

FATF compliance

By **Muhammad Amir Rana**

THE government is anticipating substantial relief for Pakistan in the Financial Action Task Force's upcoming plenary meeting scheduled at the end of the month. The official statements give the impression that Pakistan is successfully approaching full compliance on most FATF recommendations. They also believe that the international political environment on the eve of American forces' withdrawal from Afghanistan is in Pakistan's favour.

Although the Asia-Pacific Group (APG), a FATF affiliate on money-laundering issues, has retained Pakistan on its Enhanced Follow-Up list in its second follow-up report, it has issued a positive evaluation of Pakistan's overall compliance. The APG has evaluated that the country is now "largely compliant" with 24 FATF recommendations, "compliant" with seven, "partially compliant" with another seven and still "non-compliant" with two. It has acknowledged that Pakistan has made progress in addressing technical compliance deficiencies that has helped the country improve its compliance, in all, to 31 recommendations out of a total of 40.

The officials, too, believe that the APG's evaluation report has almost overruled the option of putting Pakistan on the FATF blacklist. However, as the report has come out only a few weeks before the FATF's plenary meeting, it may not have any immediate bearing on the upcoming FATF assessment of Pakistan, mainly in terms of keeping or moving it out of the grey list.

In its last meeting in February, the FATF had urged Pakistan to address three strategically important deficiencies related to investigations and prosecutions of terrorism-financing cases. The FATF also demanded proof and most importantly asked for the effective implementation of targeted financial sanctions against all UN Security Council-designated terrorists. Apparently, the FATF will mainly review progress on these three aspects. The APG report has also noted that Pakistani authorities considered 12 terrorist organisations for threat profiles but only in terms of inflows and not the outflow of funds to support terrorist activities.

On the FATF's last three apprehensions, the federal government submitted its compliance report last month. After the submission of the report, optimism increased among the authorities concerned as the compliance report indicated that the government had further strengthened its Combating the Financing of Terrorism (CFT) regime.

According to media reports, the federal government has devised a strategy to implement the CFT and anti-money laundering (AML) laws including for regulating the forfeiture, management and auction of property and assets related to money-laundering cases. The government will form specialised bodies to deal with instances of money laundering and terrorism financing. These bodies are intended to work with agencies like the National

Counter-Terrorism Authority, the Federal Board of Revenue, and the Federal Investigation Agency, among others, to successfully meet FATF requirements and fulfil the remaining three tasks. Cases pertaining to money laundering will be transferred from police and provincial anti-corruption agencies to these new specialised bodies. However, it remains to be seen whether or not the FATF members express their confidence in it.

Apart from the APG evaluation, and Pakistan's compliance report submitted to the FATF, the government is also confident that the international political scenario has changed since last year, elevating Pakistan's political position and reducing Indian pressure. The US and its Nato allies need Pakistan during and after the withdrawal of their forces from Afghanistan. If Pakistan anticipates some relief from Western countries, it should not ignore the Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan factor, which has annoyed not only France but also its allies. The government's move on the TLP's demand to initiate a debate in parliament on the question of expelling the French ambassador to Pakistan has created real concern in Western capitals. France is an effective member of the FATF and along with its allies it could make Pakistan's position weak. Recently, the UK placed Pakistan on its list of high-risk countries for money laundering and terror financing, and official circles are linking this development with the TLP and the UK's solidarity with France.

No doubt, Pakistan has made serious efforts to address the deficiencies in its CFT/AML regime, but it has largely happened because of the FATF pressure. The government has evolved multiple initiatives to address FATF's concerns, but a comprehensive institutional response mechanism will take time to become fully functional. It will require strengthening regulatory frameworks and bodies and effective coordination among institutions dealing with CFT and AML, along with a zero-tolerance policy against all radical and violent religious groups.

The government has formed a 12-member National Coordination Committee on the FATF. The members of the committee include the federal finance minister and the federal secretaries of finance, foreign affairs and interior, besides the heads of all the institutions and regulators concerned with money laundering and terror financing.

They include the governor of the State Bank of Pakistan, chairman of the Securities & Exchange Commission of Pakistan, director general of the Federal Investigation Agency, member (Customs) of the Federal Board of Revenue, and DG of the Financial Monitoring Unit (FMU). A FATF Secretariat was also established for coordination purposes among the stakeholders.

