

The Business

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Talks with Baloch  
insurgents

Prime Minister (PM) Imran Khan has hinted at talking with the Baloch insurgents in order to pacify them. While dilating on the development of Gwadar specifically and Balochistan generally, Imran conceded the Baloch people have not been treated fairly nor have their genuine grievances (accumulated over the decades since Independence) been addressed. This may have induced the angry Baloch to take up arms. In the context of the looming crisis in Afghanistan that may trigger a fresh civil war there and a fresh influx of refugees in Iran and Pakistan, the prime minister underlined the importance of working for peace in Balochistan. While CPEC and Chinese investment in Gwadar and other areas of Balochistan can be expected to bring long overdue development to the most underdeveloped province of Pakistan, these benefits, if they are to change the lives of the Baloch people, can only deliver if development finds ownership by the local populace. One could argue, while looking back at the history of conflict in Balochistan, with the current fifth insurgency by Baloch nationalists in progress, that a fresh approach to this virtually perennial problem is required. Balochistan has been on the receiving end of a heavy-handed, repressive approach, including, but not confined to, military operations since Pakistan came into being. Although it may seem that the original conflict over Balochistan's desire to be treated as a state with treaty status with the British colonialist Crown and thus differently and allowed the right of deciding its own fate and future by now is irrelevant or out of date, the fact that this original conflict was followed by broken promises, exploitation of Balochistan's gas and minerals for the development of the rest of the country while depriving Balochistan of its share and even royalties, only served to add to the list of grievances of the people of Balochistan. Military might unleashed by the Ayub Khan military regime, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government and Pervez Musharraf's regime has only served to fuel the fire. From 1978, when the fourth nationalist insurgency of the 1970s abated, the political mood in Balochistan swung round to fighting for rights within the parliamentary system rather than through armed struggle. Unfortunately, that golden opportunity to find a permanent peaceful solution to Balochistan's woes was wasted since the relatively sparsely populated province could not exercise the kind of heft and influence at the Centre that could have found peaceful, democratic solutions to the province's troubles. The reckless actions of Musharraf in killing Nawab Akbar Bugti produced rebellion by a section of his tribe that had earlier not been part of Balochistan's insurgencies. Needless to say, ending the conflict in Balochistan is not only in the interests of the state and the people of the province, the latter will only acquire a sense of ownership of the CPEC and other development efforts in the province if peace prevails and they are made beneficiaries of the development envisaged for Balochistan.

Beggars can't be choosers



WASEEM-UR-REHMAN KHAN

Since the US decided to quit Afghanistan after its failure in conquering the landlocked country, there was once again some pressure on Pakistan to allow a base to the American forces, similar to the one which was occupied by the US in Peshawar. The Badapir base was a former United States Air Force - CIA listening post, used by the 6937th Communications Group from July 17, 1959 until being evacuated on January 7, 1970. In fact after its failure in Afghanistan, the US wants to continue its hold in the region in some way or other. Instead of accepting the historical fact that no one can capture or occupy Afghanistan, it again tried to befool Pakistan by putting undue pressure on Pakistan. This

time Prime Minister Imran Khan straightaway rejected to give any such facility to the US by saying 'Absolutely not'.

This rejection is a serious shock to the US leadership, who was not expecting any such bold reply from the Pakistani leadership. They only know and are in the habit of hearing 'Yes Sir' whenever they used to exploit us for their expansionist design. In fact, they are in the habit of ordering a plan and not even want to hear how it is going to be executed, considering them as the sole superpower. It is also a fact that the US forces always failed to capture any country be it was Vietnam or Afghanistan. They are not going to accept this fact, considering their so-called superiority in the world.

A student of history should know as far as our beloved country is concerned that when Khan Liaquat Ali Khan ordered the US to vacate its base in Badapir, Peshawar, the result was before us in the form of his assassination in Rawalpindi. The murderer was shot dead soon after he committed the foreign-generated agenda in order to spoil the case. Actually till now, the US was in the habit of listening 'yes sir' from those sitting at the helm of affairs in Islamabad and not even think of whispering 'Absolutely not'.

As a quick punishment, then comes the spontaneous reaction in the form of the denial of Financial Action Task Force (FATF) decision of keeping

Pakistan in the grey list despite the fact that we fulfilled 26 conditions or points out of 27. Actually, it was a political decision under the instigation of our rival bloc, particularly India.

