. Should that occur, the consequences for the global economy could prove severe. Energy markets, already sensitive to political turbulence, might experience dramatic instability, while international trade routes could face renewed disruption.

The third scenario lies in the realm of diplomacy. Mounting international pressure—combined with the mounting costs of prolonged hostilities—could encourage the protagonists to explore negotiated arrangements aimed at reducing tensions. Such outcomes are rarely swift or straightforward, yet the history of international relations shows that even the fiercest confrontations may ultimately yield to pragmatic compromise.

The Human Cost

As with every war in history, the gravest burden is borne not by governments but by ordinary people. Bombardments of urban areas, waves of displacement, and mounting economic hardship have already altered the lives of countless families.

Children, women, and the elderly are invariably the most vulnerable in such circumstances. In wartime environments the institutions that sustain social life—schools, hospitals, and employment opportunities—begin to erode. Communities that once functioned with relative stability find their social fabric gradually fraying under the strain.

This human dimension is often overshadowed by the rhetoric of strategy and power politics. Yet the reality remains that the true cost of war is paid in the disrupted lives of civilians whose voices seldom shape the decisions that determine their fate.

A Historical Turning Point

Viewed in its entirety, the present conflict suggests that the Middle East may once again be approaching a critical historical juncture. The ramifications of this war are unlikely to remain confined to Iran, Israel, or the Gulf states alone. Its reverberations may extend far beyond the region, influencing the broader landscape of global politics and economic relations.

At this stage it would be premature to predict with certainty the direction in which events will ultimately move. Yet one conclusion appears unavoidable: the consequences of the present confrontation will likely be felt for many years to come.

History repeatedly reminds us that wars in the Middle East seldom remain limited to the battlefield. They reshape alliances, alter the dynamics of energy markets, and redefine the contours of international diplomacy. It would not be surprising if future historians were to count this conflict among those pivotal episodes of the twenty-first century that subtly but decisively shifted the balance of the global order.

The Iranian Perspective

From the vantage point of Iran, the present confrontation is no longer perceived merely as a retaliatory operation. Rather, it has taken on the character of a struggle for national survival.

Tehran appears determined to convey a stark message: that instability within Iran would inevitably trigger instability throughout the wider region. In other words, the security of the Middle East cannot easily be disentangled from the stability of the Iranian state itself.

The Gulf in a Strategic Dilemma

For the Gulf monarchies, however, the situation is profoundly delicate. These states now find themselves navigating an increasingly perilous strategic environment. Should the war continue to drag on, it may be the Gulf economies and societies that bear the heaviest consequences.

Their prosperity depends upon a fragile equilibrium—regional stability, international investment, and the smooth functioning of global energy markets. Prolonged conflict threatens to unsettle each of these pillars simultaneously.

In this sense, one might argue that the true theatre of the conflict is not confined solely to Iran and

Israel. Rather, the entire Middle East has become the stage upon which the drama of this confrontation unfolds.

And history offers a sobering lesson: when wars ignite in the Middle East, their repercussions rarely remain confined within the boundaries of the region. More often than not, they ripple outward—touching distant economies, reshaping diplomatic alignments, and leaving their imprint upon the wider currents of world affairs.

Friday, 1st May 2026

Narratives, Secrets, and the Global Game

Truth, Power, and the Silent Web

Power, Secrecy, and the Burden of Proof: A Reflection on Our Age

The political history of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries instructs us in a sobering truth: power has never been merely the faculty of decision. Rather, it has more often resembled a dense and intricate web—woven of influence, pressure, and interests too subtle to declare themselves openly. From time to time, revelations emerge—vast in scale, arresting in implication—comprising documents, images, and alleged evidentiary archives so extensive that they appear to gesture beyond the failings of any single individual towards something systemic, even civilisational in scope.

Yet prudence must not be abandoned at the altar of spectacle. For not all that glitters is gold, and not every shadow is cast by substance.

The question naturally arises: why would any individual preserve so exhaustive a record of his own alleged transgressions? At first glance, it seems an absurdity—an affront to reason itself. And yet history, that stern and unflinching tutor, reminds us that power is not always exercised through office or wealth alone. There exists another currency—quieter, more insidious—namely, information. Secrets, in particular, possess a peculiar potency. As an old maxim has it: *a secret is a blade whose hilt remains unseen, yet whose wound cuts deep.*

Within this frame, some observers advance the conjecture that relationships among the powerful are seldom confined to the formal or the diplomatic. Rather, they may be entangled with personal frailties, mutual dependencies, and—on occasion—subtle coercions. Such suppositions, however compelling, must be handled with intellectual discipline. The boundary between conjecture and substantiation must remain inviolate. Reports—whether issued under the imprimatur of international bodies or otherwise—derive their authority not from their tone, but from the rigour of their method: independent inquiry, transparent procedure, and verifiable evidence.

When we turn to the perplexities of global leadership—decisions which appear, at times, to run counter to the interests of the very populations they claim to serve—we encounter no novelty, but rather an ancient dilemma. Wars, sanctions, and policies are rarely the offspring of a single cause. They are born instead of a convergence: economic imperatives, geopolitical calculations, domestic constraints, and ideological commitments. The resulting picture may seem deceptively simple, yet beneath its surface lies a complexity as profound as the unseen depths of a river, whose currents cannot be measured from the safety of its banks.

It is both the tragedy and the distinction of our age that we inhabit a world inundated with information yet increasingly starved of certainty. Each day presents us with fresh claims—documents unveiled, recordings circulated, narratives advanced—each purporting to tear aside the veil of power. But one must ask: does every revelation illuminate, or do some merely cast longer shadows?

This is no mere tale; it is a mirror held up to our times—a mirror in which faces are visible, yet so too are masks. The question is not simply what we see, but what we are prepared to believe.

There are moments when the sheer scale of a claim—millions of documents, thousands of recordings, countless images—imposes itself upon the mind with an almost tyrannical force, as though truth itself stood before us in monumental form. Quantity begins to masquerade as credibility; magnitude assumes the posture of proof. And yet, if such assertions were to hold, they would signify not merely the moral collapse of an individual, but the pathology of an entire system.

Still, we must resist the seduction of scale. For it is equally true that an abundance of material can serve to obscure, rather than illuminate—to conceal frailty of argument beneath a deluge of detail. The essential questions remain unchanged:

How was this material verified?

What is its provenance?

Through what lens is it interpreted?

Where the clamour of evidence grows loud, the voice of inquiry must grow louder still.

The claims themselves—of moral decay among influential circles, of abuses of power, of violations of human dignity—are grave enough to stir the conscience of any thinking observer. Such themes are neither trivial nor unprecedented; history bears ample witness to both the heights and the depths of human conduct. Yet the duty of a responsible analyst is clear: to distinguish, with care and precision, between that which is established and that which is merely alleged. Without such discipline, the smoke of accusation may blur the line between fact and fiction until both assume the same hue.

Here, it is important to maintain an important distinction: that between individual wrongdoing and grand conspiracy. These are not interchangeable categories. If history records injustice, it also records its redress. If it describes darkness, it does not deny the persistence of light. A narrative that subsumes every event into a single, all-encompassing design risks reducing the complexity of reality to the simplicity of fiction.

And so we arrive at the more sensational claims—those that gesture towards vast archives, implicating figures of wealth, influence, and authority across the global stage. If taken at face value, such assertions would suggest not merely personal depravity, but a catalogue of systemic corruption. Yet here, more than anywhere, the burden of proof must remain exacting. For in matters of such gravity, insinuation is no substitute for evidence, and scale is no guarantor of truth.

We have, by now, been confronted with fragments of a disturbing mosaic: lurid correspondence, explicit letters, and images of a deeply incriminating character. Yet even these, grave as they are, appear to fall short of the darker allegations that have since been advanced. Reports attributed to international bodies have, at times, alluded to crimes of a far more heinous order—claims invoking exploitation, coercion, and violence of the most reprehensible kind. Such assertions, if substantiated, would not merely indict individuals but cast a long and troubling shadow over the moral architecture of power itself.

And yet, one must proceed with intellectual restraint. For while the notion that influence may be exercised through the possession of secrets is hardly novel, its application to sweeping and universal conclusions demands a higher standard of proof than mere repetition can supply. From the tense

stratagems of the Cold War to the subtleties of modern diplomacy, information has indeed functioned as a form of power—quiet, elusive, and often decisive.