Though the committee is not functional yet, it has brought security institutions' oversight into the implementation process. The security institutions are trying to pursue the implementation plan, but this is not a permanent solution. Fulfilling FATF compliance is not a one-time task; instead, it is about regulating financial flows and the regulations will need a permanent mechanism. This can be achieved by removing overlapping institutions and multiple regulators. For example, the interior ministry has formed its own dedicated

FATF sections that directly coordinate with FMU on operational matters, but they also coordinate with the secretariat if the latter requires some information.

Apparently, banned outfits like the Jamaatud Dawa and Jaish-e-Mohammad have disappeared from the scene, but many experts believe these groups are in hibernation and will become active whenever they find a conducive environment. Meanwhile, the TLP has emerged as a new challenge, which is making Pakistan's task to get out of the grey list a difficult one.

The writer is a security analyst.

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Ambivalent Approach of the FATF

Pakistan will stay on the grey list

By **Sajjad Shaukat**

In a second Follow up Report (FUR) on the Mutual Evaluation of Pakistan, released on June 5, this year, the Asia Pacific Group (APG) which is a regional body of the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force (FATF) said that Pakistan's rating on 21 of the 40 technical recommendations of the FATF against money laundering and terror financing has been improved, but retained it on 'Enhanced Follow-up' for sufficient outstanding requirements.

The finance ministry and Federal Energy Minister Hammad Azhar, who is also head of the task force on FATF, separately welcomed the re-rating, saying that the results proved the government's sincerity along with its resolve in complying with the FATF requirements.

But, showing an ambivalent approach, the APG report also downgraded the country due to "insufficient progress" and pertained to mutual legal assistance (MLA) with other countries by elaborating: "Pakistan was re-rated to 'compliant' status on five counts and on 15 others to 'largely compliant' and on yet another count to 'partially compliant...Pakistan will continue to report back to the APG on progress to strengthen Anti-money Laundering (AML) and Combating Financing Terror (CFT) measures."

Pakistan submitted its third progress report in February 2021 and it has yet to be evaluated.

And the development comes only a few weeks ahead of a meeting of the FATF to decide on Pakistan's grey-list status.

However, Pakistan's continuation on the 'grey list' means that it will not get any respite in trying to access finances in the form of investments and aid from global entities, including international bodies like IMF.

Nevertheless, after holding the plenary meetings virtually from February 22-25, 2021 in Paris, the FATF had kept Pakistan on the grey list for another extended period till June 2021 and asked for complying with the remaining three points of 27 action plan to target AML and CFT.

FATF's three remaining demands includes (1) TF [terror financing] investigations and prosecutions of target persons and entities (2) TF prosecutions result in effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions and (3) effective implementation of targeted financial sanctions TFS [terror financing sanctions) against all 1267 and 1373 designated terrorists, specifically those acting for or on their behalf.

Addressing an online news briefing in Paris, the FATF's President Dr. Marcus Pleyer had said: "Pakistan will remain on the grey list as some deficiencies still exist as out of 27 action plans."

The FATF authorities provided an opportunity to many Indian journalists to ask questions, but many Pakistani journalists could not get a chance despite raising their hands in the news briefing.

In fact, an active Indian lobbying and propaganda campaign to blacklist Pakistan failed, while a minimum of three votes by FATF members are required to avoid the blacklist and Islamabad enjoys the unwavering support of Malaysia, Turkey, and its all-weather friend China.

Some pro-Indian European countries, especially France and Germany, had recommended to the FATF to maintain Pakistan on the gray checklist, saying that not all factors had been totally applied by Islamabad.

Last year, the PTI-led government got three laws—the Anti-Money Laundering (Second Amendment) Bill 2020, Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) (Third Amendment) Bill 2020 and Islamabad Capital Territory Waqf Properties Bill 2020, which were passed in the joint sitting of Parliament.

In recent months, law enforcement agencies have cracked down on hardliner-religious groups such as Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP), and the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and its welfare arms, Jamaatud Dawa (JuD) and Falah-e-Insanyat—and on their sources of income, arresting, trying, and convicting several of their members and leaders.

Pakistan has been on the grey list of the FATF since June 2018. In this regard, some Western countries and especially India have been calling on Islamabad to take action against the terror groups to avoid 'Dark Grey' list status of the FATF. They have long failed to do so. Indian media spreads disinformation that Pakistan may be put on 'Dark Grey' list.