Another punitive action was taken by starting another wave of terrorism in our country. The first and major example is the blast near the residence of Hafiz Saeed in Johar Town, Lahore. Hats off to our law-enforcing agencies and intelligence heroes, who came into action quickly and arrested the mastermind of the blast from Lahore Airport while he was trying to flee to Karachi and then his onward destination. The main culprit was also taken into custody and other perpetrators of the explosion from other cities. Their arrests not only deserve applause but it also sent a message to our enemies, particularly India and its master that we are not going to surrender before their nefarious and evil design-cum-agenda and not ready to compromise on our sovereignty. All the mentioned facts go in favour and credit to our law-enforcing agencies and intelligence heroes, but they at the same time demand from us as a nation to stand with the Prime Minister's 'Absolutely not'. These two words not only carry a denial but at the same time expect from us stand shoulder-and-shoulder with Prime Minister Imran Khan. If we want to live as a nation united against our enemies and stand against the nefarious design of

our enemies who are out to damage us all the time. We should consider Imran Khan as our PM, ignoring all our political pride and prejudices. This is the only way to counter and foil the plan of our enemies. It is the time when we have to prove that we are a brave nation and ready to sacrifice everything that comes in our way of sovereignty and dignity. No doubt, our enemies already know this fact but we have to prove it with our action and deeds.

One must keep this fact in mind that living with dignity among the comity of nations is the sole and only way as far as our existence is concerned. Our geo-political position also demands us to stand by with the prime minister's words 'Absolutely not.' Despite being a divided nation with some people playing or working in the hands of their personal as well as foreign agendas, we should throw away hatred against him till this critical or crucial phase is over.

Brave nations always face tough times with courage and positive approach and not bowing before any other's plan and playing in their hands. In other case we as a nation and country stand no where and this fact should be kept in mind by both sides of the political divide of the country. At the same time we must also keep this fact in mind not to extend any begging bowl before others, be it would be the world economic dacoits, who exploit the poor countries in one way or the other.

Networks of impunity

MIR ADNAN AZIZ

It would be absolutely naive to think that Pakistan's retention on the FATF's grey list had anything to do with our laxity in enforcing its recommendations. Having implemented 26 of the given 27, the FATF's invocation smacks of blatant partisanship; the 'do more' refrain echoes Washington's perpetual mantra. To make things clearer for the undiscerning mind, only Iran and North Korea are on the FATF's blacklist.

A Foreign Policy Magazine report states: "The phrase shell company conjures images of offshore havens such as Panama or the Virgin Islands but one of the world's leading enablers of financial secrecy is actually the United States". TI's 2018 report offers a damning critique of US financial secrecy, labeling it a haven for money launderers and tax evaders.

The irony is starkly epitomized in President Biden representing Delaware as a senator for 36 years. Delaware, home to 870,000 people, houses addresses of more than half of the US publicly traded companies, including 60 percent of the Fortune 500. Further, 378 Trump owned companies are also incorporated here. A small building, '1209 North Orange Street Wilmington, Delaware', is office to over 285,000 shell companies including 5 owned by the Clintons.

A European Council on Foreign Relations study is asserted 'Networks of Impunity'. It captions how Europe continues to be a "secure financial haven for kleptocrats, criminals and

tax evaders". In February 2019, the European Parliament's tax committee reported that "EU member states lack the political will to counter financial crime". The Tax Justice Network has consistently ranked financial systems of the US, Britain, Switzerland, France, Netherlands and Germany among the leading facilitators of unaccounted proceeds. A February 2020 ICIJ expose reveals stark realities of a murky financial underworld. The leaked documents, known as the FinCEN Files, include more than 2,100 suspicious activity reports. These are a mere 0.02 percent of the more than 12 million filed with the US Department of Treasury's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN); purportedly an intelligence unit to combat money laundering.

The ICIJ identifies more than \$2 trillion worth of transactions as "possible money laundering of criminal proceeds" - that too in plain sight of government regulators. A few of the top banks reported in the FinCEN Files are JP Morgan, Deutsche Bank, Standard Chartered, New York Mellon, Barclays, Societe Generale, State Street, Commerzbank AG and PNB Paribas. According to the report, just two banks - Deutsche Bank and JP Morgan - handled suspicious proceeds worth \$1.3 trillion and \$514 billion respectively. Antonio Maria Costa, executive director at the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, said he had seen evidence that the "proceeds of organized crime were the only liquid investment capital available to some (western) banks on the brink of

collapse". A single example, Wachovia Bank, one of the largest US banks, was involved in laundering \$390 billion at the behest of Mexican drug cartels. Wachovia escaped prosecution by paying a paltry \$160 million fine and promising to ramp up its Anti Money Laundering procedures.