Thus we are drawn once more to the central question: why record at all?

It has been suggested that surveillance—covertly embedded within private domains—served not indulgence, but instrumentality. That such recordings, if they existed, were intended to construct not a diary of excess, but an archive of leverage. This is a grave proposition, and one that has circulated widely in speculative discourse. Yet its seriousness demands that it be approached not with credulity, but with disciplined scrutiny. Assertions regarding intelligence affiliations or orchestrated designs by states must, if they are to be entertained at all, rest upon evidence commensurate with their magnitude.

There is, however, a broader and less contentious observation to be made. The idea that information functions as a currency of power—indeed, as its most discreet and potent form—is deeply embedded in the history of statecraft. In the corridors of power, where civility often masks calculation, knowledge is exchanged not merely as insight but as influence. Smiles may serve diplomacy; silence may conceal negotiation; and beneath both, information moves with a force unseen yet unmistakable.

But here a necessary distinction must be drawn. Does every secret bind, compel, or enslave? Or is it sometimes no more than a reflection of human frailty—significant, certainly, but not necessarily evidence of an all-encompassing design? Not every whisper constitutes a conspiracy; not every shadow implies a structure behind it. As Winston Churchill observed in another context, truth in moments of conflict becomes so precious that it is often surrounded—indeed, obscured—by layers of distortion. In such conditions, narrative and reality may intertwine until their boundaries blur.

It is precisely this ambiguity that unsettles the modern conscience. We live in an age of ceaseless disclosure, where each new claim appears to unveil a deeper layer of hidden intent. And so the question arises—posed not in cynicism, but in genuine perplexity: how are we to interpret those decisions of global leadership which appear, at times, so starkly at odds with the welfare of their own peoples?

History offers no shortage of troubling precedents. Policies enacted in the name of security have yielded devastation; alliances forged in necessity have produced moral compromise. Yet to attribute every such decision to clandestine coercion is to risk reducing the complexity of political life to a single, seductive explanation. This would be not analysis, but oversimplification of the most hazardous kind.

For the truth, as ever, is more intricate. Political decisions are seldom the product of a solitary force. They emerge instead from a convergence of pressures: domestic imperatives, international alignments, economic calculations, strategic doctrines, and ideological commitments. These elements, often in tension with one another, shape outcomes that may appear perplexing, even troubling, but are rarely reducible to a single hidden cause.

The suggestion that leaders act under the weight of concealed pasts, or are compelled by undisclosed

vulnerabilities, cannot be dismissed outright; they belong to the realm of possibility. Yet neither can it be elevated to a universal principle without eroding the very foundations of institutional accountability. For if every decision is attributed to coercion, then responsibility itself dissolves. Institutions fade into irrelevance, democratic processes are rendered illusory, and human agency is diminished to the point of extinction.

It is therefore essential to maintain perspective. Human weakness is real; history attests to it abundantly. But weakness does not invariably entail subjugation. To assume so is to underestimate both the resilience of institutions and the capacity—however imperfect—of individuals to act with autonomy.

In the final analysis, we are confronted not merely with a question of facts, but with a question of interpretation. How we choose to understand power—whether as an open contest of interests or as a hidden web of coercion—will shape not only our conclusions, but our conception of political reality itself.

And herein lies the true challenge of our age: not simply to uncover what is hidden, but to discern, with care and discipline, what is real.

For the serious essayist, the central challenge is neither to succumb to reflexive denial nor to elevate unverified claims to the status of established truth. Eloquence, if it is to retain its dignity, must be accompanied by reason. The task is not merely to assert, but to inquire; not merely to persuade, but to provoke thought. It is in the careful framing of questions, the measured presentation of arguments, and the invitation to reflection that responsible writing finds its highest purpose.

History, in its austere wisdom, reminds us that when power escapes restraint, accountability is often the first casualty. Yet our present age introduces a further complication: it is not merely an era of information, but of competing narratives. Each report, each recording, each claim is advanced from a particular vantage point, shaped as much by intention as by fact. Here the burden shifts, in no small measure, to the reader. Does one merely receive, or does one examine? Does one absorb, or does one evaluate?

It is at this juncture that the responsibility of the writer deepens. The aim must not be to inflame, but to illuminate—to cast light rather than to generate heat—and, in so doing, to leave the final judgement where it properly belongs: with the discerning reader.

We inhabit a moment in which stories abound, yet truth remains elusive. Not every narrative is truthful, and not every truth presents itself in the form of a narrative. Reality is often obscured by



the very noise that claims to reveal it. Wisdom, therefore, lies not only in listening, but in discerning—separating signal from clamour, substance from suggestion.

If the advancement of peace, justice, and a more informed global consciousness is indeed our aim, then such narratives must be approached with critical insight, rigorous method, and a language that reflects intellectual integrity. The objective is not to arouse emotion alone, but to awaken understanding.

It may be conceded that the notion of leaders acting under the influence of fear is not foreign to human experience. Yet it is equally true that political decision-making is rarely governed by a single impulse. Interest, ideology, and pressure converge in ways that defy reduction. To isolate one element as the sole cause is to risk distorting the whole.

Thus, we find ourselves in a peculiar condition: truth exists, yet it is fragmented; falsehood persists, yet it is often artfully presented; and the individual, confronted with both, remains uncertain. In such circumstances, a principle of enduring value must be upheld—extraordinary claims require commensurate evidence. If peace is our aspiration, then our method must be worthy of it. Claims must be tested against evidence; arguments weighed in the balance of reason; conclusions presented with moral seriousness. Anything less would be a disservice not only to truth, but to the very idea of public discourse.

Modern politics—whether in one administration or another—has invariably been a theatre of contention, shaped by competing interpretations and opposing narratives. It is here that the writer must resist the pull of sentiment and instead anchor judgement in balance and inquiry. History may be written by the victors, but it is understood only by those willing to examine it from multiple perspectives.

And so, we arrive at an enduring question: what are we to believe, and on what grounds? This is not a question to be answered lightly. It demands not only scepticism, but method; not only curiosity, but discipline. The duty of the responsible writer is not merely to pose questions, but to cultivate in the reader the capacity to pursue answers with care.

We live, unmistakably, in an age of abundant information and diminishing certainty. Every document, every image, every assertion tells a story; yet the complexity of these stories often obscures rather than clarifies. It is perhaps inevitable that some narratives acquire a life of their own, shaped as much by interpretation as by fact. Yet this should serve as a caution, not a conclusion.

For while much that transpires within the chambers of power remains beyond full public view, it does not follow that every hidden matter conceals the same design. Truth is rarely laid bare; more often, it is veiled—discernible only through patient inquiry and disciplined thought.

The question, then, endures. But its answer will not be found in the immediacy of reaction, nor in the comfort of assumption. It resides, rather, in the steady application of inquiry, the rigour of criticism, and the integrity of mind.

Monday, May 4, 2026

An Era Defined, A Leader Revealed

When History Changed Its Course

Pakistan's political and military history, when surveyed with a reflective eye, reveals certain epochs that are not merely aggregates of events, but rather the prologue to an entire civilisational and intellectual reconfiguration. History, in its truest sense, is not a mere procession of occurrences; it is a living consciousness—an ever-unfolding narrative that gathers within its fold the ascent and decline of nations, the moulding of their intellectual temperaments, and the measure of their leadership's discernment. At times, the age itself gives rise to individuals who are not content to be shaped by circumstance; rather, they impose upon circumstance a new direction and are recognised not by the loftiness of their office, but by their rare capacity to bend the current of events to their will.

Such are the moments when history departs from its habitual course and assumes the force of a new current; when individuals, by the sheer weight of their character, come to determine the trajectory of their age. These are figures who, like steadfast beacons amid tempests, burn with a quiet resolve and, in the gathering darkness of uncertainty, offer both direction and meaning. In the recent political and military chronicle of Pakistan, the figure of Asim Munir has emerged as emblematic of such a moment.

This, then, is not merely the account of a soldier's ascent, but of an era defined by the collision of internal discord, external pressures, and the intricate cross-currents of global politics—within which a certain form of leadership asserts itself. In Asim Munir, one observes a rare confluence: the dignity of military command, the acuity of political judgement, and a measured grasp of international diplomacy. His rise, therefore, is not an isolated phenomenon, but a historical expression shaped by crisis, resilience, and the complex weave of global power relations, all converging to inscribe a new chapter upon the national narrative.