For years, New Delhi has been, also accusing Islamabad of using the banking system to sponsor terrorism.

On the other side, involvement of Indian banks in money laundering and financing terrorism has been exposed. In this context, on September 27, last year, a report of the top-secret files of the US Treasury Department's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) which works to combat money laundering, terrorism financing and financial fraud, has revealed the "involvement of Indian banks, including the state-owned banks, in money laundering through transactions used in facilitating and financing acts of terrorism, particularly in the region—The entities and individuals were involved in money laundering of \$1.53 billion through 3,201 illegal and suspicious transactions between 2011 and 2017". There are also reports that gold and diamond were also used for money laundering, while the Indian Premier League (cricket tournament) has also been pointed out for money laundering practices by the Indian judiciary.

It is mentionable that in November 2020, at a joint press conference and a joint press briefing, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and ISPR Director General Major-General Babar Iftikhar unveiled a dossier containing "irrefutable evidence" of India's sponsorship of terrorism in Pakistan. They revealed: "We have apprehended a RAW-sponsored sleeper cell in Karachi, which wants to create unrest in the country... India united Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan [TTP] with banned dissident [Terror] organizations... Indian intelligence agencies are also trying to establish Daesh-e-Pakistan... has recently shifted 30 terrorists of Daesh to Pakistan."

Afterwards, Pakistan's Ambassador to the UN Munir Akram handed over the dossier to the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres.

In its 27th report, dated February 3, the UN Security Council's monitoring team for tracking terrorist groups verified Pakistan's dossier, while acknowledging Pakistan's efforts in arresting individuals engaging in terrorism financing and noting the threat from the TTP—the reunification of splinter groups [of TTP] in Afghanistan, which enhanced the threat of terrorism not only to Pakistan but the entire region.

According to the UN report of 26 July 2020, "The banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and its splinter group Jamaat-ul-Ahrar continue to target Pakistan from their bases in Afghanistan... the significant presence of ISIL-K (The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant Khorasan) in Afghanistan", which the UN warns "now pursues a global agenda."

Moreover, the EU DisinfoLab continued unraveling gradually India's terror-network and anti-Pakistan propaganda campaign.

Nonetheless, the FATF was formed in 1989 by the G7 Summit in Paris to combat the growing problem of money laundering, monitoring legislative, financial and law enforcement activities taken at the national and international level, reporting on compliance, and issuing recommendations.

The organisation's mandate was expanded to include terrorist financing following the September 11 terror attacks in the USA in 2001.

Although FATF's member-countries are the USA and other Western countries, and include many Islamic states, and the decisions of the US-led major Western countries prevail on the organisation. Hence, FATF shows an ambivalent approach, as it has become a tool of keeping pressure on Islamabad, while ignoring New Delhi.

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Not by words alone

By **Maleeha Lodhi**

THERE have been a series of official pronouncements that the government is shifting the focus of Pakistan's foreign policy from geopolitics to geoeconomics. This 'shift' was first announced in March during the 'Islamabad Policy Dialogue' organised by the National Security Division and addressed by Pakistan's political and military leaders.

As summarised on a government website this 'dialogue' outlined a 'new' policy direction that involved prioritising economic security, changing the "narrative of geopolitical contestation to geoeconomic cooperation", increasing "Pakistan's economic footprint globally" and promoting "regional connectivity". The foreign minister stated several times since that the government is working on transforming the country's "geopolitics to geoeconomic policy".

If these assertions mean that Pakistan will henceforth subordinate its geostrategic aims to strengthening its economy and reorient foreign policy to serve the country's domestic economic interests and promote growth and prosperity then it is a welcome shift. However, any policy shift must have substance and clarity otherwise it remains a declaration of intent. As these official statements have yet to be elaborated or specify the means by which the policy is to be pursued, the 'shift' is, for now, a desire not a strategy. Conceptual and operational clarity is essential before announcing a policy change as is its timing. It is questionable how geoeconomics will be separated from geopolitics as the two are interrelated. Moreover, at a time when Pakistan is confronted with more than one geopolitical storm — regional and global — how exactly will the country negotiate geopolitical challenges while pivoting to geoeconomics? Afghanistan is at an inflection point facing the growing danger of descending into chaos with serious ramifications for Pakistan's security. Relations remain tense and unpredictable with India which continues on a repressive course in occupied Kashmir with demographic changes and further bifurcation of the state looming, which is bound to further inflame the situation. US-China confrontation is casting a shadow over the region posing a challenge for Islamabad that wants to avoid getting into its crosshairs but may find that a tough balancing act. Thus, geopolitics and Pakistan's security dilemmas cannot be wished away by declarations alone. A new strategy or policy shift has to be matched to reality. More on this later.

