

The Business

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Gulf unity

The influence that the Trump administration retains over Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states even in its last days in office is nothing short of remarkable. True, there was a convergence of interests in that everybody wanted a show of unity among Iran's traditional regional rivals before Biden forced everybody back into the nuclear deal with Tehran, but considering the way Saudi and Qatari state media outlets, including Doha-based Al-Jazeera, continued to spew venom against each other till very recently a thaw didn't really seem imminent. Full marks, then, to not just the Trump team but also key regional mediators like Kuwait for engineering this rapprochement. Yet it's not as if everything will be forgiven and forgotten just because Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman hugged and kissed Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hammad Al Thani in the traditional Arab style for the whole world to see, even if it does mean that they have decided to let go of enough to start working together once again. The coming months will tell how well they have been able to paper over the cracks as the Middle East prepares to re-engage over Iran in a very different setting.

It was after all tiny but extraordinarily wealthy Qatar's independent streak when it comes to foreign policy that angered GCC heavyweights and led to the split three years ago, especially its support for the Muslim Brotherhood whose rise after the so-called Arab Spring made Gulf monarchs somewhat uncomfortable and its tilt towards Iran once the Arab plan about the Syrian civil war began to go sour. How well Doha is able to juggle between all the demands of a show of Gulf unity and its growing ties with and dependence on Tehran will clearly be the deciding factor. And the fact that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman made a point of mentioning Iran in his speech after everybody met and made up speaks volumes about how tough Qatar's position is going to be.

One of the things that Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in particular want Qatar to fall very quickly in line about is its increasingly warm relations with Turkey. As old friends left it out of the circle, Doha found itself pushed increasingly into the embrace of new ones, which included not just Iran but also Turkey. And since the GCC bloc doesn't get along too well with either, it naturally wants Qatar to scale down its relations with them as well. Pakistan, of course, is very good friends with both of them, and hence understands the immense complexity of the issue perhaps better than any other country in the world. Already, the prime minister has had to do a significant amount of damage control with Arab friends because of his initiatives with others, including Turkey.

Modi at war with India



SAJJAD SHAUKAT

Famous political thinkers agree that a number of internal factors like the quantity of population, system of government, geographical location, economic output, and more, play a key role in formulating the foreign policy of a country. However, this thesis is unfounded in India where extremist Hindu entities, led by the BJP, and the fanatic Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, control internal policies while molding external policy according to self-interests at the cost of India.

In this regard, the Indian Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 (CAA), further exposed the discriminatory policies of the Modi-led government. The CAA, coupled with the National Register of Citizens (NRC), is mainly against Muslim immigrants especially from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. Despite criticism from

human rights groups, foreign leaders, the UN and moderate Hindus in wake of violent protests that killed hundreds of persons—mostly Muslims by the police and prejudiced Hindus—Modi's regime has not withdrawn from the CAA or NRC.

Now, Indian internal policies are totalitarian. Various developments like the unprecedented rise of Hindu extremism, persecution of religious minorities such as Sikhs, Christians and particularly Muslims, show that the Hindu fanatic groups have been promoting religious and ethnic chauvinism in India by propagating the Hindutva ideology.

Meanwhile, in September, last year, India's parliament passed three controversial agriculture bills which left the peasants at the mercy of corporations—resulting in nation-wide farmers' protests. Since the Indian Parliament abrogated articles 35A and 370 of the Constitution strict military lockdown in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) continues unabated. Despite the deployment of more than 900,000 military troops there, it is the Kashmiri freedom fighters that continue the war of liberation.

India, dominated by politicians from the Hindi heartland, continues the use of the Hindutva ideology to use brutal force mercilessly against any move to free Assam, Kashmir, Khalistan, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Manipur—all places where wars of liberation are being fought. These states are rocked by a large number of armed and violent re-

bellions, some seeking separate states as others fight for autonomy. In the recent years, Maoists accelerated their struggle by attacking official installations and India's counterinsurgency strategy to crush these movements has badly failed.

