

The Frontier Post

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Printed and published by Mahmood Afridi at Moraka's Printers, 27 Abdara Road, University Town, Peshawar.
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Afghan NDS, IS-K and Pakistan

RECENT media reports revealed that twenty-four Pakistani women along with their forty six children are languishing in Pul-e-Charkhi jail in Kabul. These women had been arrested by the Afghan Intelligence Agency, NDS on charges of having affiliation with Daesh. Pakistani Diplomats from Embassy of Pakistan Kabul had visited the Pul-e-Charkhi jail two weeks back and had detailed interviews with those women. Later, their credentials had been sent to the Ministry of Interior by Pakistan Embassy Kabul for necessary verification through NARDA and relevant Departments.

Further details revealed that out of these twenty-four ladies, six of them are from Punjab, one from Sindh, one from Balochistan and the rest of them are mostly from Orakzai agency. Most of these women have completed their sentences, whereas few are waiting for their trails. The reports suggest that most of these ladies are in jail because of the activities of their husbands who seem to be mostly from Afghanistan and were supposedly affiliated with ISIS. As reported, one lady accepted being a supporter of the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), a designated terrorist organization by the government of Pakistan. Two women accepted being Daesh supporters out of which one was sentenced to seventeen years and the other one is still under trial.

The revelation of the arrest of 24 Pakistani women by Afghan Intelligence came at a crucial time, when the both counties are witnessing tense diplomatic relations. The Afghan authorities intentionally did not disclose these cases in the hope of a better opportunity to punch their neighboring Pakistan and this was the ripe time to malign Pakistan at international level. However, the Pakistan government must not rush to conclude the results of the cases portrayed by the Afghan authorities, rather a comprehensive probe must be carried out to find out the details of these reported Pakistani women and most importantly their spouses. It would be important to highlight that hundreds of thousands of Afghans had procured Pakistani National ID Cards and Passports through illegal means. Therefore, it is suggested that besides carrying out their background checks from their native towns, the DNA tests of those ladies and their children must be conducted to ascertain their true origin. BLA enjoys full freedom and support of NDS and RAW at Afghan soil.

As far as the IS-K is concerned it may have some presence in Pakistan particularly in Ex. FATA and Southern Punjab. In fact, IS-K is an emerging threat to the whole region including Pakistan and Afghanistan and both nations must cooperate with each other against this common enemy. Simple denial statements of Pakistani authorities would not serve the national interests. Presently, IS-K is targeting Pakistani youth particularly disadvantaged communities of our society through its jihadist ideology.

The jihadists elements and already radicalized a specific section of our society have great attraction in the IS-K manifesto and ongoing unemployment, injustice and other social illness are the factors which strengthen the IS-K propaganda. Therefore, Pakistan needs to formulate a comprehensive strategy against the threat posed by the IS-K at this early stage otherwise it will pose a bigger challenge to the country in the coming days.

US-China Great Game

US Secretary of Defense Austin issued directives based on recommendations of the Department of Defense (DoD) China Task Force and approved several major initiatives to better address the security challenges posed by China. As said, the initiatives had been developed in consultation and coordination with US partners and will complement the multi-faceted work on China policy of departments, agencies, and the White House. While shedding light on future United States, China strategy, Secretary of Defense, Austin said that today's efforts will improve the Department's ability to revitalize US network of allies and partners, bolster deterrence, and accelerate the development of new operational concepts, emerging capabilities, future force posture, and a modernized civilian and military workforce. The directive illustrates that due to the importance and sensitivity of the issue, Austin himself will directly oversee the Department of Defense's China-related policies, operations, and intelligence work.

As reported, President Biden established the China Task Force in February this year. The Task Force has a two-fold mission: to conduct a baseline assessment of China-related programs, policies, and processes at the Department of Defense; and to provide the Secretary with a set of top priorities and recommended courses of action for the Department. The task force remained successful in preparing its first ever recipe on which Austin had started his anti-China voyage.

