

## **SCENARIO 248**

### **FOREIGN POLICY IN KHAN's TIME**

#### **A Point to Ponder:**

In January 2022, the total cost of PM Khan's foreign trips during his 3-year tenure till then was \$530,000. The amount pales in comparison to **Zardari's single visit** to New York City in 2012 which cost the national kitty \$1.1 million then and the \$901,250 spent on **Nawaz's single visit** to the same city in 2016;

**'PM Imran's 47 foreign trips.... Report'** at [nation.com.pk](http://nation.com.pk)  
dated 4<sup>th</sup> January 2022 is referred.

### **PRE-ELECTION (2018) LANDSCAPE:**

**On 25<sup>th</sup> July 2018:** The general election in Pakistan was a defining moment in the country's history. This was the third election held since the restoration of civilian rule in 2008. The contest was clearly between the outgoing ruling party PMLN of Nawaz Sharif and the PTI led by Imran Khan. In that decade, the PPP, which had been a leading political party since 1960s, saw a sharp decline - then reduced to a regional party in Sindh. Its last charismatic leader Benazir Bhutto was assassinated in Dec 2007, but neither her husband Asif Zardari nor her son Bilawal had shown any crowd-pulling appeal.

The other major party PMLN suffered a major setback when its leader Nawaz Sharif was disqualified by the Supreme Court of Pakistan in July 2017 and later sentenced to 10 years in jail by a NAB court, on the charge of corruption. His daughter Maryam Nawaz, who was being groomed as his successor, was also in jail on similar corruption charges, and disqualified from holding public office. During the trial, Nawaz Sharif tried his best to discredit the judiciary to convince his followers that he was being framed for political reasons.

Nawaz Sharif's narrative was that the establishment, his code word for the army, his old nemesis, pressurized the courts to act against him. He often claimed himself the great champion of democracy, conveniently forgetting that he himself rose to power during Martial Law regime of Gen Ziaul Haq. Nawaz Sharif and his colleagues in PMLN were very confident that the masses would turn up in huge numbers to show their rejection of the court verdict; but got deeply disappointed. His party won lot many seats in 25<sup>th</sup> July's elections, but couldn't stage a comeback to power.

Another important political development was that Imran Khan, the PTI leader, emerged as the next Prime Minister of Pakistan. A former cricketing hero-turned politician, he was able to garner increasing support, particularly among young voters, **on the twin slogan of change and an end to corruption.** There was no doubt that the erstwhile ruling parties, in cahoots with dishonest bureaucrats, were guilty of massive corruption. They robbed the country ruthlessly and amassed assets in Western countries and Dubai through illegal commissions on government projects and large-scale money laundering. Their corruption was the major reason for the on-going economic crisis in Pakistan, on account of burgeoning debt burden that resulted in depreciation of Pakistani rupee at an unprecedented low.

In addition to corruption, these leaders mainly from Sharifs, Zardari & *ulema* (religious tycoons)'s family dynasties, were guilty of misrule and poor economic planning. They gave

preference to some glitzy mass transportation schemes like white elephants, while denying funds to projects needed to fulfill the required needs of industrial development, basic education, health, sanitation, clean water and power.

Most of the above said politicians were driven by a lust for power and money; sold loyalties for the sake of their offices. The moral fiber of bureaucracy got eroded; when civil servants are not selected on merit nor allowed to function honestly, or picked up on the basis of nepotism, it would result in entirely bad governance and massive corruption. Imran Khan could fill the bill, but also miserably failed due to the crooked & non-cooperative bureaucracy AND corrupt practices of some of his own team of advisors and cronies.

At the time when IMRAN Khan took reins of the country as Prime Minister in August 2018, Pakistan was facing grave challenges in foreign policy, while plagued by a serious economic crisis allegedly. Priority had to go for handling the economic challenge first as a collapsing economy seriously impairs a country's ability to keep adequately good relations with other countries.

Pakistan is basically a sound country with good resources; its people are talented and the armed forces are disciplined and highly trained, while it possessed nuclear power, too. But it needed political stability under a clean and forward-looking leadership. Education and health needed high priority. Economic growth alone could provide jobs. The alarming growth of population had to be checked since decades. If other Islamic countries like Iran and Bangladesh could achieve success in this area, why can't Pakistan? Eradication of terrorism and extremism were not only nation's internal need but would also help improve our external ties.