In regards to Indian external policies, Modi is following aggressive policies especially against Pakistan and China. For the purpose, Indian forces have intensified shelling inside the Pakistani side of Kashmir by violating the ceasefire agreement in relation to the Line of Control (LoC). Tensions also increased between India and China when the Indian government bifurcated Jammu and Kashmir into two union territories—Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh to be ruled by the federal government. China objected to the split of Jammu and Kashmir as 'unlawful and void', saying that India's decision to include some of China's territory challenged Beijing's sovereignty. As such, the border dispute between India and China remains unsettled.

On May 5, last year, tensions further escalated when India occupied various areas, adjacent to the Line of Actual Control (LAC). In response, Chinese forces moved into the regions along the eastern Ladakh border and vacated the disputed territories.

Modi's war-mongering strategy has increased the country's defence budget. New Delhi also continued purchasing arms and weapons from the Western countries, particularly the US and Israel. However, his extremist policies—overt and covert intervention through Indian military and

RAW in Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka—have been backfiring on India.

Notably, the Indian Minister of External affairs, Jaswant Singh, was expelled from the party for praising Mohammad Ali Jinnah and echoing the pain of the Indian Muslims in his book after having worked for the BJP for 30 years. Pointing towards their attitude towards the minorities, Singh wrote, "Every Muslim that lives in India is a loyal Indian...look into the eyes of Indian Muslims and see the pain." He warned in his book, if such a policy continued, India could have third partition.

It is mentionable that the former Soviet Union, which had subjugated the minorities and ethnic groups through its military, disintegrated in 1991. Even its nuclear weapons could not save its collapse.

The major cause of the disintegration of the former Russia was that its greater defence expenditure exceeded to the maximum, resulting into economic crises inside the country.

Similarly, Modi's internal and external policies in the country will spark financial crises, acute poverty and the spread of the Coronavirus pandemic has broadened the split of India's federation, much like the Soviet Union.

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Never give NRO Anybody- Imran Khan

Questions on free speech

KAMAL SIDDIQI

This week, Twitter Inc. deleted new tweets posted by US President Donald Trump on the official government account, @POTUS, and suspended the account of his presidential campaign. Earlier, it had removed his personal account @realDonaldTrump which had 2.3 million followers off the platform, permanently.

Many have welcomed the move, citing Trump's support of rioters who stormed Capitol Hill. Trump had tweeted "We will not be SILENCED!" from the @POTUS government account, with 33.4 million followers.

Twitter shut down his @TeamTrump campaign account shortly after it sent out a tweet with a "statement from President Trump" accusing Twitter of "banning free speech" and coordinating with "the Democrats and the Radical Left" to silence him.

Twitter said accounts used by Trump to try to get around the ban could face permanent suspension under its "ban evasion" policies. This move is being debated the world over where some proponents of free speech say that such a move does not augur well. For example, Mexico's President Andrés Manuel López Obrador criticised censorship of the US President, but at the same time declined to condemn the assault by Trump supporters on the US Capitol, citing his policy of not interfering in other countries' affairs.

In response to his banning, Trump wrote, "Twitter is not about FREE SPEECH," adding that he is considering building his own social media platform in the near future. Trump also pointed his followers to an account on Parler, an American microblogging and social networking service, launched in 2018. Parler describes itself as a "non-partisan public place" and is believed to have a significant user base of Trump supporters, conservatives, conspiracy theorists, and right-wing extremists.

The platform markets itself as a "free speech" and unbiased alternative to mainstream social networks such as Twitter and Facebook. However, many say its content policies are more restrictive than the company portrays. If that was not enough of a challenge, Google also suspended Parler from its app store, citing posts inciting violence and demanding "robust" content moderation from the

app. The action means that the network, seen as a favourite place for people expelled from Twitter, could become unavailable for new downloads on the world's main mobile phone app stores. Of course, the question one must ask is what does this mean for us? To begin with, Twitter was used by Trump to circumvent the mainstream media. Its ban on the US President is welcome news for most news outlets. Till this week, Twitter was an excellent platform which the US President used extensively to pursue his agenda. The only problem with this was that by undermining the mainstream media, Trump could get away with misleading messages and push fake news. Hopefully this is a thing of the past; or is it?

