

THE LOOMING THREAT

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

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Khaled Ahmed was born in 1943 in Jallandhar during the siege of Stalingrad. He has been an opinion writer based in Pakistan for the past 40 years. Over his decades of experience, he has worked for [The Pakistan Times](#), [The Nation](#), [The Frontier Post](#), [The Friday Times](#) and [The Daily Times](#), three of which have been closed down either permanently or temporarily. He is now consulting editor at [Newsweek Pakistan](#), based in Lahore. Ahmed graduated from Government College Lahore during the 1965 war with India with an MA (Honours) on the roll of honour, along with a diploma in German from Punjab University. In 1970, he received a diploma in Russian (Interpretation) from Moscow State University. In 2006, he wrote the book, *Sectarian War: Sunni-Shia Conflict in Pakistan* at the Woodrow Wilson Centre in Washington DC.

On January 31, [The Indian Express](#) wrote in its editorial: “In Washington, Kabul and Delhi, there is apprehension that President Donald Trump is abandoning Afghanistan to the Taliban and the Pakistan Army. Pakistan, on the other hand, sees its dream of a pliable Afghanistan within reach.”

Afghanistan is a member of SAARC but SAARC is scuttled by the India-Pakistan rivalry. India-China relations are unfriendly and New Delhi sees the CPEC as a menacing development. Pakistan, economically belly-up, needs handouts and finds itself opposed by Iran because of the crucial dollars coming to Pakistan from the Arabs.

Pakistanis who choose to be objective see nothing but trouble with a Taliban comeback in Afghanistan. It sees elements in Afghanistan working for India to “balance” what New Delhi perceives Pakistan is doing in Jammu & Kashmir. It has retaliated through alienated Baloch and Pashtun elements creating trouble in Karachi. Pakistan has caught some of the terrorists that attacked the Chinese consulate in Karachi in November 2018 and thinks the attack was actually planned and executed by RAW.

Pakistan doesn't see the Afghan Taliban as its friend. The dislike is mutual from the days Pakistan thought it could manipulate them as proxy warriors. After 9/11, millions of Afghans were forced to become refugees in Pakistan. The Taliban who shifted into Pakistan's tribal belt, were mishandled and allowed to destroy the tribal system of authority in an area that can contain two states the size of Switzerland.

Pakistan's own Taliban, created by the al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, became the “enemy within” and joined up with the Afghan Taliban who reject the Afghan-Pakistan border called the Durand Line. Both kinds of Taliban support themselves financially by kidnapping rich Pakistanis, prominent among them sons of the Punjab governor and Pakistan's prime minister. At the time of writing, the latest of the doctors of Quetta — 17th in a row — picked up by the Taliban has returned after a month of captivity after paying Rs 50 million.

Pakistan wants normal relations with India after decades of bad blood but India may soft-pedal the issue till after the election. India's presence in Afghanistan can be beneficial for the region if it normalises relations with Pakistan. A majority of foreign policy experts advise free trade and free movement of people under SAARC.

Most objective Pakistani observers think that the return of the Taliban in Afghanistan will endanger Pakistan because the new conflict between the bearded warriors and a “liberal” Afghanistan plus the non-Pashtuns of the north will spill over into Pakistan. The Pashtun of the tribal areas are alienated too after remaining backward for 70 years in a “tribal museum” under state policy, forcing them to migrate inland and to the Gulf states.

India should read what three high commissioners of Pakistan to India thought of Pakistan’s India policy in the Institute of Regional Studies Islamabad publication Indian Grand Strategy: Machiavellian or Kautilyan?”

Riaz Khokhar’s (1992-1997) advice: “There is a need for us to put a dampener on our proactivity about Kashmir, because our moment of action would inevitably come at some point in time. We should maintain our cool in the present crisis as the basis of reciprocity. We should not activate the LoC and should restrict our rhetoric internally.”

Ashraf Jahangir Qazi (1997-2002) says: “We need to resolve the relatively easily resolvable disputes with India and move towards normal trading relations with it for the economic prosperity of our country and well-being of our people. Pakistan’s response will have to be much more calculated than it has been in the past.”

Aziz Ahmed Khan (2003-2006) posted the following insights: “from being a foolish person, Prime Minister Modi of India is a very accomplished politician and administrator. He places a lot of emphasis on efficiency of bureaucracy. When he was Chief Minister in Gujarat he used to rely more on a coterie of efficient bureaucrats rather than his ministers. We should focus inwards... Pakistan will have to take stronger action against the likes of Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi and Hafiz Saeed.”

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