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## PAKISTAN: PM Imran Khan's Visit to US July 22, 2019 Aanalysed

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US President Trump would be “welcoming” Pakistan PM Imran Khan for “official working visit” on July 2019 at the White House. How does one read President Trump’s invitation to Pakistan PM as only about a year ago he was severely castigating Pakistan for undermining US interests in Afghanistan? Intriguing question that arises contextually is whether this is an US ‘invitation’, or a US ‘summons’ to the Pakistan PM.

Initially, before resorting to an analytical survey, one need to record that Pakistan PM Imran Khan proceeds to meet US President Trump not as an unfettered Prime Minister of Pakistan but as the “Selected PM of Pakistan” imposed by the Pakistan Army on Pakistan through a rigged ‘Judicial Coup’. Presumably the Pakistan Establishment sends him to White House with a listening brief rather than any flamboyant flourishes or diplomatic achievements. Of course, diplomatic niceties by White House after the visit do not preclude laudatory rhetoric.

It is my reading that while the United States official statements pertaining to President Trump-PM Imran Khan discussions may be embellished with many rosy hues, a strategic reality check would indicate that the US invite to White House discussions need to be viewed as more of an American President’s summons to Pakistan PM Imran Khan to read him the riot act in terms of United States demands on Pakistan in relation to Afghanistan, on US demands on Pakistan in case United States resorts to an intervention in Iran and United States displeasure on Pakistan Army’s collusive involvement in advancing China’s CPEC flagship CPEC project.

Lurking in the background is also Pakistan's nuclear weapons arsenal which in the past Pakistan claimed it to be the 'Islamic Nuclear Bomb' with the attendant connotation that Pakistan nuclear capability was to serve the Islamic World's security. This has potential of igniting a nuclear arms race amongst the major Islamic countries of Greater South West Asia and poses a threat to US interests in the region.

Contextually, analysis calls for questioning the timing of US President Trump's inviting Pak PM Imran Khan to White House and the alacrity with which the Pakistani PM has accepted the invitation and also where do compulsions for this White House 'official discussions' lie more heavily when viewed against the prevailing geopolitical and economic ground realities.

On both counts above what emerges is that notwithstanding prevailing Afghanistan situation, the United States holds strong geopolitical leverages over Pakistan and more so when Pakistan is tottering over a complete economic collapse.

Pakistan has thrived in boxing much above its weight so far because of a certain US-China convergence on perspectives on Pakistan. With US-China relations having morphed into an adversarial mode and a US-China Trade War underway, Pakistan now finds itself on the wrong side of the US-China divide.

Pakistan's economic collapse despite infusions of financial aid by China and Saudi Arabia had much against PM Imran Khan's wishes Pakistan had to approach the IMF for bailout loans—much larger than what China and Saudi Arabia could provide. The United States holds strong leverages over the IMF which adds to United States leverages over Pakistan currently.

Therefore, the compulsions to reset US-Pakistan relations weigh heavily more on Pakistan than on the United States. Surely, this Pakistani predicament would not have been lost on US President Trump and his advisers. In my assessment, it is this compulsive assessment which tempted US President Trump to extend an invite to Pakistan PM Imran Khan who would be meeting the US President on July 22 on a much weakened wicket and with glaring Pakistani vulnerabilities.

Pakistan PM Imran Khan as a former Pak cricket captain reading the unfavourable cricket pitch before him would be seriously inhibited from throwing googlies at White House meet.

The United States' only compulsion, if it could be termed as a compulsion is Pakistan's collusive participation in assisting United States end aims in Afghanistan.

Pakistan is trumpeting this invitation to Pak PM for official discussions as a big diplomatic victory for Pakistan in breaching India's strategy of diplomatic isolation of Pakistan forgetful of the reality that invitations for "Official working visit is extended personally by the US President for discussions on a one-to-one level with no delegation level meets. Such meets give US President opportunities to size up the political visiting leader and also let him know what the US expects or demands.

In fact, somewhere in the Pakistan media alluding to concerns on this format a recommendation was made that PM Imran Khan should not be meeting US President alone, presumably fearing that Pak PM may give away to demands not cleared by Pakistan Army Establishment.