For economic progress and internal reforms, Pakistan needed peace and international cooperation. In his policy pronouncements, Imran Khan had emphasized his intention to take Pakistan out of its economic mess, created by former governments through corruption, misrule, and self-serving economic priorities – coupled with negative or hostile relationship with our neighbouring countries. During the past 70 years, the US had given over \$75 billion in aid to Pakistan, which was mostly in shape of military weapons and army officer's training – NO INFRASTRUCTURE OR DEVELOPMENT PROJECT for the general populace ever.

Pakistan got the US weapons for defense against Communist aggression, but it became an essential tool of corruption through its military and bureaucratic hands. While negotiating or accepting deals, the civil and military leadership NEVER thought that sovereignty should come first; Gen Ayub Khan's book FRIENDS NOT MASTERS was a true slap on the face of that collective Western imperialism - but was not pondered by any.

Imran Khan's stance remained that '**USA has turned Pakistan into a client state and that we have been fighting America's wars**'; additionally, that the US was always found demanding that Pakistan should '**do more**' in the war against terror. Let us examine the facts. In international relations, convergence of interests brings two countries closer. Imran Khan's arguments were contradicted by numerous anti-nationalism factors like why Pakistan always opposed Israel; why befriended China in 1950s when the US had hostile relations with it; why developed ties with Gaddafi and Khomeini who were hated by the US; why developed Pak-nuclear bomb, then refused to roll it back and carried out nuclear explosions - all these 'actions' of Pakistan were against US agenda. In 1978, Soviet military intervention was seen in Afghanistan, Pakistan felt it as a grave threat to its own security thus Gen Ziaul Haq started giving aid to the Afghan Mujahidin. When the US jumped into Afghan-War, Pakistan openly opted to support the war; since its closest friends, Saudi Arabia and China, were also supporting the same.

PM Khan made the above statement because in Afghan War Pakistan sacrificed its 80,000 civilians and Army-men, destroyed its \$165+ billion business etc and what the US and its allies lost – only nearly 2400 heads in total during long 20 years. Still we had to be blamed for

NOT DOING MORE; the US got the most humiliating defeat of the modern times. For more details see:

**'THE HISTORY OF A DISGRACEFUL SURRENDER [2021]'**  
by **INAM R SEHRI**, 360 pages, published by GHP Surrey UK IN 2022

Imran Khan was right in saying that political negotiations should be held to end the Afghan war but the real issue was to persuade the Taliban to agree to a political compromise - in fact the Taliban didn't want to join such negotiations. What was the fault of Pakistan or the new PTI government if the Taliban were not coming to the negotiation table?

Later, Al-Qaeda declared a Jihad against Pakistan and Pakistani Taliban [TTP] began a vicious campaign of terror. Pakistan was alleged that terrorists use sanctuaries in Pakistan to conduct operations in Afghanistan; Pakistan strongly denied the said charge.

### **KHAN CONFRONTED THE US:**

The PTI's new government had two issues in the basket then. It entered into a spat with the US on what Secretary of State Pompeo had discussed with Imran Khan. Secondly, the Foreign Minister misunderstood the Indian position on talks, necessitating a clarification by the Foreign Office. The PTI government's objective to seek better relations with India was laudable, but no high hopes could be raised. As for Iran-Saudi differences, any mediation could only be attempted with Riyadh's approval.

Before taking over the premiership by Imran Khan in Pakistan, the military-to-military relationship was going ideal during the US President Trump's unpredictable behaviour for Pakistan. The western media and media anchors on Pak-TV channels were frequently discussing the development and the apprehended consequences; the US publication '**THE DIPLOMAT**' dated 18<sup>th</sup> August 2018 is referred in this context.

Over the last two decades, one area of cooperation that remained off-limits to any bilateral rows was Washington's intent to offer **coveted training programs for Pakistani military officers**. During Trump administration, the change didn't become a factor that could shift Pakistan's regional security policy because Washington had already conveyed to Pakistan that the military training component of US aid would remain in place despite the suspension of the security assistance package. Traditionally, the US military had sought to protect such educational programs from political tensions, arguing that direct military-to-military ties were strategic in nature and were crucial for future alliance building purposes.