When, in November 2022, Asim Munir assumed command of the Pakistan Army, the state stood in the grip of a profound and all-encompassing political upheaval. The government of Imran Khan had already fallen through a vote of no confidence, leaving in its wake a landscape clouded by uncertainty and contention. It was a moment when the credibility of state institutions, the coherence of political narratives, and the trust of the public alike were subjected to severe trial. The polity appeared adrift, as though the vessel of state had been cast into a whirlpool of doubt, its balance challenged by waves rising from every quarter. It was, in the language of history, a moment of “the trial of leadership”—when office ceases to be an honour and becomes instead the weight of obligation. To place the command of the army in Munir's hands, at such an hour, was to entrust him with the helm of a ship navigating a storm-laden sea.

The protest movement that gathered force under Imran Khan's leadership further intensified the political atmosphere. Across the breadth of the country, the air reverberated with slogans; the streets were animated, yet hearts were burdened with suspicion. His supporters took to the roads, and accusations—direct and unrestrained—were levelled at the military leadership. These charges introduced a new and more volatile phase of tension, one in which words assumed the sharpness of

blades and narratives themselves became contested battlegrounds. This was no longer a mere divergence of political opinion, but a struggle of competing with truths, each faction raising aloft its own standard of legitimacy. In such a climate, allegations directed at the military leadership deepened mistrust and strained the delicate fabric of institutional confidence.

The army and the government issued repeated denials, yet the atmosphere remained thick with doubt. History teaches, with an austere clarity, that when the bond of trust begins to fray, explanations seldom suffice to restore it; indeed, they often dissipate unheard. Thus, the state's narrative found itself engulfed in the tempest of emotion, while the voice of reason grew faint, and public perception fractured into mutually opposing interpretations.

The events of 9 May marked a tumultuous and defining chapter in Pakistan's political history, leaving a fissure both deep and enduring. Following Imran Khan's arrest, violent protests erupted across the country, shaking the very foundations of state order. Sensitive installations—including the General Headquarters in Rawalpindi—were targeted, and what began as protest assumed the symbolic form of rebellion. It was a day when the line between dissent and insurrection blurred to the point of indistinction.

In the aftermath, a wave of legal proceedings was set in motion, with hundreds named in cases. The state initiated stringent legal action, presenting it as a necessary assertion of the rule of law; Khan and his party, however, denounced it as retribution. Thus, the battle of narratives deepened further, and political divisions became more sharply defined. It was at this juncture that the momentum of the protest movement began to falter, as the broader political climate grew ever more intricate and fraught.

Indeed, the events of May served to alter the very trajectory of the movement. What had once surged forth as a popular tide gradually lost its force, as though history itself had turned a corner, compelling political actors to reconsider their alignments and recalibrate their strategies. The elections of February 2024 ushered in a new political arrangement: the Pakistan Muslim League (N) and its allies assumed power, and the pieces upon the political chessboard were once again rearranged. This shift was not merely political in form; its reverberations extended into the realm of state policy and governance.

Yet the most consequential transformation emerged in the aftermath of the Pakistan–India conflict of May 2025. This brief but intense war, spanning four days, not only demonstrated military capability but also reshaped the psychological landscape of the region. Characterised by the deployment of advanced technologies—drones, missile systems, and modern strategic doctrines—it departed markedly from the conventions of earlier wars. Pakistan's application of contemporary warfare drew considerable attention in international circles, while its claimed successes became a subject of global discussion. The situation escalated to such a degree that the United States, having initially maintained a posture of neutrality, found itself compelled to intervene and call for a ceasefire.

According to Pakistani accounts, the downing of India's advanced Rafale aircraft proved a decisive moment, altering the direction of the conflict and capturing the attention of international media and

defence analysts alike. This was not merely a tactical achievement; it reverberated across the strategic imagination of observers, suggesting a potential shift in the balance of power. History offers here a familiar lesson: even a modest alteration in that balance can transform the global narrative. Those who yesterday stood as spectators may, under altered conditions, be drawn into the role of arbiters.

Analysts across the world have since observed that the conflict marked a turning point not only in military terms but also at the psychological level. It restored a measure of confidence within Pakistan and conveyed to the outside world a clear message—that the state remained resilient, active, and fully capable of defending itself. Initially regarded as a regional dispute, the conflict's escalation compelled international attention, and the eventual call for ceasefire underscored a perennial truth of global politics: that even localised conflicts may exert far-reaching influence. Power, when asserted upon the battlefield, has a way of summoning diplomacy in its wake; when equilibrium falters, the table of negotiation is, almost inevitably, laid.

It was in the aftermath of this conflict that Asim Munir was elevated to the rank of Field Marshal—a distinction that, in this context, signifies not merely advancement in rank, but the formal recognition of a leadership tested and affirmed in the crucible of events.

In the aftermath of that conflict, Asim Munir was elevated to the rank of Field Marshal—an honour bestowed upon but a select few in Pakistan's history. Such a distinction signifies far more than military success; it is, in essence, an expression of national confidence, a recognition that transcends the battlefield and enters the realm of collective trust. It occupies a singular place in the country's historical memory. The claim of a ceasefire by the President of the United States, coupled with Pakistan's affirmation of it, pointed towards an emerging diplomatic concord. It was at this juncture that military strategy appeared to dissolve seamlessly into diplomatic finesse.

On the global stage, the conflict conferred upon Pakistan's military capability a renewed and distinct recognition. Defence analysts acknowledged that the country was not only capable of safeguarding its frontiers but was also attuned to the evolving demands of modern warfare. In that moment, the state asserted its presence with unmistakable clarity. Concurrently, a perceptible transformation was observed in Asim Munir himself: once regarded as reserved and cautious, he now emerged as a figure marked by confidence and a clarity of purpose.

Within India, meanwhile, political pressures intensified. Narendra Modi faced mounting criticism, and questions began to surface regarding the direction and efficacy of his foreign policy. The contrast in engagements in Washington was striking where the earlier encounter bore the marks of caution, the latter revealed a statesman of composure and diplomatic maturity. This evolution was not merely personal; it was forged in the crucible of circumstance. Wars, as history attests, reshape individuals even as they refine leadership. India's relations with Israel, alongside its alleged role in tensions involving Iran, introduced a new layer of strain within the region. These developments reflected the intricate web of global politics, wherein interests often assert themselves over principle, and complexity becomes the defining feature of international relations.

Amidst this shifting landscape, Pakistan adopted a measured and balanced policy, presenting itself

as a responsible state actor. It was here that military leadership began to assume an overt diplomatic role. Those close to Asim Munir describe him as a man of few words but firm action—one who does not rely upon rhetoric but allows results to speak in his stead. It is precisely this restraint that lends his leadership a distinctive character.

Engagements in Washington introduced him more fully to the international arena. Initially perceived as reserved, he gradually revealed an uncommon assurance. His visit to the United States marked a defining moment in this regard, as he appeared not merely as a commander, but as a diplomat of substance. His wider engagements—with China, Saudi Arabia, and Iran—further underscored that his role extended beyond the military sphere into the domain of active diplomacy.



By June 2025, his bearing had come to reflect that of a seasoned diplomat. Positive impressions within American policy circles opened new avenues for Pakistan, while his composure and clarity of expression proved effective in engaging global audiences. This signalled the emergence of a new diplomatic dimension, one in which the boundaries between military and diplomatic spheres appeared increasingly porous.

Pakistan's offer to mediate between Iran and the United States during a period of heightened tension constituted a significant diplomatic initiative. At a time when the world appeared precariously poised on the brink of wider conflict, such an offer reflected both foresight and restraint, strengthening Pakistan's standing as a constructive actor. It was, in effect, an articulation of a broader vision: that Pakistan sought to position itself not as a partisan participant, but as a bridge between contending powers. The meeting at the White House in June 2025 further elevated this trajectory, conferring upon it both diplomatic depth and symbolic stature. International media described the development as remarkable, and in its wake, Asim Munir came to be regarded as a consequential figure within global politics.

Following the formal engagement at the White House, a gathering at the Pakistani Embassy in Washington assumed the character of more than a ceremonial reception; it became, in essence, an intellectual forum. The presence of American foreign policy experts lent it the atmosphere of an informal council of reflection. It was here that Field Marshal Munir articulated a principle that resonated beyond the immediate setting:

"Diplomacy remains the most effective path to the reduction of tensions, and Pakistan stands ready to assist."