Officially as now stated by the White House, the US-Pakistan 'official discussions' are scheduled to focus on counter-terrorism, defence ties, energy and economic and trade matters. Within a couple of hours of a one-day 'official discussions', expectedly, the United States focus will be on letting Pakistan PM Imran Khan know where United States stands on Afghanistan, Iran, Counter-Terrorism and Pakistan nuclear weapons, and what United States expectations/demands are on these three critical concern of the United States Af-Pak region and in South Asia as a whole.

On Afghanistan, following Pakistan's earlier castigation by President Trump of Pakistan, what has been noticeable has been that Pakistan has been yielding to United States demands. Pakistan Army has forced the Taliban to sit down for Afghan Peace Dialogues at Doha, even though progress may be slow. Pakistan is now being prevailed upon to pressurise the Afghan Taliban to agree to inclusion of the Kabul Government at future US-Afghan Taliban talks---something which the Taliban was rejecting.

Should the Doha Dialogue facilitate an eventual US Military Forces exit from Afghanistan, then in that eventuality President Trump could be spelling out on July 22 to Pakistan PM the US demands on orderly and peaceful US withdrawal, or else?

On Iran, US President can be expected to demand of Pakistan that with growing confrontational postures in US-Iran relations, the United States would expect Pakistan not be a by-stander. The United States would expect Pakistan and the Pakistan Army to play its earlier roles on Iran vis-à-vis United States military requirements. In past decades, Baluchistan on Pakistan's borders with Iran was to be one of the springboards for any US operations against Iran. Pakistan Army was then also facilitating Baluchistan territory for launching clandestine US Special Forces Teams for reconnoitring and surveillance missions of Iranian military targets.

On Counter-terrorism front, Pakistan should not be under any doubts as to where the United States stands especially under President Trump. United States strong stances on Pakistan and Pakistan Army's complicity with Jihadi terrorism outfits is not seen only in terms of Afghanistan and India but also in the wider context of its serious implications for US national security interests-- both Homeland USA and US global interests. Pakistan would be called upon for more verifiable and strong actions against Jihadi terrorism outfits.

United States strong reservations on China's OBOR are well publicised and US displeasure on China's flagship project in Pakistan—the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)—stand also articulated widely by the United States. The CPEC is a direct threat to vital US national security interests in The Gulf and the Indian Ocean facilitating Chinese Navy potential base at Gwadar at terminal end of CPEC.

It is not only the CPEC but also the entire spectrum of the China-Pakistan Axis that will come under laser focus by US President Trump at the White House meet.

Contextually, with geopolitical churning on in uncertain directions, if US President has invested political capital on denuclearisation of North Korea, it would be logical to assume that US President Trump may attempt the same on Pakistan. After all, both North Korea and Pakistan have been termed by US strategic community in the past as “Rogue Nuclear Weapons States” spawned by China—is now in US adversarial cross-hairs.

US-Pak defence ties are listed as one of the points of discussions. However, it can be assumed analytically, that any resumption here and the degree of resumption would depend largely on the measure that Pakistan extends cooperation on the issues discussed above. US President Trump is a good businessman and it is inconceivable that he would give away more than what he can get out of Pakistan PM Imran Khan.

On the economic front much coverage exists in the media on the conditionalities that IMF has imposed on Pakistan and which in the end-game will seriously impact not only on Pakistan's economic scene but also on Pakistan's domestic politics. Here too the perspectives given in the preceding paragraph will apply.

Analytically, it would be in order to glance at what Pakistan PM Imran Khan could project to US President Trump at the White House on July 22? The obvious answer is Kashmir. In this context, one could quote one leading Pakistan Columnist of high repute in his column in the Pak English daily, The DAWN wherein he states to the effect that the United States now views Kashmir issue as an ‘irrelevance in a power driven world’. Further, that US now perceives that it is Pakistani actions that contribute to much of the suffering of the Kashmiri people.

Concluding, it needs to be asserted that analytically the US President Trump-Pakistan PM Imran Khan at the White House for “official working visit” is going to be more of a “transactional meet” with President Trump demanding Pakistani transactions than any long term reset of US-Pakistan relations.

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