The British National Crime Agency reports that "90 billion pounds is being laundered in the UK each year". The British Virgin Islands with a mere 20000 inhabitants is the world's fourth largest recipient of (unaccounted) 'FDI'. Various noted bodies refer to London as the "laundry of choice for criminals". This is just the tip of the iceberg as trillions in criminal proceeds go through laundries of choice peppering the Western financial system. This is enabled by oversight of the very governments that police and penalize the lesser mortals of this world. A proven reality, the economies of states that dare pursue nationalistic policies are made to scream through 'recommending bodies' and 'aid agencies'. The conduct of India, an FATF member since 2010, stands irrefutably proven in its subversive and malicious intent towards Pakistan. Declassified documents reveal how president Nixon, in a bid to oust a democratically elected Salvador Allende, ordered the CIA to "make the economy scream in Chile". In his bestselling 'Confessions of an Economic Hit Man', John Perkins (an insider) chillingly narrates how the economic hit was only the first line of attack. If it failed, then CIA "jackals" were sent in to stage a coup or assassinate an uncooperative leader. If that too failed, then the US would resort to military action - an oft-repeated macabre script.

Lord Cromer famously worded the British Empire's influence on Egypt when he said: "We do not govern Egypt; we govern the governors of Egypt". For all his macho bravado, Gen Musharraf shall always be remembered for his absolute capitulation to Washington's demands. In doing so he opened the gates of hell for Pakistan. Prime Minister Imran Khan's post-budget address was the harbinger of an agonizingly long-awaited national policy. Having treaded a non-compromising path to the stewardship of Pakistan, the 'Taliban Khan', absolutely and rightfully averse to fighting alien wars, stands fully vindicated. We simply cannot afford a proxy war's destructive and harrowing consequences all over again.

Used to a Pakistan governed by serfs, measures to make our economy scream are inevitable. These machinations shall become ever more desperate, given the expected outcome left behind by a vanquished Washington-led juggernaut in a totally ravaged and rudderless Afghanistan.

Our national policy, as laid out unequivocally by the prime minister, based on national interest rather than the inherited ones of unabashed vacillation shall be, as Milton put it, "Hard are the ways of truth and rough to walk". However, our history shall undoubtedly record it as Imran Khan's most cherished legacy; the most en-

Can peace still be won?

MALEEHA LODHI

As a resurgent Taliban continue their military advance in Afghanistan fears are growing in the region and beyond about what lies ahead for the war-torn country. A throwback to the past with armed power struggles between militias? A protracted civil war? An ascendant Taliban flushed with victory eventually setting up a Taliban government with nominal inclusion of minorities? Or will the Taliban reach out to other Afghan parties for negotiations to forge agreement on their country's political arrangements and future?

The American military withdrawal is nearing completion in what President Joe Biden described in his end-of-mission address as a speedier drawdown driven by safety concerns. It has been orderly and so far, casualty-free. This means that the US-Taliban Doha agreement is holding with the Taliban ensuring a peaceful exit. Pakistan has also played a supportive role in facilitating a smooth US pullout through GLOCS (ground lines of communication) and ALOCS (air lines of communication).

But as the US drawdown entered its final phase, with 90 per cent now completed, fighting escalated between Afghan government forces and the Taliban. The Taliban have stepped up their offensive and in a series of military assaults overrun and captured many districts. Their apparent strategy to secure control of highways and encircle cities has seen a growing meltdown of government forces with surrenders by demoralised soldiers across northern Afghanistan that has reinforced their military momentum. Taliban spokesmen claim most districts have been taken by negotiation and without a fight. Having seized areas on the border with China, Iran, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan the Taliban now control the border there with the Afghan government consequently losing their grip over significant parts. Taliban representatives have however sought to reassure anxious neighbours that they pose no threat to the region.

Diplomatic efforts aimed at intra-Afghan negotiations that had stalled in Doha have

been overtaken by fast-moving developments on the ground. Attention has turned to when the Taliban will likely mount an assault on Kabul and whether the ANSF would be able to hold them off for any length of time. Assessments vary about the fall of the Afghan government. Although President Biden has said a Taliban takeover is not inevitable, a much-cited US intelligence assessment concluded it could be as early as six months. Reduced US air support for Afghan forces may contribute to this. Pakistan's assessment is that Kabul could hold out beyond six months.