This statement was not merely a declaration of diplomatic intent; it signalled a deeper

transformation—Pakistan was no longer confined to reactive postures but had begun to assume a proactive role in addressing global crises.

During the tensions between Iran and the United States, while the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister were visibly engaged upon the diplomatic front, Field Marshal Munir's quieter yet no less effective efforts continued in parallel. Confirmation of these contacts by a White House official underscored the coherence of Pakistan's civil and military coordination. This approach bears resemblance to what is often termed in international affairs as "Track Two diplomacy", wherein formal and informal channels operate in tandem, each reinforcing the other.

The negotiations held in Islamabad on 11 April between Iranian and American representatives imparted a new dimension to Pakistan's geographical and diplomatic significance. The joint presence of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Field Marshal Munir at these talks symbolised an alignment of state institutions under a unified national vision. Though the discussions did not yield immediate results, they marked an important milestone in what must be understood as a sustained diplomatic endeavour, where continuity itself is the measure of progress.

The acknowledgement by Donald Trump that a ceasefire between Iran and the United States had been facilitated at Pakistan's behest represented more than a diplomatic success; it amounted to a declaration that Pakistan was emerging as a credible and trusted intermediary between global powers. Although subsequent rounds of negotiation were not held in Pakistan, the country's continued involvement reinforced the significance of its role.

A pertinent question arises: why would adversarial states such as Iran and the United States accept the same intermediary? The answer lies in Pakistan's carefully balanced foreign policy. Its relations with Iran, the Gulf states, China, and the United States have endowed it with the capacity to function as a bridge between divergent interests. It is at this intersection that the leadership of Field Marshal Munir assumes the form of a coherent state strategy.

By advancing the security priorities of its partners—Saudi Arabia, China, and the United States—in a measured and balanced manner, Pakistan has established itself as a responsible stakeholder. This is not diplomacy in its superficial sense, but rather a finely calibrated equilibrium, where each step is weighed with precision so as not to unsettle the concerns of any one party.

A significant factor underlying Field Marshal Munir's success in mediation lies in his long-standing intelligence connections. His tenure in Military Intelligence in 2016, followed by his leadership of the Inter-Services Intelligence, enabled him to cultivate relationships with Iran that transcend the limitations of formal diplomacy. Such ties engender a level of trust that cannot be easily replicated through conventional channels. It is for this reason that both Iran and the United States perceive him as an individual capable not only of understanding their respective positions, but of conveying them with clarity and credibility to the other side.

The unconventional style of Donald Trump's politics has long been a matter of public knowledge. In his calculus, relationships are shaped less by office than by personality; it is the individual, rather than the institution, that commands his regard. Within this frame, his rapport with Field Marshal

Asim Munir gives rise to a new diplomatic reality—one in which formal protocol yields, at least in part, to personal trust. This element, once peripheral, has in the modern conduct of international affairs assumed a significance both subtle and profound.

When other संभाव्य intermediaries—Turkey, Saudi Arabia, China, and Russia—recede from such a role for reasons of their own, Pakistan emerges as the singularly viable alternative. This is no accident of circumstance, but the outcome of a sustained and carefully calibrated diplomatic strategy, through which Pakistan has preserved its acceptability across divergent camps.

In the final analysis, there emerges a defining aspect of Field Marshal Munir's character that distinguishes him from many of his contemporaries in both military and political spheres: a manner at once direct, unambiguous, and decisive. For a leader such as Trump, who favours clarity over equivocation, such a quality possesses a particular appeal. It is this very attribute that renders Munir not merely an effective commander, but an accomplished diplomat.

In the theatre of global politics, there are moments when a single sentence transcends the sum of its words and comes to embody the mental temper of an age, the priorities of a state. Such a moment arose during a gathering in the United States, when Field Marshal Munir was asked about the threats confronting Pakistan—particularly the spectre, oft invoked in analytical circles, of instability or even disintegration.

The question was not merely speculative; it carried within it the accumulated anxieties of years, long debated within policy forums and strategic institutions. In a region marked by geopolitical tension, internal political fluctuation, and economic strain, such inquiries are not uncommon. Yet Munir's response was immediate, unequivocal, and devoid of ambiguity. He declared, with striking firmness: ***"I do not envisage a world without Pakistan."***

This statement was not a mere defensive posture; it was, rather, a declaration of conviction—an affirmation of state confidence, national continuity, and historical resolve. Yet another dimension of his reply drew particular attention, as he intimated that, should Pakistan's existence ever face a grave threat, the country possessed the means to defend itself with full capacity—even to an extent that could carry consequences of global magnitude.

It appeared, in that moment, that Pakistan's leadership had entered a phase in which words themselves bore the weight of instruments—where a single utterance might hold the potential to forestall conflict. Munir's remark, though stern in its tone, may thus be understood as a complex yet effective guarantor of peace. Within the framework of international relations, it cannot be dismissed as a mere emotional expression; rather, it represents an extension of the doctrine commonly termed deterrence—the principle by which the demonstration of power serves not to provoke war, but to prevent it.

As a nuclear state, Pakistan has long subscribed to this doctrine. Yet on this occasion, Munir's words served to reaffirm that its defensive posture extends beyond the safeguarding of territorial boundaries to the preservation of its very existence. It is a conception not unfamiliar in history,

recalling the logic that governed relations among great powers during the Cold War, when the capacity for destruction itself became, paradoxically, the guarantor of peace.

Thus, the statement carries within it a dual significance. On the one hand, it is an expression of military resolve—a clear warning that the survival of the state admits of no compromise. On the other, it conveys a diplomatic message: an assurance to allies and the wider international community that Pakistan approaches its security with seriousness, sovereignty, and decisiveness. It is precisely at this juncture that military leadership and diplomatic strategy converge, forming the hallmark of contemporary statecraft.

International observers have interpreted the statement through varying lenses. Some have regarded it as an unusually forceful articulation, while others have seen in it the measured resolve of a responsible nuclear state—one that possesses both the capacity and the restraint to avert conflict. This apparent tension is, in truth, emblematic of modern geopolitics, wherein power and peace, though seemingly opposed, function as complementary forces.

Viewed against the broader canvas of Pakistan's history, the statement does not appear as a sudden impulse, but as part of a longer continuum of thought and action. Since its inception, the state has confronted moments when its very survival seemed at stake. On each such occasion, its leadership has conveyed a consistent message: that Pakistan is not merely a geographical entity, but an idea—and ideas cannot be extinguished by force alone.

Munir's response, though succinct, is rich in implication. It is at once an affirmation of national will, a continuation of strategic doctrine, and a distilled expression of diplomatic intent. It reminds us that in the modern world, survival depends not solely upon strength, but upon the judicious exercise of it. Pakistan's diplomatic history now appears to be entering a new chapter one in which a fine yet resilient line is drawn between war and peace.

Under Field Marshal Munir's leadership, Pakistan has sought to demonstrate that true power in the contemporary age lies not merely in armament, but in judgement, balance, and credibility. This journey, therefore, is not simply the story of an individual's ascent, but of a state's intellectual and strategic evolution—one that may, in time, exert its own influence upon the wider currents of global politics.

The course of history, it must be remembered, seldom runs in a straight line. It bends, it eddies, and at times it presents those rare crossings where nations are compelled to rewrite their destiny. In this sense, the trajectory of Field Marshal Munir appears not merely as the rise of a military officer, but as a turning point—indeed, as a bridge—across which Pakistan has sought to steady its internal discord while asserting its presence upon the global stage and confronting external challenges with renewed purpose.

Yet this narrative remains unfinished; it is but a beginning. The pages of history will continue to unfold, and time alone will determine where this chapter ultimately comes to rest. For now, it is sufficient to observe that a name has been inscribed upon the breast of history—a name that has emerged not as the captive of circumstance, but as its architect.

The global politics of the twenty-first century stand at a crossroads where military strength and diplomatic acumen have become inseparable. The expression of power is no longer confined to the battlefield; it extends equally to the negotiating table, where the destinies of nations are shaped. Within this context, Pakistan—once perceived merely as a regional actor—now appears to be emerging as a responsible and active participant on the world stage. At the centre of this evolution stands the figure of Field Marshal Asim Munir.

