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Afghanistan 2017 Offers "No Exit" Options to the United States:

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Sensing that the violent paroxysms of the Pakistan Army-Taliban combine in 2017 in disrupting Afghanistan brook no conflict-resolution, the United States this week wisely decided to reinforce US Forces in Afghanistan by another 4,000 troops, possibly, politically signalling a 'Statement of Intent' that more troop surges could follow.

Contemporaneously in 2017 Afghanistan emerges as even more pivotal for United States national security interests than ever before. As pointed in my recent SAAG Papers on the subject that the United States cannot afford to abandon or abdicate from its security commitments on Afghanistan and leave it to the machinations of the China-Pakistan-Russia Trilateral.

US President Trump has wisely delegated authority to his Defence Secretary General Mattis to solely decide the troop's requirements to stabilise Afghanistan. This is a welcome step moving away from the past years of micro-management of Afghanistan military operations by the political establishment in Washington.

Since Afghanistan in 2017 offers 'No-Exit' options to the United States, it becomes incumbent that the United States policy establishment should recognise some essential home-truths to achieve the end-aims of stabilising Afghanistan and making it secure against the terrorism

First and foremost is to identify the main disruptionist forces that wish Afghanistan not to emerge as a stable, secure and moderate Islamic democratic nation. For their own vested interests they wish to push Afghanistan into the deeper recesses of Islamic medieval fundamentalism. Heading the list is the Pakistan Army and followed by its creation and protégé, the Taliban. Then we have the Al Qaeda

remnants and the creeping footprints of the ISIS. Notably spearheading the wave of suicide bombings in Kabul currently are the Haqqani Brothers who operate out of Pakistan territory of North Waziristan and enjoy protection of the Pakistan Army.

In Afghanistan 2017 the Pakistan Army distinguishes itself in undermining United States efforts to stabilise Afghanistan by actively being in league with the Taliban, Al Qaeda, ISI-Khorasan and the Haqqani Brothers. This is a continuum of Pakistan Army's record of the last decade and a half of double-timing the United States in Afghanistan while pretending to be United States "Enduring Ally" and a "Major Non-NATO Ally."

The above hydra-headed cobra which has plagued Afghanistan for decades now can only be liquidated if the United States takes stringent actions against Pakistan and more specifically the Pakistan Army. The Pakistan Army is directly or indirectly linked or involved with these entire Islamic Jihadi obscurantists in destabilising the democratic regime in Kabul evolved by the United States

The United States needs to surgically cut all economic and military aid to Pakistan. The United States also needs to consider imposing economic sanctions against Pakistan if it does not come to heel. Pakistan or the Pakistan Army is no longer a strategic asset for the United States. It is heartening to note that voices are strongly emerging on Capitol Hill calling for such measures in 2017.

Secondly, the United States needs to accord top priority to a United States Forces troops surge in Afghanistan to ensure Afghanistan's border protection and violations of Afghanistan's sovereignty from the East, namely Pakistan. This would involve a two-fold task. Reclaiming the Southern Afghanistan's provinces from Taliban control and reinforcing Afghanistan's Eastern border with both US Forces and Afghanistan Army troops.

Associated with the above military measures is the pressing imperative that military commanders of US Forces be delegated freedom of operational execution of military operations required by the overall interest of the United States, US Forces military commanders should not be burdened by the Washington political mandate of not impinging on Pakistan Army sensitivities on Afghanistan, as in the past. In the past, military success in Afghanistan could not be achieved not because of lack of military competence of the US Forces Generals but because of Washington's political establishment interference to appease Pakistan. In Afghanistan in 2017, Pakistan Army is a confirmed enemy of United States military presence in that hapless nation.

Thirdly, the United States needs to initiate significantly beefing-up the military capacity of the Afghanistan Army and the Afghanistan Armed Police for combating internal security operations against the Islamic Jihadi outfits. Originally recommended by me in the initial stages of the last decade was that the Afghanistan Army should have a minimum strength of 500,000 to secure the nation against both external and internal threats. US policy establishment hesitated to do so out of misguided and ill-advised sensitivity of the Pakistan Army. The United States would not have reached the military impasse that it faces in 2017 in Afghanistan.

Incidentally, my SAAG Papers of that time elicited email responses from US military officers serving in Afghanistan that they hoped that “the blokes in Washington read these Papers.” Also it led to an invitation to present a Paper at a US Seminar in Florida, USA in which the US CENTCOM Commander and I think Ambassador Neumann were participating. Regrettably, I could not attend due to a visa denial.

Afghanistan to be made secure and stable without being weighed down by its dependence on Pakistan as a land-locked nation forces an imperative on the US President and US policy establishments to reset its foreign policy formulations on Iran.. It is not that the United States has not temporised with Iran in the past for achieving its strategic ends, as for example in the Former Yugoslavia. Iran stands out notably as a perceived adversarial nation to the United States not exploiting military turbulence in Afghanistan to militarily discomfit the US military presence there, like the Pakistan Army.

Then we need to turn to the over-riding geopolitical challenge posed to the United States by the emergence of the China-Pakistan-Russia Trilateral whose implicit aim has been the prompting of an American abandonment of Afghanistan. Actions speak louder than words in that these three nations commenced since end last year a series of Trilateral meetings excluding both Afghanistan and the United States from the parleys, notwithstanding the fact that both Afghanistan and the United States were the prime actors contributing to put the war-ravaged nation back on the rails.

Tangentially, it also needs to be impressed on the United States is that it must also move towards cutting of the financial aid and arms supplies that all Islamic Jihadi groups destabilising Afghanistan receive from certain sections of the Gulf States.

The last recommendation that one would like the United States to consider is that as a back-up option the United States needs to keep alive its old linkages with the Northern Alliance groups. For those whose memory is short, it needs to be reminded that the United States military intervention in 2001, displacing the Pakistan-supported Taliban regime in Kabul and pushing the Al Qaeda out of Kabul was achieved by the United States on the shoulders of the Northern Alliance foot-soldiers spearheading the offensive towards Kabul. This is an asset which the United States needs to recreate, sustain and make use of in once again ridding Afghanistan of the evil presence of the Pakistan Army sustained Taliban.

In 2017, the US President and his policy establishment should make a firm resolve and implement too that the United States as a declaratory policy would not enter into any political parleys with the Taliban. It is “self-defeating” for the United States to do so. The Taliban exists and thrives in generating military turbulence in Afghanistan solely on the sustenance provided by the Pakistan Army and China. Russia also seems now to be getting into the act.

The main concluding observation that one would like to strongly assert is that the United States can achieve its end-aim of a stable and secure Afghanistan only and simply by EXORCISING Pakistan from its Afghanistan policy formulations. Pakistan is not the solution but the major impediment in a bright future for Afghanistan. Pakistan as an impediment becomes more ominous in 2017 as it teams up with China and Russia on this score.

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