The Taliban themselves have maintained a meaningful silence on this. Instead, they have announced they plan to accelerate the peace process in the coming month and present a written peace proposal. Their spokesman declared last week that "Although we have the upper hand on the battlefield we are very serious about talks and dialogue". At a recently convened meeting in Moscow a Taliban leader also reiterated the desire for a peaceful settlement. The US, for its part, has warned the Taliban against any military takeover and continued to call for a negotiated settlement. A State Department spokesman said earlier this month that "The world will not accept the imposition by force of a government in Afghanistan. Legitimacy and assistance for any Afghan government can only be possible if that government has a basic respect for human rights". Meanwhile, in response to a question, President Biden stated bluntly that the US would not be responsible if the Taliban took over militarily or if civil war broke out. The key question now is whether the international community can still act to encourage the Taliban and other parties to pursue a negotiated settlement. While Biden said it was time for "determined diplomacy" for peace he did not spell out what this meant other than reiterate that it was up to Afghans to decide their own destiny. Though time is running out there is still a narrow, but fast-closing window for collective action. The most immediate need is for regional states and big powers to desist from arming the warring Afghan sides and to strictly imple-

ment a policy of non-interference in this regard. A joint declaration to this effect should be considered. Anything less will fuel a civil war worse than that witnessed in the 1990s which will only compound the suffering of the Afghan people who yearn for peace and order.

Beyond this, the extended Troika - US, China, Russia and Pakistan - plus Iran (who will need some persuasion) should consider mounting collective pressure on the Afghan parties to encourage them to work for an orderly transition to an interim government. Some would argue it is too late for this. But there is time for a last-ditch effort to avoid a chaotic outcome. Far better than simply watching the situation unravel or issuing platitudinous statements. No country has enough leverage individually but collectively deployed leverage might influence the parties to be responsive. The Troika plus Pakistan and Iran could offer a package of incentives to help spur intra-Afghan talks towards a settlement. This can include three elements. One, an assurance to lend legitimacy to such an outcome especially as the Taliban would want to reinforce, not lose, the international recognition they won with the Doha agreement. Two, an offer to begin the process of delisting of individuals and entities from the UN's sanctions regime; this was promised to the Taliban by the Doha accord in return for entering intra-Afghan talks. And three, the assurance of international economic assistance which the next government in Kabul will need to rebuild a war-ravaged country. Holding out the promise of a peace dividend should also aim to mobilise public pressure on the Afghan parties not to squander an opportunity for peace and stability.

Pakistan should encourage an early meeting of representatives of the extended Troika countries even if it is convened virtually to issue a no-arms supply and non-interference declaration as well as agree on a package of incentives to place before the Afghan parties. Let it not be said that diplomacy failed the people of Afghanistan who have already suffered so much through decades of war, turmoil and strife. And let history not judge



Dead heat

RICHARD ESKOW

What if you saw someone walking past a burning house who paid no attention to it? They don't try to put out the fire. They do nothing to help the people crying out inside. They just keep walking. You would think there was something wrong with them, wouldn't you? Now imagine the burning house is their own, and their own friends and family are trapped inside. That seems sociopathic. And yet that person is us, and the house is humanity's common home. But you know that already. Observations like that are so commonplace nowadays they've become clichés. You may have already stopped reading this, and I don't blame you if you have. After all, we know exactly what we're doing to ourselves. We just don't know what to do about it. Or we're not willing to do what needs to be done.

Welcome to your future: "Officials on Friday hunted for any missing residents of a British Columbia town destroyed by wildfire as Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau offered federal assistance ... The roughly 1,000 residents of Lytton had to abandon their homes with just a few minutes notice Wednesday evening after suffering the previous day under a record high of 121.2 Fahrenheit (49.6 Celsius). "Officials said it was un-

clear whether anyone remained in the village 95 miles (150 kilometers) northeast of Vancouver due to a lack of cell service and because it wasn't safe to enter most of the area."

Welcome to your future: "California has declared a state of emergency to address power system concerns, as parts of the US south-west reported dangerously high temperatures. An excessive heat warning is in place for much of Arizona and California, and southern areas of Nevada and Utah. People are being told to stay in air-conditioned areas and out of the sun. "Californians have also been urged to conserve energy during peak times, as temperatures are expected to remain between 100-110F until Sunday."

The California Independent System Operator, which controls most of the state's power grid, asked people to set thermostats to 78F or higher, avoid using major appliances and unnecessary lights. "In Phoenix, Arizona, the temperatures reached 118F on Thursday, while Las Vegas reported 115F and Denver reached 100F for the third day in a row. About 50 million people were under excessive heat warnings and heat advisories across the south-west." Power that comes and goes. The oppressive sensation of never feeling cool. The sun an alien and hostile object overhead.

Welcome to your future: "Global warming will increase the chances of