History rarely affords us individuals who are, in equal measure, soldier, strategist, and diplomat. Munir's persona reflects this rare synthesis. Should Pakistan succeed in maintaining its internal stability and external dignity in the years to come, the role of this leadership will be remembered as a defining milestone. Yet the story is not complete; it is but a chapter, with many pages still to be written.

Wednesday, May 6, 2026

Out of Ashes and Iron: A World Recast

When the Marginal Rewrote the Centre

When the gilded pages of history gather within their fold tales steeped in blood, they cease to be a mere ledger of events; they are transfigured into living emblems of human will, political discernment, and civilisational consciousness. For history, in turning its leaves, does not simply recount what has passed; it intimates, with a grave and knowing hand, what may yet unfold. Such dreadful and momentous instants are not incidents alone; they are epoch-making inscriptions upon the breast of time itself. In these charged interludes, the equilibrium of power, the direction of narrative, and the very psychology of nations are recast in a new mould. What is written in such hours does not remain the residue of accident but rises to become a metaphor for the destiny of civilisations. The tempests that gather upon history's horizon do not merely convulse geography; they seize as well the realms of thought, the grammar of power, and the deeper registers of cultural awareness.

The turbulence that has, in recent weeks, risen over the Middle Eastern firmament bears precisely this character. It appears less a discrete war than the prelude to a new epoch in global politics. The fierce military onslaught upon Iran by the United States and Israel, and Iran's answering resistance, reveal with stark clarity that the classical definition of power has overreached its former bounds. What commenced as a clash of steel and fire has rapidly diffused into the more intricate theatres of diplomacy, economics, and global opinion. Here, one is reminded that wars are not waged solely upon the field of battle; they leave their imprint upon minds, upon narratives, and upon the flowing currents of history itself.

Over the past eight weeks, the Middle East has come to resemble a volcanic theatre—an unfolding drama in which the scent of gunpowder, the delicacy of diplomacy, and the resolve of nations have coalesced into a pattern at once intricate and deeply suggestive. The thunder of missiles and bombs, the hushed undertones of diplomatic exchange, and the psychological contestations of states have become so inextricably entwined that they defy separation. Against this backdrop, one discerns the faint but unmistakable emergence of a reconfigured map of global politics.

What began ostensibly as a conventional military confrontation soon expanded its circumference, drawing into its orbit Lebanon, the Gulf states, and even the fragile architecture of the global economy. The sudden and severe aerial and missile strikes launched by the United States and Israel initially bore the aspect of a limited operation; yet in short order, they metastasised into a far wider crisis. It was at this juncture that the traditional metrics of power began to tremble, and a new strategic contest announced itself. For this war, though outwardly ignited by force of arms, is in truth emblematic of a wider transformation in international affairs—one in which power is no longer adjudged by military capacity alone, but by prudence, endurance, and the mastery of narrative. It is, in essence, not merely a war of munitions, but a war of meaning; and it is for this reason that its reverberations extend far beyond the theatre of battle.

The ferocity with which the United States and Israel struck Iran carried within it an air not merely of confidence, but of something approaching hubris. These were not simply military operations; they were political statements—calculated to paralyse Iran not only in material terms, but in the

psychological domain as well. The objective appeared starkly defined: to degrade Iran's military capabilities and compel its political leadership into retreat. It was presumed that a matter of days—of concentrated bombardment—would suffice to dismantle Iran's command and control structures and break the spine of its armed capacity.

Early declarations echoed this confidence, suggesting that Iran would be brought to heel with dispatch. The initial assaults, accompanied by emphatic pronouncements from Washington, projected the image of a decisive and irreversible blow. Yet such estimations proved, perhaps, insufficiently attuned to the deeper realities upon the ground. For history, with a certain austere irony, has long insisted upon a lesson too often disregarded: that the strength of nations resides not in their arsenals alone, but in the consciousness that animates them. The United States and Israel, it would seem, overlooked another of history's enduring maxims—that it has little patience for prolonged arrogance.

Iran, far from succumbing, not only preserved its capacity for resistance but succeeded in transforming the Strait of Hormuz into an instrument of strategic leverage, placing its hand upon the pulse of the global economy. Here again, history offers its familiar counsel: that power is not merely a function of matériel, but of resolve, strategic subtlety, national cohesion, and the coherence of a shared narrative.

Recovering with notable rapidity from the initial shock, Iran demonstrated an ability not merely to endure but to recalibrate. Through its counterstrategy, it signalled unmistakably that it was not a passive target, but an active and adaptive force. By directing its efforts towards American interests across the region, and by mobilising its network of allies, it established a multidimensional pressure that began to alter the trajectory of the conflict. In so doing, it challenged the long-standing assumption that military superiority alone is decisive.

The intense bombardment of Iran by the United States and Israel thus precipitated a conflict whose effects swiftly transcended borders, assuming a global resonance. What had begun within the confines of Iran soon extended to Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, and the Gulf states. American bases, diplomatic installations, and economic interests came under increasing strain. A limited war had, in effect, become a regional crisis. Iran's response, marked by the activation of allied networks and a broad-based resistance, made plain that any assault upon it would not be answered in kind, but in kindred magnitude. It was at this moment that the conflict assumed the character of a regional conflagration—rendering the calculations of global powers infinitely more complex.

Here, a defining feature of Iran's strategy comes sharply into view: it refused to confine the conflict within a merely defensive perimeter, instead transposing it into a far broader geographical and economic theatre. Its most consequential stratagem lay in the instrumental use of the Strait of Hormuz—a manoeuvre in which it has, to a considerable extent, succeeded. By disrupting the flow of oil, it did not simply impede a regional supply line; it cast a pall of uncertainty over the global economy itself. This act served as a potent reminder that, in modern warfare, geography is no passive backdrop but an active and formidable weapon. The Strait of Hormuz is not merely a maritime corridor; it is the arterial lifeline of the world economy. In tightening its hold over this narrow passage and constraining its traffic, Iran, in effect, placed its hand upon the economic pulse of the globe.

Iranian control over the Strait thus became an instrument of pressure that sent tremors through international markets. It is at such junctures that wars often outgrow their formal declarations, for their underlying impulses extend far beyond their stated aims. That geography itself could be weaponised in this manner was a contingency that the United States and Israel appear not to have fully reckoned with. For them, it marked an abrupt and disconcerting turn—as though the battlefield had, without warning, expanded into the very circuitry of global commerce.

The United States proclaimed the destruction of thousands of Iranian targets; yet the realities on the ground suggested a more complex picture. Iran's countermeasures—its missile strikes and the activation of allied networks—persistently challenged this narrative, demonstrating that it remained both operational and effective. A dissonance thus emerged at the global level: had Iran truly been diminished, or was it reconstituting itself in a more resilient and adaptive form? The shifting tenor of pronouncements from Washington served as a reminder that ostensible strength is not always a faithful measure of real power. Indeed, it is rare to witness so conspicuous a disjunction between assertion and outcome at the level of the American presidency.

The negotiations held in Islamabad constitute a significant chapter in this unfolding drama. That the United States and Iran should come face to face under the auspices of Pakistan's mediation marked an extraordinary development—a moment of genuine historical inflection. Yet more striking still was the manner of Iran's participation: not as a weakened supplicant, but as a sovereign and self-assured state, actively engaged in safeguarding its interests across multiple fronts. Its tone and demands reflected a conception of diplomacy not as the antithesis of war, but as its continuation by other means. Here, words cease to be mere instruments of expression; they become vehicles of strategy.

One discerns in this approach a certain intellectual discipline—an insistence upon principle over the expediencies of the moment. Iran made it plain that it would negotiate, but on its own terms. Diplomacy, in this conception, is not a retreat from conflict but an extension of it into another register. Such a posture indicates that Iran has consolidated its position not only in the military sphere but in the diplomatic arena as well.

Though the initial round of talks yielded no tangible settlement, it nonetheless opened a new pathway. In this, one glimpses a distinctive feature of Iranian statecraft: a view of history not as a mere succession of events, but as an arena of contending wills. Acting upon this premise, Iran has treated diplomacy as a continuation of war—one in which weapons are supplanted by words, yet the essential objective remains unchanged: the preservation of sovereignty.