But some say that the damage has been done. Trump supporters will follow him wherever he goes in cyberspace. And that fake news has found a home in social messaging platforms, in one way or another. We have seen several examples of this. All over the world, opinion leaders have turned to Twitter to get their message across without having to worry about fact checking by the media. But bypassing the media is a threat to democracy, as we have seen in the case of Trump. If the mainstream media weakens, so does accountability.

But there are those who argue on the intentions of Twitter and other social media platforms when they ban in a selective manner. We have a local example. In 2019, for example, Pakistan identified 200 Twitter accounts that were suspended apparently for posting about Kashmir. This followed an uproar where many Pakistanis reported that their accounts were suspended after they posted in support of Kashmir. The claim came from journalists, activists, government officials and fans of the military tweeting in support of Kashmir freedom. There are many who argue about what should go on social messaging platforms and what should not. The bigger problem, of course, is who decides this.

While platforms like Twitter have taken pains to explain their neutrality, many quarters are not convinced. Questions that remain unanswered are—will alternate platforms continue to spread fake news? And more importantly, have social messaging platforms taken over the role of the mainstream media to decide what is news or what is not? We have entered a new age of information.

The Hazara killings

ANEES JILLANI

One of the first things one realizes about Pakistan is that its population lives in different eras. A tiny minority is attuned to the latest trends in New York and London and it is difficult to differentiate between them and the elite in Western capitals.

A huge educated majority is patriotic and many amongst them are pan-Islamists and believe that Muslims throughout the world form an ummah; some but not all are susceptible to clerics' sermons. Then comes the vast majority of our populace: the illiterate poor masses who may or may not be happy—according to our newly found trend of conducting polls—but simply live to survive.

Such differences may be present in many other countries but the magnitude is phenomenal in our country. One segment will know the names of rivers passing through various American states and the salient features of the American constitution while the other extreme may not even know the name of our presi-

dent. And the state is not doing much to bridge this gap. We may have one of the largest numbers of news TV channels but most are not accessible in the rural areas where 65 percent of the people live. Even where they are available, most prefer to watch entertainment on TV. The number of people reading newspapers then dwindles to a minuscule. We the few reading English newspapers seldom interact with the unfortunate half, except perhaps by visiting under-developed or far-flung areas once in a while to take pictures to share on Facebook. What however is mind-boggling is when some in the educated class make assertions using strange conspiracy theories, including those related to our domestic sectarian issues.

They ignore the sermons that are given in some of our mosques where listeners are riled up against the Shia community. Such people also seem to never wonder about the ideology which prompts some to kill Shias including the Hazaras. It took us so long to carry out a military operation in the tribal areas to flush out the terrorists. Nobody

bothers to explain why this operation could not be carried out decades earlier. Similarly, I know of no other country in the world where dangerous arms and weapons are so readily available as in Pakistan. Instead of establishing JTs and commissions headed by high court judges, all we have to do is to control the supply of weapons to drastically cut down on cases of terrorism. Attacking terrorist ideologies is more difficult but we can again look to the experience of other countries to imitate their actions, although many of them sometimes can be controversial.

Catching terrorists and hanging them in public or conducting their trial in 24 hours is not the answer. If the state shows empathy with the victims then terrorists feel frustrated. Eleven Hazara coal miners were killed in Mach on January 2. The Balochistan government lacked the courage to visit the protesters in Quetta while the prime minister made a mockery of the whole thing by making it an ego issue. What could a cabinet minister or a prime minister do by meeting the relatives of the unfortunate

Hazara victims? Not much—but the bereaved wanted to hear words of consolation from higher authorities. The federal government then had the nerve to talk about compensation to the victims' families. Is that the panacea to a tragedy which has not happened for the first time and, I dread to say, probably not for the last time in the country?