What is really meant by geoeconomics? The international literature on this is instructive. There is little agreement on how to define geoeconomics with the term used in different ways. Definitions include the geostrategic use of economic power, using "economic tools to advance geopolitical objectives", achievement of foreign policy outcomes by economic, not military, power projection, and "use of economic instruments to promote and defend

national interests, and produce beneficial geopolitical results". Some see geoeconomics as a form of statecraft that deploys geopolitical power and leverages geography to achieve economic ends.

Edward Luttwak, a US strategic thinker, first forged the term geoeconomics in 1990 in the Cold War's aftermath. He argued that commerce was displacing military power as a tool for countries to deploy with geoeconomics emerging as an "admixture of the logic of war with the methods of commerce". Building on previous scholarly works, the book *War by other Means* by Robert Blackwill and Jennifer Harris contributed to the global debate on the rising role of geoeconomics in the international arena by examining the means adopted by the US, China and others to accomplish foreign policy goals. More and more states they wrote "are waging geopolitics with capital, attempting with sovereign checkbooks and other economic tools to achieve strategic objectives that were in the past the stuff of military coercion or conquest".

In a recent book titled *Geoeconomics and Power Politics in the 21st Century*, one of its writers points out that geoeconomics has not entirely replaced military means of statecraft. Both instruments coexist and are deployed by countries depending on what they consider appropriate for the challenges they confront. The book emphasises that in making use of economic tools the factors that count in geoeconomic strategies include markets, resources, and ability to control and direct investment to compete effectively.

Almost all the recent literature identifies China as the world's leading exponent and "practitioner of geoeconomics". With ample justification. China's Belt and Road Initiative is the biggest and most ambitious geoeconomic enterprise of this century. Encompassing over 70 countries and engaging 138 states it aims to build land and maritime networks involving infrastructure, power projects and telecommunications to promote trade and resource flows, achieve economic integration and boost economic growth and development. In Africa and Latin America, Chinese influence has expanded through targeted investments giving it unprecedented strategic outreach.

Geoeconomics has been successfully pursued not just by big powers but smaller and medium-sized countries too. The crucial and obvious requirement is domestic economic strength and resources. Does Pakistan have the economic attributes regarded as prerequisites to pursue a geoeconomic policy? The most fundamental requirement is a strong economy. With an economy perpetually burdened by crises in public finance caused by chronic budget and balance of payments deficits, Pakistan has yet to seriously address these structural problems to achieve sustainable growth. A narrow tax base and failure to mobilise domestic resources has inevitably meant growing indebtedness and reliance on frequent IMF bailouts. A limited and undiversified export base plus lack of innovation has also prevented the country from becoming a player in global markets and economy.

Therefore, if Pakistan wants to pursue a geoeconomics policy in any meaningful way it has to transform its economy, ensure a stable political environment and reorder its internal priorities and budget allocations. Economic power and capability cannot be 'borrowed' or 'imported' from outside but built at home by undertaking long postponed structural reforms. The essential ingredients of a strong economy are internal.

If by geoeconomics the government means leveraging the country's location to become a regional hub that vision has been projected by every government since the 1990s. It was never realised because of regional geopolitical tensions and the country's weak economic fundamentals. And that too requires a strong economic foundation including efficient and attractive markets.

No country can talk its way into effecting a policy shift. Unless it is backed by substance and reflects reality it remains a vision on paper, not in practice.

*The writer is a former ambassador to the US,
UK & UN.*

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Covid-19 and the foreign strategies of Pakistan

By **Dr. Iram Naseer**

Voltaire on one occasion said, "The danger which is least expected soonest comes to us," Indeed, illness and infections have afflicted mankind since the earliest days. Nonetheless, it was not until agricultural societies evolved that the transmission of these viruses increased noticeably. Malaria, tuberculosis, leprosy, influenza, smallpox, and other diseases first developed during these early years. The more cultured humans turned out to be—with loftier cities, more glamorous trade courses, and improved exchange with diverse ecosystems—the more likely infections spread in human history.