The United States, for its part, announced a ceasefire while simultaneously intensifying pressure through a naval blockade and the seizure of an Iranian vessel. This duality reflects a familiar tension within American policy—a gesture towards peace in one hand, and an instrument of coercion in the other. Iran, however, proved adept at turning this contradiction to its advantage. By accepting the ceasefire, it treated the pause not as an end, but as an interval in which to fortify its diplomatic position.

In the course of negotiations, Iran advanced a ten-point proposal encompassing a ceasefire, the easing of sanctions, and guarantees of security. These demands spoke for a state resolute in the

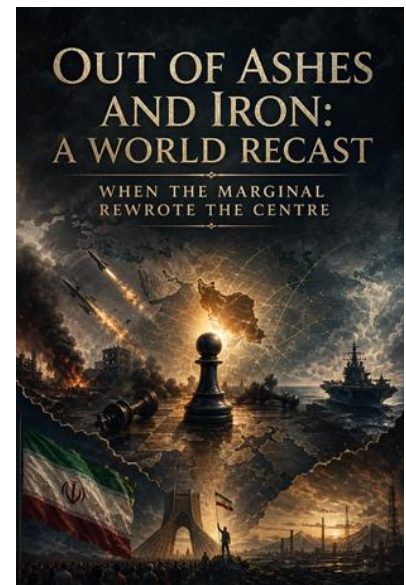
defence of its rights, unwilling to yield under pressure. In this sense, they may be read as the diplomatic articulation of its resistance. There is here an echo of a tradition in which principle is accorded precedence over transient expediency. Iran, too, adhered to this line—maintaining its core positions despite immediate costs. Its demands made clear that it would not compromise upon its sovereignty or its strategic assets at any price.

It remains an incontestable fact that Iran has borne a heavy toll in this conflict. Thousands of lives have been lost; millions displaced; billions of dollars in economic damage incurred. Vital infrastructure—oil and gas facilities, industrial complexes, educational institutions, and the basic framework of the state—has suffered grievously. Such is the price that has been exacted. Yet the question persists: does this loss signify weakness, or does it attest to endurance? In the chronicles of nations, there are moments when loss transcends itself, giving rise to a deeper collective consciousness.

So it has been in Iran. Out of devastation has emerged a renewed national narrative—one that confers legitimacy upon resistance and elevates it to the realm of conviction. A powerful idea has taken root: that to withstand external aggression is not merely a political necessity, but a moral imperative. The public, through its conduct, has reinforced this narrative—standing by its bridges, its institutions, its national symbols, as though constituting a living rampart. It is a tableau that recalls those moments in history when a nation and its identity appear to merge into a single, indivisible whole. Nor would this be without precedent; for history offers many examples in which adversity, rather than enfeebling nations, has served to steel them. Nations endure, in the final reckoning, not by the force of arms alone, but by the strength of the words through which they understand themselves.

In the opening days of the war, Iran's senior leadership became the direct object of attack, creating a vacuum of considerable consequence. The succession that followed—whereby Mojtaba Khamenei emerged as the new Supreme Leader after Ayatollah Ali Khamenei—marked not merely a transfer of authority, but the beginning of a distinctly new political phase. What, at first glance, appeared to be a moment of weakness was, in practice, transmuted into an instrument of consolidation. The system did not fracture; it hardened. The Revolutionary Guard saw its influence deepen and expand, while internal divisions, though not extinguished, were pressed into the background, subordinated to the imperatives of survival and cohesion.

It remains undeniable that Iran has paid a formidable price. The loss of life on a vast scale, the devastation of infrastructure, and the gravest of economic blows together constitute the heavy toll of this conflict. Yet the more enduring question persists: does such loss signify fragility, or does it attest to resilience? Iran, for its part, has woven this suffering into a national narrative—one in which resistance is elevated beyond strategy into the realm of conviction. The public, in turn, has lent substance to this narrative through conduct as much as through sentiment. It is here that one recalls



the deeper truth that nations are sustained not merely by their institutions, but by the words and meanings through which they interpret themselves.

The reverberations of this war have extended well beyond the immediate theatre, unsettling the broader architecture of global power. Where once the world was habitually described in terms of three principal centres—the United States, Russia, and China—there now emerges a more fluid and contested order, in which states such as Iran assert their presence with increasing confidence. This may well signal the advent of a new global configuration, one in which power is no longer measured solely by economic magnitude or military reach, but also by strategic position and the capacity for sustained resistance.

Indeed, the very conception of power has been subjected to scrutiny and revision. The older metrics—wealth and weaponry—no longer suffice as exclusive determinants. Strategic geography, regional influence, and narrative coherence have assumed a central place in the calculus of power. In this evolving landscape, Iran has demonstrated that even a state perceived as comparatively weaker may, through judicious strategy, patience, and resolve, carve out a meaningful position within the international order. It has, in effect, challenged the presumption that hierarchy in global affairs is immutable.

For the United States, the war has generated pressures both domestic and international. Congressional constraints, mounting financial costs, and the shadow of impending elections have all served to narrow the scope of policy choices. On the global stage, too, its standing has been subject to strain. By contrast, Iran's image has undergone a notable transformation. Across what is often termed the Global South, it has found a measure of recognition as a force of resistance, while sentiments critical of American policy have intensified. In a striking irony, a war conceived in part to diminish Iran's standing has instead rendered it more conspicuous—and, in certain quarters, more formidable.

Within Iran itself, a robust national narrative has taken shape, casting resistance not merely as a political necessity but as a collective duty. The populace has not only aligned itself with the state but has demonstrated, through its actions, that in the face of external threat, internal divisions recede into secondary importance. It is a tableau that evokes the enduring interplay between language and nationhood—each sustaining and reinforcing the other—until identity itself appears as a shared and defended inheritance.

If one were to distil the outcome of this conflict into its essential elements, two conclusions present themselves with clarity. First, Iran has borne a heavy cost in human, economic, infrastructural, and military terms. Second, notwithstanding these losses, it has emerged upon the international stage as a more assertive and consequential actor. This paradox is hardly unfamiliar to history, wherein the shadow of setback often conceals the embers of advancement.

For this was never solely a war of arms; it was a contest of narratives, of wills, and of endurance. Iran has illustrated that resistance, when allied with strategy, may transcend the confines of defence and become the foundation of a new historical trajectory. A state deemed weaker, if guided by prudence, patience, and steadfastness, may not only alter the course of events but compel recognition within

a system dominated by greater powers. The world now stands at an inflection point, where the definition of power itself is undergoing revision, and where those once dismissed as marginal begin to inscribe their own destinies.

To speak plainly, this war may be understood as the prelude to a new global narrative—one in which the grammar of power is being rewritten, and in which resistance assumes the character of a generative force rather than a reactive one. It teaches, with a clarity sharpened by conflict, that arms alone are insufficient; narrative, endurance, and strategic intelligence are equally indispensable. Iran has shown that a state regarded as vulnerable may, by standing firm, bend the arc of history.

If the entire episode were to be reduced to a single sentence, it might be said that Iran suffered loss, yet secured position. Such, indeed, is the recurring lesson of history: that power does not arise from resources alone, but from resolve. The world today stands upon a new threshold. The meaning of power is being recast, and those nations once thought peripheral are forging for themselves a place of consequence. The story of Iran in this conflict is one such illustration—an example whose implications may well shape the course of international politics in the years to come.

Saturday, May 9, 2026

Diplomacy in the Shadows: The Unwritten Negotiation *Behind the Curtain of Global Statecraft*

There are, in the long chronicle of history, certain moments that—though fleeting in appearance—carry within them the sediment of centuries: the accumulated tensions of rival civilisations, the slow grinding of ambition against restraint, and the delicate recalibration of power itself. These are the intervals when time, as if in contemplation, seems briefly to suspend its march; when decisions of vast consequence are not proclaimed from podiums but conceived in hushed exchanges behind closed doors. Such murmured negotiations, scarcely audible at their inception, often return in due course as the resounding verdicts that shape the destinies of nations.

Our own age of international politics now finds itself poised upon such a hinge of history. It is a moment at which power, interest, pride, and necessity have become so intricately interwoven that their boundaries defy easy distinction. This is no longer merely an era of military pre-eminence; it is, more profoundly, an age governed by the authority of narrative—where words may travel further than artillery, and where silence itself can assume the character of a most emphatic declaration. The great powers, accordingly, no longer contend solely upon the battlefield; they advance their claims across negotiating tables, through the calibrated imposition of economic sanctions, and by the subtle orchestration of strategic communication.

