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**Ground realities**

As the world battles an extraordinary pandemic that has taken away over a million lives across the globe, ties between India and Pakistan continue to worsen. Pakistan has now presented to the UN secretary-general a dossier the second in the past five years on India’s ‘terror campaign' inside Pakistan.

The dossier comes ahead of India’s two-year non-veto membership tenure in the UN Security Council, starting from January 2021. Pakistan's Ambassador to the UN Akram has also briefed journalists on what he said is substantial evidence of India’s hand in destabilizing Pakistan and sabotaging the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which Pakistan sees as key to its future development and security. Though Ambassador Akram did not name the groups that India is said to be pampering and funding, this does shed a light on India’s ability to gain access inside Pakistan's areas and raises some fresh concerns regarding India’s ability to mobilize proxies within Pakistan's borders.

Since the overthrow of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, concerns have been raised about India supporting militant groups, both religious and non-religious the detained Indian spy Kulbhushan Jadhav being a prime example, apart from other attacks and incidents such as the ones on the Chinese Consulate in Karachi as well as the Karachi Stock Exchange. India's ability to enter two very sensitive border areas should indeed be cause for alarm; another scary revelation the dossier makes is India helping Daesh in Pakistan.

During the vote last June on non-permanent Security Council seats, India’s bid went uncontested for the Asia Pacific region; it was clear from the outset that Pakistan would not be able to do much to deny India access to the Council. However, it can be argued by some that, with the presence of China in the UNSC, we need not worry about any possible Indian move in the Council against Pakistan. The status quo is expected to continue to prevail in the South Asian region for years, and in the present global political situation there are no leaders and governments that find it essential to corner Pakistan.

In fact, other than a few angry tweets about Pakistan, the Trump administration’s overall Pakistan policy remained cordial. If they did not offer major financial packages to Pakistan, they also did not threaten Pakistan nor repeat the ‘Do-More’ mantra. Trump’s chief diplomat Mike Pompeo did not warm up to Pakistan, but the country was still able to get financial loans from the IMF.

In the beginning of the pandemic, the IMF extended a $1.4 billion emergency loan to Pakistan. The argument would be that without US support, Pakistan would not be able to get such loans. This can be seen as an indication that the Trump administration was satisfied with Pakistan’s role in facilitating dialogue with the Afghan Taliban, which Trump and his administration see as one of the successes of his era’s foreign policy objectives.

Post-Trump Washington is likely to review the dialogue process and may delay the troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, which means Pakistan will remain important for the US when it comes to any deal or lack of it on Afghanistan. The Biden administration is also most likely to base its South Asian policy on the Obama administration's goal of ensuring a stable, prosperous and at-peace-with-its-neighbors Pakistan.

If the Biden administration does not take a confrontational path to contain China, CPEC may not be an obstacle in US-Pakistan bilateral and regional relations. Given the higher levels of foreign debt, it is in Pakistan’s interest to keep a balance in its relations with China and the West. Despite the fact that China has pumped $22 billion in Pakistan, we are not on our feet in any economic sense; in fact, Pakistan stands more indebted today than four years ago. In 2019 alone, Pakistan borrowed $14.9 billion. The expected $50 billion more coming from China under CPEC also does not offer a clear path to self-sufficiency. It is a vicious circle of debt-trap, which Pakistan is still in denial about.

The role and scale of diplomatic efforts are always subject to a country's economic and political stability. Unfortunately, we lack both. Without such stability, our dossiers may not go beyond providing talking points to spokespersons. The utmost concern for us at the moment should be political stability, which could then lead to economic independence from loans, poverty, deficit and uncertainty. Sadly, that is not the course we are on.

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