In fact, the United States sees China as a genuine threat to its international position as world leader, despite the fact that China did not confront America in any regional conflict such as Syria, Afghanistan and Libya whereas Russia did and presented several setbacks to the US. However, the unlimited Chinese political, economic, and technological influence worries the American policy makers and compelled them to react to this silent invasion which seems to flush away American supremacy into the Atlantic Ocean in coming days. Therefore, as US Secretary of Defense, Austin's worries are genuine, and due to this fear America had already utilized most of its cards against China whereas China has yet not opened its anti-US doctrine so far. However, as the US is tightening its grip against China, the time is not far when Chinese will hit back at the United States in the same way.

Hosting US military bases a hot potato for Afghanistan's neighbors

WITH the pullout of US troops from Afghanistan, Pentagon officials are making last-minute efforts to pursue basing options with Afghanistan's neighbors for future operations. Washington continues to focus on Pakistan for establishing a military base in the region, despite the fact that some American officials believe the negotiations have reached an impasse for now. The New York Times reported on Monday.

"While we have no basing agreements to announce, we know that Afghanistan's neighbors share our desire to counter the scourge of global terrorism," a Defense Department spokesperson was quoted as saying by ANI/Sputnik Monday. Washington will continue to pursue options with partners and allies in the region, the spokesperson said.

The US finally made the decision to withdraw troops after having been stuck in a quagmire for nearly 20 years. It now is in a complex and fully frustrated psychological state. On the one hand, Washington feels impotent to stabilize the Afghan situation; on the other, it is unwilling to see itself lose control of Afghanistan after its troops' pullout.

Therefore, securing a military base in Afghanistan's neighbors has become a choice. Washington's purpose is to ensure it can still form a timely military deterrent against Afghanistan even if its troops are withdrawn from the war-torn country.

The most preferred option is for the US to operate a base in Pakistan. This is why Washington is making great efforts to persuade Islamabad to allow it to do so. After all, Pakistan was once an important US ally in South Asia. It supported the decision of the adminis-

tration of former US president George W. Bush to start a war in Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban regime 20 years ago. But the cooperation between the two countries on the war in Afghanistan has put the Pakistani government under intense pressure from Islamic extremism.

Pakistan doesn't want to be dragged into Afghan affairs and draw fire upon itself anymore. Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi in May ruled out the possibility of any US military bases on its soil in the future. However, the US has not discarded its attempts, and is still trying to persuade it.

Apart from Pakistan, another obvious option for Washington would be Central Asia. US troops were, after all, based in the region from 2001 to 2014. According to US media reports, the Pentagon is

indeed eyeing Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as potential candidates for new bases. However, it's hard to imagine that Central Asian countries will easily allow Washington to open bases.

Currently, Central Asian countries have some security concerns.

First, as the US is planning to completely withdraw its troops from Afghanistan, this irresponsible behavior may challenge the security of these countries. Second, they need to take into account their relations with Moscow when coordinating their relations with Washington.

The withdrawal of the US troops is, in fact, a new military strategy to deal with the changes of the situation in Afghanistan. It is a relatively "low-cost" way to maintain the US strategic and military deterrence. If the US cannot find an

appropriate alternative in Afghanistan's periphery in time, the expected effects of its policy of withdrawing from Afghanistan will be significantly reduced.

However, a new US military base on their territory is no different from a hot potato - one that Afghanistan's neighbors are unwilling to take over. Allowing Washington to operate a base can easily turn countries into a target of the Taliban and anti-US forces throughout the region. The Afghan Taliban has warned their neighbors against allowing the US military to operate bases on their soil. "We urge neighboring countries not to allow anyone to do so," the Taliban said in a recent statement, adding that they would "not remain silent in the face of such heinous and provocative acts."

Washington's attempts to establish a base in Afghanistan's periphery

could help the hegemonic force sustain its influence on the Afghan situation, but will not contribute to ease the situation for everyday Afghans. Washington worries that Beijing and Moscow will fill the power vacuum after its troop withdrawal. This only demonstrates the US' hegemonic logic.