In this context, if we examine the current situation, the world is changing its attitude from a security-oriented post 9/11 position to a growth concentrated post Covid-19 epoch. The virus has smashed South Asia with full force and its second and third upsurge may influence the region more intensely. Being a key state, both internationally and locally, Pakistan's approach influences the region tremendously. In respect to the country itself, Pakistan has maintained a practical position when formulating its foreign affairs opinions and having it understood internationally while dealing with the turmoil of COVID-19. A maintainable concord with Afghanistan and a respectable relationship with it was one of Pakistan's top priorities. Our position in the Afghan Peace Process will help bring about peace in the region. According to the most recent developments, a contract between the two nations to renew business has also been made under the Afghan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) of 2010.

In other news, Islamabad donated medical materials to India, which is in the midst of an uncontrollable and devastating Covid-19 wave. Ventilators, personal protective equipment, digital X-ray machines and other linked apparatus along with fifty ambulances from the Edhi Center have been sent across the border. If both nations can work together for the quick transfer of this aid then it is not beyond doubt that further collaboration is possible between the two. In fact, Pakistan has embarked upon missions to collaborate with India. Recently, for example, the Foreign Minister of Pakistan spoke to the UN about Palestine and highlighted our priorities to be peace and negotiation, admirably so. As Shah Mahmood Qureshi stated, "It is time to say enough, the voice of the Palestinian people cannot be silenced, what we do today or cannot do would be recorded in history, driven by arrogance and encouraged by license."

It is quite interesting to note that it was Pakistan that proposed holding an online conference for South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) meetings. This is noteworthy because it shows that regional teamwork has been reinvigorated,

something that was previously lacking. While the pandemic brought all the states together, Pakistan took the moment to highlight concern about Kashmir as well.

It goes without saying that the world is heading more towards regionalism. Peace in Kabul cannot be denied at any cost. Neither Pakistan nor other South Asian states can allow a civil war in Kabul. The government of Pakistan should maintain its stance, specifically in light of the ruthless guerilla attacks that have taken place in Afghanistan lately. Another challenge ahead of our government the provision of visas for external Pakistanis, especially from the Gulf. Furthermore, according to the World Bank, 'Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka would be the most disturbed states during this pandemic.' Thus, handling debt is another important challenge ahead of the government. This would be the time for authorities to focus on aiding the market through empowering industries and enacting guards against inexpensive imports. This would reduce our independence on external states and improve domestic developments.

Pakistan should continue to promote mutual cooperation within regional mediums like the OIC and SAARC. Such degree of diplomacy should also be used in dealing with the pandemic. We have had far too many disastrous encounters with Covid-19, now the focus should be on eliminating the effects of the pandemic entirely. On the other hand, we must devise a strategy against the US' continuous apprehensions over CPEC and the economic advances China is making world-over. It is understandable that all efforts as of right now are directed towards controlling the pandemic but some thought must also be given to external affairs and the stance we want to assume. The point is to act responsibly within the constraints of the pandemic.

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Impact of India's Hybrid warfare on National Security of Pakistan

Now India is using fresh tools against Pakistan

By Raania Siddiqui

Clausewitz, On War 1780-1831

War methods have transformed over the years from first- generation warfare to fifth, also known as hybrid warfare. Hybrid warfare is a military strategy which employs a blend of conventional and non-conventional warfare with political, irregular and emerging, alternating technologies being the most influential. It is the most dangerous form of warfare because it is hard to locate the targeted aspect as well as the direction of the incoming unleashed weapon.

Historically, Pakistan and India have been at war more than once and still continue with border skirmishes and minor conflicts involving trade and diplomacy, however, now India has shifted its strategy to hybrid warfare.

India made unlimited attempts to adversely affect the national security of Pakistan, however; Pakistan emerged victorious and defeated India through its strong course of counterattacks. Some tactics used by India to destabilize Pakistan's security includes; evident insurgency through state-sponsored terrorism as in the Kulbhushan Yadav case, Lawfare; through abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution revoking the special status of Indian-Occupied Kashmir, the 2019 Pulwama- Balakot crisis, and the Indian Chronicles: India's disinformation campaign.