Within this shifting theatre, the Middle East has once again assumed a central role upon the stage of history—a region where the shadows of the past and the outlines of the future appear locked in a continuous and uneasy embrace. Each development there reverberates far beyond its immediate geography, shaping the currents of the global economy, the flow of energy, and the reconfiguration of political alliances. It is for this reason that the tensions of the region cannot be reduced to the narrow confines of a singular conflict; rather, they form part of a broader and more intricate global narrative, in which each actor strives—by turns—for survival, supremacy, and the preservation of identity. Within that narrative one discerns, in varying measure, the hues of resistance, the gestures of conciliation, and the unmistakable echoes of power.

For countries such as Pakistan, this evolving landscape presents at once a trial and an opportunity. It is a trial inasmuch as the preservation of sovereignty and dignity within so complex a web of global intrigue is no easy undertaking; yet it is also an opportunity, for those who can act with clarity and purpose may yet secure for themselves a more assured diplomatic standing. It is here that the true test emerges: the test of national strategy, of leadership endowed with foresight, and of a historical consciousness sufficiently refined to distinguish the transient from the enduring.

Pakistan's recent diplomatic exertions suggest an acute awareness of this moment. Rather than confining negotiations to the visible geometry of formal trilateral engagement, efforts have been vigorously pursued through the more discreet avenues of back-channel diplomacy. Yet, even as these quiet endeavours unfold, a parallel theatre has emerged in the form of public pronouncements—most notably those of President Trump—which, with their dramatic inflections and shifting tones, have themselves become a focal point of global attention. The present essay, therefore, is not a mere recital of events, but an attempt to interrogate the deeper forces, motivations, and possibilities that

lie beneath their surface. It seeks to illuminate not only what is occurring upon the visible board of world affairs, but also the stakes of the game itself—and the principles by which it is being played.

On that particular day, a curious gravity seemed to settle over the air of Islamabad. Within a quiet chamber of the Serena Hotel stood a triangular table—no mere assemblage of wood and craftsmanship, but a potential milestone in the unfolding current of history, and a living metaphor of contemporary diplomacy. Were history capable of assuming a physical form, it might well have chosen such a shape: poised upon three angles yet bound to a single centre; representative of three distinct forces yet compelled towards a precarious equilibrium. This was no ordinary object fashioned by the hand of an artisan; it appeared, rather, as though cast in the crucible of time itself—each of its edges bearing the imprint of a civilisation, a political vision, and a deferred aspiration.

Three sides, three chairs, three flags—an image as though the geometry of the world had momentarily converged upon a single point. There was, in that tableau, an almost symbolic magnetism, as if destiny itself had paused in anticipation of its own signature. The United States, Iran, and Pakistan were present not merely as states, but as embodiments of three competing narratives: power, resistance, and reconciliation. The very structure of the table seemed to disclose a deeper philosophy. The circle, one might say, signifies unity; the square, stability; but the triangle—by contrast—speaks of tension held in balance. It was as though the table itself proclaimed that any dialogue conducted upon it would not proceed along simple lines but would instead unfold as a complex interplay of angles, contradictions, and negotiated accommodations.

The inspection of this table by Field Marshal Asim Munir was not, therefore, a routine gesture of military formality. It carried with it the unmistakable suggestion that Pakistan no longer stands as a mere spectator—or worse, a pawn—within the great game of nations, but has emerged as a participant of consequence, a co-author in the writing of history itself. His gaze appeared directed not at the material surface before him, but at the potential outcomes it portended—outcomes capable not only of reshaping the region, but of redrawing the political contours of the wider world. For beyond the immediate choreography of diplomacy there lingered the more ominous reverberations of threat—echoes that spoke, in stark and unsettling terms, of reducing a civilisation as ancient as Iran to ruin and thereby casting a long and disquieting shadow over the prospects of global peace.

In certain respects, the scene called to mind those earlier moments when history turned upon decisions made within confined spaces—whether at Camp David, Oslo, or Dayton. Yet the table in Islamabad possessed an additional dimension. It was not merely a reflection of shifting balances of power; it was also an assertion of civilisational confidence. It signalled that the making of decisions would no longer remain the exclusive preserve of Western capitals; that the East, too, would speak in its own voice, claim its own space, and negotiate upon its own terms.

And yet, history—like a restless poet—rarely consents to dwell upon a single line. The moment that appears most certain is often the one most vulnerable to dissolution. The table that seemed destined to bear witness to agreement was, in the end, quietly removed. It was as though the final couplet of a carefully composed poem had been abruptly erased. But does that erasure signify an ending? Or

merely an interlude—a pause before the narrative resumes, perhaps in a different key, yet with undiminished consequence?

A few days later, when an American journalist crossed the threshold of that same room, he encountered an atmosphere steeped in a peculiar stillness—an air heavy with absence, as though a gathering had been prepared in full splendour, the lamps lit and awaiting, yet no guests had come to partake. The edges of the table had already been dismantled; the flags were being folded away with ceremonial restraint; and in the surrounding silence there lingered the quiet melancholy of an unfinished narrative. An unspoken question seemed suspended in the air: was this a failure—or merely the overture to a greater success yet to unfold?

The absence of the American delegation transformed the entire tableau into something resembling a half-shattered dream. The expected arrivals—Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner—never materialised; their flights halted before they could complete their journey. Meanwhile, Donald Trump’s oft-repeated assertion—“we have all the cards”—echoed with a curious duality. It bore the cadence of a player who pauses the game, not in surrender, but in the calculated hope of reshaping its terms; a declaration that, on the surface, projected confidence, yet beneath it concealed the careful recalibration of strategy. This was not a simple refusal, but a theatrical interlude—a deliberate pause in which the true narrative was being composed behind the curtain. Indeed, Trump’s statements—outwardly forceful yet inwardly measured—served as a reminder that in politics, words are seldom mirrors of reality; more often, they are its veil.

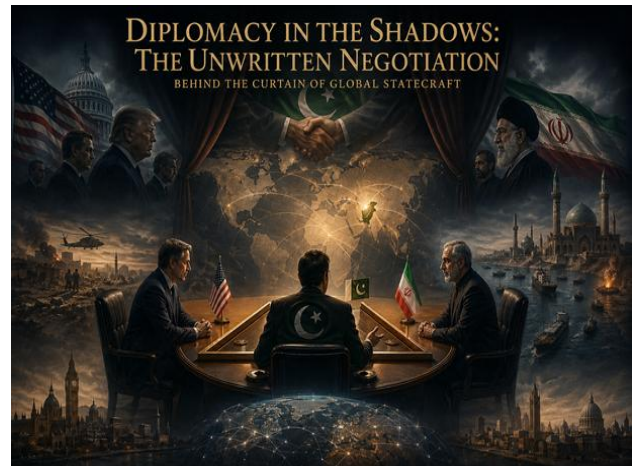
From the Pakistani airbase, the departing C-17 Globemaster aircraft seemed to bear silent witness to this ostensibly faltering scene. American matériel was being withdrawn, yet the broader chessboard of diplomacy remained very much in play. The movements of the Iranian delegation—from Islamabad to Muscat, then onward again, and eventually to Saint Petersburg—evoked the rhythm of a chess match in which each apparent retreat conceals the preparation of a more decisive advance. The presence of Vladimir Putin within the halls of the Boris Yeltsin Presidential Library suggested that the contest had now outgrown its original confines: no longer a duel between two adversaries, but a far more intricate engagement involving multiple actors. The game, in other words, had not ended; it had merely expanded its field. Diplomacy was no longer contained within a single chamber—it had dispersed across continents.

The global media, true to form, responded with characteristic haste. “Islamabad Process Fails,” “Trump Refuses,” “Iran Tilts Towards Russia”—such headlines betrayed a tendency to apprehend only the surface of events, neglecting the deeper currents beneath. The language of “failure” was readily invoked, yet in truth this moment represented not an end, but a stage—one that pointed towards a more consequential outcome. The projections of Goldman Sachs, the fluctuations in oil prices, and the thinning traffic through the Strait of Hormuz all served as indicators of a crisis that, while outwardly unsettled, was in fact moving—however unevenly—towards a new equilibrium.