China is practicing true multilateralism by making efforts to promote the Afghan peace process within multilateral frameworks, including the SCO, China-Central Asia cooperation and the China-Pakistan-Afghanistan trilateral cooperation mechanism. The biggest strength of China's methods is that relevant parties can participate on the basis of equality, integrate multilateral and bilateral efforts, and proactively promote peace talks instead of insisting on military solutions. This is more consistent with the reality and needs of Afghanistan.

This G7 Summit will be a time for sensible proposals on Covid-19, and nonsensical, virtue signalling schemes for climate change

Paul A. Nuttall

THE political 'great and good' will convene in sunny Cornwall this weekend for the annual G7 summit to address their two 'big issues': the pandemic and the green agenda. The former is vital, the latter is riddled with flaws.

The British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, will host the summit, and be joined by the prime ministers of Japan, Australia, Canada and Italy. Also in attendance will be the German chancellor, the French president, and most importantly, the new American President Joe Biden.

The nations of the G7, which was formed in 1975, are deemed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to have the most advanced economies in the world and account for 58% of global wealth. The two principal items at the top of the agenda for the G7 are dealing with the international Covid crisis and tackling climate change.

The global Covid crisis will be top of the agenda because it is both here and now, and unlike climate change, it is not based on predictions about the

future. Pressure is being applied on the leaders to support a waiver on intellectual property rights on vaccines and treatments for Covid, so they can be shared around the world.

Indeed, fifteen of the UK's Nobel Laureates have called on Boris Johnson not to block such a proposal. Moreover, former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown has described the situation as "a life and death matter", and has urged the leaders to agree to "burden-share the financing of the whole medical effort".

For once, Brown is quite correct. With the borders of Europe and the US being routinely breached with ease at the moment, the pandemic will surely skip from state to state. To the Americans' credit, they have already waived their rights to intellectual property on this issue and Japan has indicated that it is willing to follow suit.

Only the British and the Germans are holding out against the proposal. If common sense prevails, the leaders will all agree to the waiver and share their technology - albeit with the agreement of companies

involved - with nations that have the finance and the scientific capability to develop their own vaccines. It is for the good of humanity and the clue, after all, is in the name: it is a 'Global Pandemic'.

The other issue at the top of the agenda we are told is climate change. The British are leading the way on this one and Johnson is calling for a new 'Marshall Plan' to fund green energy projects in middle and developing countries, particularly in Asia and Africa. This issue, however, is not as straightforward as it might initially seem and there are a number of glaring problems with this scheme.

Firstly, how big is this green Marshall Plan going to be and who is going to pay for it? One would expect the hardworking taxpayers of the G7 countries to be billed for the scheme, which is going to be immensely unpopular with the domestic electorate, particularly in the US and the UK. Also, a proportion of Marshall Aid, which was provided by the Americans after the Second World War, had to be paid

back with interest. I wonder if there are any plans to recoup the money spent on this green Marshall Plan; I expect not.

Secondly, do these middle and developing countries actually want or need investment in green initiatives? We all want to see a greener world, and it may make wealthy leaders glow with a sense of self-satisfaction to be doling out cash, but many green initiatives result in making poor people poorer and rich people richer. I would suggest that the poor of Asia and Africa would prefer regular food, clean water, and infrastructure than a truckload of wind turbines.

There is also little point in the G7 countries funding a green Marshall Plan if other leading economies are not fully signed up to cutting emissions. If China, for example, which is responsible for 27% of global greenhouse gas emissions, cannot be brought to the table, then putting a few wind turbines in Chad or Burkina Faso would be irrelevant. It would represent little more than self-indulgent virtue

signalling and it would surely make more sense to tackle China on this issue first. I am sure many of the leaders know this already, but domestic political pressure will ensure that they agree to Johnson's plan.