India struck on several fronts, isolating Pakistan from the rest of the world. It has openly financed terrorism in Pakistan for many years. India's state-sponsored terrorism was an attempt to paint Pakistan as a failing terrorist state on the worldwide stage. In recent years, India has been globally exposed as a sponsor of terrorism in Balochistan via Kulbhushan Yadav. An Indian agent who worked under the alias Hussain Mubarak Patel, who was apprehended at Pak-Iran border by border security forces in 2016, he confessed to being an Indian Navy officer recruited by the Indian intelligence agency, Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). He claimed that his purpose was to inflict insurgency in Balochistan. Separatist groups were funded financially and equipped militarily to fight against the government of Pakistan. These separatist groups include the Balochistan Liberation Army, the Baloch Republican Army and the Baloch Liberation Front. India completely denied any relation with the spy.

After facing defeat in creating anarchy in Pakistan, India again shifted towards the innocent Kashmiris and started to provoke them deliberately. Indian government abolished decades-old laws that gave a measure of autonomy to the disputed Muslim-majority region. Indian-Occupied Kashmir was stripped of its special status under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution and put under an infinite lockdown since 5 August 2019 with internet blackout, downgraded from a state to an union territory, and split into two. Article 370 had allowed the Indian-administered region jurisdiction to make its own laws in all matters except finance, defence, foreign affairs and communications.

Ever since the Kargil incident in 1999, the Pulwama-Balakot crisis is the most serious military engagement between India and Pakistan. The Pulwama attack occurred in Indian-Occupied Kashmir, killing more than 40 personnel of the Indian Central Reserve Police Force. An attack was initiated by the Indian Air Force as they released payloads of bombs in Balakot, an area in KPK, on 26 February 2019. This led to an air combat between the Indian and Pakistani Air Forces on 27 February, which resulted in the loss of two Indian aircraft and the capture of Indian Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman by Pakistan.

"Essentially combat is an expression of hostile feelings. But in the large-scale combat that we call war hostile feelings often have become merely hostile intentions. At any rate, there are usually no hostile feelings between individuals. Yet such emotions can never be completely absent from war. Modern wars are seldom fought without hatred between nations; this serves as a more or less substitute for the hatred between individuals. Even when there is no natural hatred and no animosity to start with, the fighting itself will stir up hostile feelings: violence committed on superior orders will stir up the desire for revenge and retaliation against the perpetrator rather than against the powers that ordered the action. It is only human (or animal, if you like), but it is a fact."

(Carl von Clausewitz)

Indian Chronicle is a very recent episode of India's hybrid warfare against Pakistan. The Indian state intelligence agencies carried out a disinformation campaign against Pakistan for 15 years. There was fake news development against Pakistan in more than 116 countries and 9 regions of the world. It hijacked definite international organizations such as the UN and EU parliament and its members. Around 750 fake news outlets and more than 550 domain names, which not only created an eco-cycle around Indian information operations, which were then amplified by the Asian News International (ANI); fake news agencies that created this mass perception against Pakistan. Its purpose was to distort Pakistan's image internationally through registration of fake domains. Even the deceased were resurrected for anti-Pakistan statements.

Although these tactics used by India to destabilize the national security of Pakistan did not persist for long, they did damage it. It affected the national security of Pakistan politically, economically, militarily and socially. Politically it attempted to tarnish the image of the country internationally. Economically it added Pakistan to the FATF grey list in

accusations of money laundering and terror financing. Militarily it started insurgencies and increased border conflicts. And in the social media, propaganda and disinformation at the global level were initiated. However, its effort stands null and void before the counter-efforts of Pakistan.

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Afghanistan: A rear mirror view

By **Najm us Saqib**

Terming it a terrorist attack on America, Al-Qaeda's head Osama Bin Laden was identified as the man responsible for 9/11 in which nearly 3000 people died. Upon the Taliban's refusal to handover the culprit, a month later, the US launched air strikes against Afghanistan 'to disrupt its use as a terrorist base of operations and to attack the military capability of the Taliban regime'. British, Canadian and other NATO troops joined in the war, removing the Taliban from power. The rest is history.