The formula advanced by Iran marks a significant inflection in the practice of diplomacy. Viewed with due intellectual care, the situation reveals itself in three discernible layers. The first lies in Iran’s proposal itself—an initiative that signals an unusual and noteworthy departure from established patterns. “Peace first, then nuclear”—the phrase establishes the foundation of a new strategic

sequence. The willingness to reopen the Strait of Hormuz and to relinquish certain forms of maritime control constitutes both an admission and an affirmation: that Tehran has introduced a measure of flexibility into its posture, coupled with a recognition that complex disputes may best be resolved in stages rather than as a single indivisible whole.

At first glance, such flexibility might be mistaken for retreat; in reality, it reflects a deliberate and time-honoured strategy. Even in warfare, a step backward may serve as the prelude to a more decisive advance. This evolution is far from trivial. Iran, which once bound its concerns into a single, unyielding chain, now appears willing to disentangle them—to address each issue within its own distinct frame. It is, in essence, a form of intellectual maturation, a hard-won composure forged in the crucible of experience.



The second layer resides in the thinking of American strategic circles. It is for this reason that formulations such as “open for open” are being accorded serious consideration—a reflection not of idealism, but of pragmatic realism. For the United States, energy prices are never merely economic; they are deeply political. As elections approach, the cost of fuel becomes, in effect, a matter inscribed upon the ballot itself. Iran seeks to sell its oil; the United States seeks to stabilise prices. Their needs, though shaped by different impulses, converge upon a common ground. It is here that interest begins to outweigh ideology.

Analyses emanating from institutions such as the Center for Strategic and International Studies, particularly the notion of a “paradoxical equilibrium,” illuminate the deeper essence of this contest. Power, in this conception, is not defined solely by military superiority; it is equally a function of endurance, patience, and strategic restraint. Iran, in this instance, appears to be exercising a distinct form of power—one grounded less in immediacy than in persistence. Pressure is applied; pressure is answered; yet both sides are acutely aware that such a contest cannot extend indefinitely. In this arena, patience itself becomes a weapon—and it is one that Iran seems particularly adept at wielding.

Herein lies the central paradox of the crisis. Iran possesses fewer resources, yet greater patience. The United States commands vast resources yet is constrained by time. It is at precisely this juncture that Trump’s oft-invoked “trump card” appears less decisive than it might once have seemed. Power, after all, is not merely the accumulation of means; it is also the capacity to endure. The American public cannot indefinitely absorb the pressures of inflation, whereas Iran’s historical experience has cultivated a certain resilience—a long familiarity with hardship borne in the name of continuity. This divergence—between abundance and endurance—may yet prove the decisive factor in this intricate game of statecraft.

The third layer, perhaps the most revealing of all, lies in the language of official statements. When Marco Rubio observed that “the offer is better than expected,” he was doing more than offering a

casual assessment. Such phrasing belongs to the subtle lexicon of diplomacy, in which rejection and invitation often coexist within the same utterance. It was, in effect, an acknowledgment that the door remains ajar—a gesture not of outright acceptance, but of conditional openness. In that carefully measured sentence lay the quiet assurance that the conversation, far from concluded, was still very much alive.

Reports emanating from global media outlets, when read with a measure of discernment, serve not to negate but rather to reinforce the impression that the real negotiations have never ceased. The distances between the parties, though outwardly apparent, are in truth narrowing; and a phased agreement—incremental in form yet substantial in implication—appears to be taking shape. It is, in essence, the very conception advanced by Iran, now finding a cautious echo among American analysts. This is the world as it truly operates: not in the glare of cameras, but in the quiet discretion of closed rooms, where the architecture of decision is patiently assembled.

Why, then, was that triangular table removed? The answer lies in a principle as old as politics itself: perception often outweighs reality. In Donald Trump's political method, drama is not an accessory but an instrument. He denies before he affirms; he rejects before he reclaims the same proposition as his own triumph. It is a familiar stratagem—first the refusal, then the acceptance, recast as victory. The performance is as deliberate as it is calculated, designed to persuade a domestic audience that concession has not been made, even when agreement lies just beyond the horizon.

Within this unfolding drama, Pakistan's role emerges with increasing clarity and consequence. Iran's confidence in Islamabad, coupled with continued US engagement—and reinforced by Trump's repeated praise of Pakistan's leadership, including its prime minister and Field Marshal Asim Munir—confirms a subtle but significant transformation. Pakistan is no longer defined by geography alone. It is taking shape as a diplomatic identity, one that commands widespread international recognition.

Whether the negotiations are conducted in Islamabad or Muscat is, in the final analysis, of secondary importance. The venue may change; the necessity does not. The process itself has not concluded—it has merely entered a new phase. Its methods may evolve, its locations may shift, yet its purpose remains constant. Russia, Oman, and other actors are increasingly drawn into the orbit of this engagement, enlarging both its scope and its complexity.

This conflict, if such it may be called, is singular in its nature. Its conclusion, in broad outline, appears already discernible; yet its stages are marked by a complexity that both obscures and enriches the path towards that end. For all the theatre, the volatility, and the apparent uncertainty, the underlying necessities are too compelling to sustain indefinite confrontation. History, in its long memory, offers a consistent verdict: necessity, in the end, prevails over spectacle.

Iran's endurance and calculated resistance have already begun to alter the prevailing global narrative, unsettling established balances and compelling a reassessment of power itself. The question is no longer simply who is stronger, but who can persist longer. Meanwhile, within the Middle East, a more searching inquiry has begun to take shape among its peoples: whether the United States stands as a guarantor of their security, or as an instrument of other priorities. This

question transcends the merely political; it reaches into the realms of civilisation and collective consciousness.

At the heart of the matter lies a deeper and more consequential inquiry: does this crisis herald the emergence of a new global order, one in which regional powers assume a more decisive role? The prospect appears increasingly plausible. China, Russia, and a constellation of regional alignments may yet lay the foundations of a reconfigured equilibrium. Within this evolving landscape, Pakistan, particularly in the Middle East, seems poised to assume a role of growing significance—its strategic commitments and regional engagements suggesting a trajectory that extends well beyond its traditional confines.

When history approaches one of its defining moments, it ceases to be a mere sequence of events and becomes, instead, a lesson in profound lessons. It forces us to reconsider the nature of power, the limits of interest, and the moment in which collective reason turns away from the path of negotiation and toward the path of accommodation. The current situation offers a living example of this process: beneath the surface of tension, danger, and uncertainty, a quiet movement persists—one that steadily, if imperceptibly, tends toward stability.

It is a truth increasingly evident that in the modern world no conflict can endure indefinitely. The interlocking chains of economic dependence, the imperatives of energy, and the dense fabric of global interconnection render prolonged confrontation not merely costly, but ultimately untenable. Under the weight of its own contradictions, conflict gives way to conciliation. It is this principle that, sooner or later, compels even the most reluctant adversaries to face one another across a table—however empty that table may momentarily appear.

Another dimension of this unfolding reality lies in the construction of narrative itself. Nations and leaders who succeed in articulating a coherent, persuasive, and resonant narrative are those who shape the currents of global opinion. War, in our time, is waged not only along borders but within minds—across perceptions, ideas, and interpretations. Victory, therefore, belongs not merely to those who command resources, but to those who can sustain a delicate balance between reality and perception.

For Pakistan, this is not a moment for passive observation, but for considered action. As a responsible and increasingly engaged state, its success will depend upon its capacity not only to comprehend the shifting contours of global politics, but to act upon them with foresight and deliberation. Diplomacy must not remain confined to reaction; it must be elevated into a proactive and shaping force.

In the final reckoning, the world seems to be passing through a phase in which every conflict carries within it the seeds of its own solution. The volatility of circumstances, the intensity of rhetoric, and the uncertainty of the moment are undeniable. Yet the deep current of history tends toward balance. It is this balance that maintains the continuity of civilization, and it is from this balance that a new order, a new structure, and a new hope inevitably emerge after every major crisis.

Thus, one may say, without undue exaggeration, that the world now stands at a juncture where every actor seeks not only to make a move, but to enhance his own value within the game. The marketplace

is animated; the bargaining continues; yet the conclusion is inescapable—agreement must, in time, be reached. And when that agreement is finally struck, history will once again bear witness to a familiar truth: it is not power that prevails, but necessity. And it may well record, alongside the cities where peace has altered the course of events, the name of Islamabad—inscribed among those places where the direction of history itself has been quietly, yet decisively, transformed.

Tuesday, May 12, 2026