Indeed, if you look at the leaders attending the summit, many of them are under political pressure, which is being applied by Greens in their own countries and it does not have a single motorway, which no doubt contributed to Boris Johnson's decision to fly all of 280 miles from London to Cornwall - a real commitment to cutting carbon emissions. It is also one of England's poorest counties and is heavily reliant on tourist trade.

As a result of this G7 summit, many holidays would have been cancelled, thus harming the local economy. And for those who are determined to take their vacations, ridiculously long car journeys and traffic jams await. Indeed, it was very selfish of the organisers of the G7 to choose such an unsuitable location for the summit. And with that, I am sure there is a metaphor in there somewhere.

China moves forward in soft power struggle for SE Asia

Mark J Valencia

THE June 7-8 meetings between Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his ASEAN counterparts - both as a group and bilaterally - in Chongqing was just the latest advance by China in its burgeoning contest with the US for the hearts and minds of Southeast Asia.

Despite some recent self-inflicted setbacks, overall China seems to be gaining ground. Indeed, at the meetings, the ministers reiterated their intention "to avoid activities that could escalate tension in the contested South China Sea" and Wang called for an upgrading of ASEAN-China relations to a "comprehensive strategic partnership." The US has much diplomatic ground to make up and it is likely to step up its efforts in the coming months. But will it be enough to make a difference?

The US has dominated Southeast Asia since the end of World War II with both hard and soft power - the capability to use economic or cultural influence to shape the preferences of others. While its hard power is still dominant and even growing, its soft power has declined both absolutely and relative to that of China.

In this contest, China has the geographic advantage. It is Southeast Asia's permanent giant next-door neighbor. It also has a large diaspora of ethnic Chinese that comprises significant minorities in many Southeast Asian countries, and many of Southeast Asia's political, economic and military leaders have some Chinese blood. But this can be a political liability when tensions flare between this minority and the majority indigenous peoples.

The US cannot match

China's economic prowess and largesse and hopes that its political, social and economic systems and - more importantly - its values will be sufficient to keep much of Asia in its camp. But this is increasingly proving to be a false hope. So the US is falling back on its tried and true advantage - dominant military power and the threat of its use. But even in this sphere China is making rapid advances, and the prospect of its eventual military superiority in the region is looming.

This increased militarization of the issues puts off Southeast Asian countries that will suffer if the two engage in conflict. Moreover, militarism is not the hallmark of a great and successful nation whose values and achievements should speak for themselves.

Many in Southeast Asia had hoped that under President Joe Biden, the US would step up its diplomatic and moderate its military goals and behavior vis-à-vis China, especially where they confront each other in the South and East China Seas. That hope had some basis, because Biden's Indo-Pacific coordinator Kurt Campbell and his national security adviser Jake Sullivan have publicly advocated "competitive co-existence" with China. Moreover, China seemed to be open to a reset in relations. But US-China policy has so far not only continued that of former president Donald Trump but even trumped its hypocrisy, condescension, confrontation and militarism. Indeed, US diplomacy has lagged far behind its military signaling.

At the end of May, the US finally sent Deputy Secretary of State Wendy

Sherman to visit the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' de facto leader Indonesia, erstwhile US ally Thailand and China-leaning Cambodia. But the trip was unremarkable other than its skipping and probably missing key states like the Philippines and Vietnam.

US Secretary of State Tony Blinken's scheduled follow-up virtual conference with his ASEAN counterparts was an embarrassing - even maddening - non-event because of technical difficulties. President Biden did call Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, but that was mainly to try to save the self-serving defense alliance. More important, the US has made clear by its actions that its immediate priorities lie elsewhere - the Middle East, by necessity to quell a crisis; Russia, because of its increasingly aggressive actions; and Europe, by choice.