Twenty years later, US troops are preparing to leave Afghanistan after seeing the demise of Bin Laden, Al-Qaeda, thousands of people and the dream of a stable Afghanistan. Even after spending billions of dollars and rendering unprecedented sacrifices by the US and its allies, the Taliban are still looking strong with their ominous capability to not only inflict harm but also to rule the country. Notwithstanding the promises of reconstruction, Marshall Plan, several political and monetary pledges, the country remains as unstable as it was two decades ago or even before.

In the event of an international dispute, it is advisable to put to use the available tools of negotiation, conciliation, litigation, mediation, good offices and arbitration before resorting to coercive means such as reprisals, embargos or intervention. The international law is available to ensure the preservation of global peace and security. Equally so are the United Nations, the Regional Agencies and a number of multilateral treaties. The use of amicable means in addressing international disputes lies in the heart of maintaining peace and security in the world. However, the US had decided to circumvent all available means for peaceful settlements of disputes and took the military route in response to 9/11 attacks. Perhaps it did so because not only was its sovereignty challenged within its own territory but its status as the sole superpower of the world also came under clouds of uncertainty.

Inserting out Bin Laden or eliminating Al-Qaeda, the US must have launched its comprehensive plan of action only after gathering and weighing relevant information and evidence, assessing, identifying, defining and reviewing the alternative resolutions and calculating the risks and consequences involved. During the decision making process, all pros and cons would have been discussed threadbare including all related facts like the weaknesses and strengths of the opposing sides. Knowing the gravity of the issue, some space must have been kept to review and evaluate the decision enabling Washington to realign the strategy and the subsequent tactics accordingly. In designing a venture of such a huge magnitude, the strategists and policy makers must have envisioned the elements of unpredictability involved along with covering the basics such as accommodating, compromises, collaboration, disagreements, avoiding and defeating. Keeping the ultimate

objectives in mind, the overall strategy must have also factored in crisis management and the subsequent conflict resolution while aiming at achieving a win-win solution.

Something must have gone terribly wrong along the way as the ultimate victory still seems elusive. Either certain new objectives were included in the initial plan or there were some unstated objectives that still needed to be achieved. Otherwise, why would Washington wish to keep a tab on Afghanistan even after its troops leave the Graveyard of Empires after a considerably long stay of twenty years? If the consideration was to eliminate the bases of terrorists or bring peace in the country and provide a broad-based political government to the people of Afghanistan, the withdrawal of troops could have been delayed. If these objectives remained hard to pin down while staying inside the country for so long, how will Washington achieve these being stationed outside the country? If the withdrawal of troops is going to help Afghanistan or the juxtaposed states, why is the US being urged for a 'responsible withdrawal'? Which one of the stakeholders in the Afghan conflict—like Pakistan, Iran, China, Russia, Turkey or Central Asian states—is pleased to see the foreign troops leaving Afghanistan in the prevailing mess is anybody's guess. The only content stakeholder seems to be the Taliban, who are somehow still underestimating the US' might and its power to destroy, especially when it is attacked.

Coincidentally, a recent UN report has revealed that the Al Qaeda leader Ayman Zawahiri is alive and resides somewhere in the border area of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Is it some kind of a signal that the menacing Al Qaeda threat was still looming large and the US should reconsider its withdrawal plan? Given the fact that the world has seen many withdrawal plans and their postponements in the past, it would not be surprising for the South Asian experts if the US withdrew from its withdrawal plan before September. In any case, after the ultimate withdrawal of troops, there is no restriction on the US to redeploy its troops in Afghanistan, if and when any emerging situation demanded it.

All said and done, history has proved that Afghanistan cannot be ruled by any outside forces. Afghanistan will be settled on Afghanistan's terms. The Taliban are a reality and the resistance forces are likely to prevail even if the Afghan conflict becomes another hundred-year war. As there will be no American umbrella available and there will be less funds flowing to Kabul, expect President Ghani to cry wolf every now and then. Undoubtedly, there is chaos waiting around the corner and in the event of a civil war, expect another huge influx of refugees in Pakistan and Iran. Looking at the prevailing geo-strategic regional situation, the stakes are much higher for Pakistan now than they were in October 2001. Hence, playing its hand wisely seems more important for Islamabad than playing its 'role' this time. Providing air bases to the US is not the only issue requiring sagacity, wisdom, restraint and farsightedness. Islamabad must prove beyond any reasonable doubt that its leverage over the Taliban is more of a myth than a reality.