And lastly, both the provincial and federal government must realize that the international community, and especially Iran, is watching this closely. Apathetic actions by the government regarding the Shia community for whatever reason and to please whomever are going to be remembered for a long time to come. That will be a tragedy as Iran is one of the few countries in the world which unequivocally supports our stance on the illegal occupation of Kashmir by India. Actions speak louder than words. You have to do something positive instead of playing in the hands of terrorists of the Islamic State. The object of terrorism is terrorism. With guns, you can only kill terrorists. It is only with education that we can kill terrorism.

SENATOR KAUDA BABAR

Why fencing Gwadar is necessary?

In recent weeks, there has been a lot of concerns expressed by people from various sections of society over the fencing of the port city. Some of the concerns were genuine while others were formed based on misinformation/disinformation. For political point-scoring, some politicians have unfortunately decided to politicize the issue. It is, therefore, necessary to have a clear picture of why Gwadar city is being fenced and that is why I have decided to author this piece.

Currently, there are four entry points of the port city. The current fencing arrangement is being carried to cover the open, unpopulated areas of the city. These areas are those which will be the main hub of development works in the near future. We should remain cognizant of the ground realities. Our eastern neighbor openly opposes the CPEC. Hostile foreign

intelligence agencies have been planning to ensure the failure of the mega project. Therefore, it seems feasible to at least fence the open, unpopulated areas of the city.

The fencing of Gwadar city is part of Gwadar Safe City, which is a component of Gwadar Master Plan. It was approved by Gwadar Development Authority's Governing Board. The Gwadar Safe City is a joint project of both federal and provincial government. 50% of the project's funding is provided by the federal government whereas the remaining 50% is provided by the Balochistan government. The director of this project is Commissioner of Makran Division whereas DIG Makran Division is the deputy director of the project. After implementing temporary fencing arrangements, there will be a total of 19 entry points—eight entry points (two major and six minor) will be for vehicular movement

whereas 11 entry points (operational gates) will be for those on foot wanting to enter the port city.

It is important to note that the fencing arrangement is temporary. A wrong perception is being created that fencing will be obstructing the freedom of movement and in a way violate Article 15 of the constitution. The temporary fencing arrangement is being carried out on the open, unpopulated areas of the city because it is not feasible to create checkpoints everywhere.

The fencing of the city will allow gradual removal of checkpoints created within the city for internal security purposes. With the passage of time, these checkpoints will eventually be positioned at the entry points of the city. Consequently, it will have a positive impact on the socio-economic situation of the city. Majority of the local people are associated with the fishing sector.

The temporarily fencing arrangement will not bring any change in their commuting time to sea for fishing activities. However, a gradual reduction of intra-city checkpoints will further ease movement for the local people as well. Moreover, the completion of fencing project will allow to begin the process of deweaponisation in the city. A wrong perception is being created that the primary reason for fencing the city is to protect foreign investors.

It is not only to protect foreigners but local people as well. In the recent past, several terror attacks have been carried out in and around Gwadar. Therefore, the idea is to transform the port city into one large gated community with several entry points. The fencing project is being carried out solely for the safety of locals and foreigners and does not intend to obstruct the freedom of movement or disturb daily

commuting. With Gwadar becoming a large gated city, foreign investors will prefer to invest in the port city without any security fears. The investments will eventually help in a socio-economic uplift of the local populace.

Balochistan High Court has also made its judgment that the Balochistan Assembly is the best forum to discuss the fencing issue. On the instructions of Chief Minister Jam Kamal, the Balochistan government has suspended the work on fencing for now. Meanwhile, Balochistan Assembly has constituted a committee on Gwadar fencing issue. In the end, I would like to once again reiterate that the current fencing arrangement is temporary.

The fencing will be carried out to cover open, unpopulated areas of the city which will remain the main points of development for the next 5-10 years. With the passage of time and development works, the fencing will eventually move to the outskirts of the city.