Even in Asia, its main interest seems to be shoring up its alliances with Japan and South Korea as a bulwark against China. Worse, it appears to ASEAN countries that Washington prefers to bolster the Quad (India, Australia, Japan and the US) as its regional lever on security policy. This is an affront to ASEAN's aspirations of "centrality" in regional security affairs, because the Quad, if effective, will become central to security management, particularly vis-à-vis China. While the US gives lip service to ASEAN's aspirations, it seems frustrated with its members' turn away from democratic values and ineffectiveness in managing regional affairs, such as the crisis in

Myanmar.

Meanwhile China has been making diplomatic advances. President Xi Jinping has communicated with some of his Southeast Asian counterparts, and Foreign Minister Wang Yi has traveled through the region and met personally with his counterparts. The foreign ministers of Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines also visited China for bilateral talks in late March.

China has made inroads with its "win-win" Belt and Road Initiative, despite US warnings of debt traps, environmental damage and coercion. Its Covid diplomacy - donating vaccines and even partnering with Indonesia to produce more - has also been far superior to that of the US, which - by necessity - has been focused on getting its own house in order. It has only just now started to catch up in Covid diplomacy, and Southeast Asia will be only a small part of its global effort.

China's relationship with Indonesia is perhaps the most important for it in the region. Recent tension between them over intrusions by Chinese fishing and Coast Guard vessels into the Indonesian exclusive economic zone (EEZ) has given way to warming ties. Indonesian President Joko Widodo has referred to China as a "good friend and brother."

On June 5, China and Indonesia initiated an "inaugural high-level dialogue." Usually very sensitive about its maritime security, Indonesia accepted China's offer to try to salvage its lost submarine in the strategic Lombok Strait.

It has also undertaken

naval exercises with China off Jakarta. This is remarkable because allowing US naval vessels to pass by its capital city has been a sticking point in negotiations over delineating a sea lane in the Java Sea.

This does not mean that Indonesia is about to move away from its non-aligned status, and there are still many things that could go wrong with the relationship - such as more incursions or incidents in its EEZ or China's treatment of its Muslim minority in Xinjiang. But it does mean the China-Indonesia relationship is rapidly improving. To a great extent, the US-China soft-power contest is between US values and its provision of security versus China's economic clout - and China seems to be winning.

The US has made human rights and democratic values its stock-in-trade and a dominant part of its foreign policy in Asia. Indeed, that is what distinguishes the US from many other countries - especially China.

This may be good for humanity, but in a realpolitik world it puts the US at a disadvantage with Southeast Asian governments that are struggling to maintain their hold on power, which will always be their top priority. Indeed, in a realpolitik world, "nice" nations often finish second. Moreover, US values are losing their appeal. There are clearly weaknesses in the US system of governance. Under counterattack by China's foreign-policy czar, Yang Jiechi, in their Anchorage meeting, Blinken acknowledged faults in the US system of governance but claimed that after every crisis "we've come out stronger, better, more united, as a country." This was

whistling by the US graveyard of civil discourse, accepted norms and unity that was American democracy.

Such fantasies cannot hide the ugly, violence-prone, cultural civil war that has made American democracy dysfunctional.

To be sure, China's domestic values offer an unattractive alternative. But frankly, most ASEAN countries do not care how China treats its own citizens - and some are just as authoritarian and draconian and resent US criticism of their governing style. Playing to this reality, Wang has said, "We support ASEAN in upholding the principle of non-interference in internal affairs."

Remarkably, the US has failed to take full advantage of China's diplomatic "own goals" - its incursions into Indonesia's EEZ, its massing of fishing boats in the Philippines' EEZ, and its maritime provocations of Malaysia and Vietnam in their claimed waters.

To regain and retain its moral leadership, the US needs to demonstrate that its values and system of government are the best of all for all and that it can and will maintain a competitive edge with China economically and technologically, not just militarily.

The US has much diplomatic ground to make up, and I expect it to try to do so over the next few months. The ASEAN Regional Forum in August and the East Asian Summit in November provide good opportunities. But it may be too little, too late and too self-serving to matter. At this point it will take a Hail Mary - perhaps a tour of the region by Biden himself - to get Washington back in the game.