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Afghanistan 2017 Witnesses the Power Tussle of Two New Strategic Trilaterals

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Strange and ironical are geopolitical histories of a region where within two decades geopolitical alignments have spun on their heads. This happens to be the case of Afghanistan's turbulent last two decades where a new and serious power tussle is underway between two Strategic Trilaterals.

In 2017, Afghanistan is engulfed in a serious power tussle not between two Superpowers of the pre 9/11 era but two diametrically opposite 'Strategic Trilaterals' of China-Pakistan-Russia, a newly emerged strategic convergent group facing the combination of the United States-Afghanistan-India Trilateral, which notably is interlinked by bilateral strategic partnerships amongst the three last named.

Afghanistan, therefore, has been intrusively pushed into the global power tussle by the unprincipled strategic machinations of Pakistan. Pakistan as the 'Regional Spoiler State' and a compulsive 'Disruptor of Afghanistan Stability' has drawn China more conclusively to back and be permissive of Pakistan's state-sponsored terrorism against Afghanistan.. The portents available in 2017 clearly point towards China underwriting more strongly Pakistan's continued disruption of Afghanistan peace and stability.

The geopolitical oddity out in this developing power tussle is Pakistan which post-9/11, at least rhetorically was in the American orbit, though double-timing the United States war effort against the Taliban all along the way. Pakistan in 2017 has opportunistically managed to switch sides from being the "US Front Line State" in Afghanistan to emerge as "China's Front Line State" as China spreads its strategic wings all over South West Asia. The China-Pakistan Axis was already in existence and China has managed to prevail over Russia to form this new Trilateral as part of China's greater game against the United States.

Similarly, the United States as the main and predominant actor in Afghanistan was for more than a decade and a half catering for sensitivities of Pakistan Army Generals and was willing only to accede to India a developmental role in Afghanistan. In 2017, the United States compelled by geopolitical churning in this region has made it known that it would welcome India to play a larger and significant role in Afghanistan, including possibly a security role. The latter has rattled Pakistan greatly.

China too was also given a disproportionate prominence in the confabulations on Afghanistan peace plans by the United States forgetting that China was one of the only two countries that maintained significant relations with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan till it was displaced by the United States military intervention post 9/11. Russia surprisingly has spun on its head in relation to Afghanistan to keep company with China and Pakistan. Its only apparent aim is to make it difficult for the United States to hold on to Afghanistan, as part of its global power tussle with the United States.

Geopolitical churning has spun fully on its head in 2017 and it becomes necessary to ponder as to which of the two Strategic Trilaterals named above will dominate Afghanistan's move towards peace and stability and a democratic future as a moderate Islamic nation.

Missing from the China-Pakistan-Russia Trilateral composition is the vital presence of Afghanistan as the nation most impacted and which should have the decisive voice in any formulations on its future. The China-Pakistan-Russia Trilateral therefore stands composed of all external actors-external to the people of Pakistan, with Afghanistan rusticated from this Trilateral's formulations.

Pakistan is the most hated nation in Afghanistan for the decade long subjection to medieval and brutal Islamic Jihadi suppression of Afghanistan, courtesy Pakistan Army and its notorious ISI. Afghanistan stood flattened by wanton destruction of Afghanistan during the brutal Taliban rule. The Taliban did not contribute any constructive programmes for prosperity of Afghanistan but its only intent was to forcefully hold by proxy Afghanistan for its patron---the Pakistan Army. Even today, Pakistani safe havens provided by Pakistan Army in areas bordering Afghanistan are being used by terrorist affiliates of the Pakistan Army for suicide bombings in Kabul and elsewhere.

China is criminally complicit in being permissive of letting its strategic stooge Pakistan to indulge in wanton destruction of Afghanistan. China has only three strategic interests in Afghanistan (1) See the exit of United States from Afghanistan and filling the void by China's own obtrusive power presence (2) Exploit the vast mineral resources lying untapped in Afghanistan without offsetting its returns for development of Afghanistan (3) Ensure that Afghanistan remains as Pakistan's military courtyard both for geopolitical reasons and now to guard the flanks of CPEC.

In the perceptions of the proud Afghan people, China gets adversely bracketed with Pakistan by its strategic nexus with the state-sponsored terrorism state. China therefore is considered as a major power which by its association with Pakistan cannot contribute positively to stability of Afghanistan. China cannot effectively be a part of any global Afghan peace initiatives, simply because it will veto any reconciliation which

is not to the liking of the Pakistan Army Generals.

Russia's presence in the China-Pakistan led Trilateral is not only unusual but also strategically illogical. Russia by aligning with the China-Pakistan Axis and its past record in Afghanistan figures negatively in Afghan perceptions. More so lately when Russia has started giving military aid to the Afghan Taliban engaged in current destabilisation of Afghanistan. By doing so, Russia additionally has vitally lost out on India's friendship in South Asia which had stood firm for nearly four decades.

Analytically therefore the China-Pakistan-Russia Trilateral has no vital stakes in the development and reconstruction of war ravaged Afghanistan and this Trilateral is the least likely to be welcomed by the people of Afghanistan or given political credence.

On the contrary, the United States-Afghanistan-India Trilateral offers the best choice to the people of Afghanistan in terms of securing their future, economic development and peace and stability. The United States and India have made Afghanistan as the focal point and centrepiece of their Afghanistan policy formulations. Neither the United States nor India can be accused of any brutal suppression or destabilisation of Afghanistan by proxy regimes.

The United States has poured in billions of dollars to stabilise Afghanistan and not let Afghanistan again be over-run by the Taliban. In tandem with the United States it is India unlike China or Russia, India has poured in billions of dollars for economic reconstruction of Afghanistan and promoting democracy there.

The last point needing analysis is that on the global stage which of the two Strategic Trilaterals is militarily more weighty. While the combination of China and Russia as military heavy weights is conceded but Pakistan though a nuclearized state cannot be considered in the same league.

The United States-Afghanistan-India comprises the sole Superpower with Asian giant India now considered as a "Leading Power" in global power calculus. Afghanistan may not be strong militarily but geostrategically it is consequential and adds weight to the United States-India strategic convergences on Afghanistan. I would rate this Trilateral as intrinsically more powerful with the United States having a Forward Military Presence in Afghanistan.

The opposing Trilateral of China-Pakistan Russia will oppose strongly any constructive efforts of the United States-Afghanistan-India Trilateral to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan despite strong protestations to the contrary. This portends an Afghan turbulence to continue for the long haul.

In conclusion, in view of the above analysis, what needs emphasis is that the United States has to clamp down hard, including military intervention, to stop Pakistan Army's unending destabilisation of Afghanistan? This done, the United States-Afghanistan-India Strategic

Trilateral can focus on the unhindered economic reconstruction and development of Afghanistan, so sorely needed to liberate Afghanistan from the disruptive yoke of the Pakistan Army and in the process contributing towards overall stability in Greater South West Asia.

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