However, the Trump admin, in its latest attempt to put pressure on Pakistan, started to close various training programs for Pakistani military officials. Many nationalist think-tanks in Pakistan were happy over Trump's decision to shut down military training programs – because it openly manifested that Washington's influence would further reduce over Pakistan. However, the policy couldn't be implemented due to certain internal factors within American high offices – and then US elections of 2020 took away Mr Trump.

It was, perhaps, the backdrop that Pakistan had to sign a military training agreement with Russia; the Pakistani military officials were planned to receive training in Russia's military institutes. Security cooperation between Islamabad and Moscow had expanded over the previous few years. Among other things, **Washington's heavy-handed approach toward Pakistan was, in fact, considered as the reasons driving it away from the United States**. The decision further isolated Washington's remaining pockets of influence in Pakistan.

Moreover, an attempt to isolate Pakistan militarily at a time when the United States was trying to directly engage the Afghan Taliban didn't bode well for any effort to revive the Afghan peace process - Pakistan had big stakes in the Afghan peace process then. On the whole, it was not clear how Pakistan's national security establishment viewed the decision. Islamabad and Washington's direct line of contact for the military-to-military relationship had suffered a serious blow – the analytics could guess.

**On 27<sup>th</sup> August 2018:** Shah Mahmood Qureshi, the new Foreign Minister, held his first press conference and talked about the new government's foreign policy putting '**Pakistan first**' and emphasizing a focus on national interests. He briefly touched upon Pakistan's relations with its neighbourhood, the US and China, and outlined the government's visions and road map in the months to come. During his first visit to Pakistan's Foreign Office on 24<sup>th</sup> August 2018, PM Khan had emphasized that '**he would pursue an independent and proactive foreign policy with no compromise on national interests, seek relations based on parity, and bridge the trust deficits in regional relations**'.

Three days later, PM Khan once more emphasized that his government would not accept any unfair demands by the US; adding that his government would cancel any agreements made against national interests by previous governments. Next day, the Pentagon cancelled \$300 million aid to Pakistan, supposedly due to a lack of '**decisive action against militants**'. The suspension was in addition to another \$500 million worth of Coalition Support Funds which had been withheld earlier in the year under the Trump administration and was done to build up more pressure on Pakistan. Basically, this money was not an aid - it was a due right of Pakistan as reimbursements for the losses suffered by the country in the war on terror.

#### **US's 'DO MORE' MANTRA – NO MORE:**

**On 3rd September 2018:** at his office, PM Khan held a one-on-one meeting with Gen Bajwa mainly in connection with US-Pakistan relations - the meeting came ahead of US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's scheduled visit to Pakistan on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2018.

US Secretary of State Pompeo was in Islamabad only for five hours but only to repeat their *mantra* of 'DO MORE'. The hard fact was that US-Pakistan bilateral relations were at an all-time low in those days; a serious trust deficit, made worse by President Trump's bullying style. However, the US needed Pakistan to keep open the supply route for its forces in Afghanistan and in helping to secure a face-saving exit from the longest war in its history.

During those days, it was an attempt to isolate Pakistan militarily at a time when the US was trying to directly engage the Afghan Taliban in an arena of the Afghan peace process. Pakistan had big stakes in the said process and an eventual settlement had to incorporate Pakistan's concerns. In that context, the ongoing targeting of an ally country's security apparatus was taken as a deliberate effort to create more distrust among both countries' national security institutions; both were directly engaged in Afghanistan politically and militarily since two decades long span.

BUT it was Washington's choice – might be a blessing in disguise for Pakistan. The US had shown cold shoulders to the significance of 'military diplomacy' during those times and it was considered a good omen then.

*"In 2004, Rumsfeld was asked about **military diplomacy** as a variant of soft power he feigned ignorance. Four years later, his successor Robert Gates however admitted that the trials of the US in Afghanistan and Iraq were proof that military strength was not sufficient to secure peace. He admitted that in the global war on terror, soft power and military diplomacy were far stronger instruments than hard power,"* an old

essay of Raashid Wali Janjua dated 11<sup>th</sup> July 2016 in daily '**the News**' of Pakistan is referred.

In pseudo-democracies like in Pakistan where the political leadership, instead of asserting civilian control in defense and security spheres, leaves a yawning gap to be filled by military leaders, military diplomacy comes to the rescue of the state by default. Why a democratic government used to abdicate vital foreign policy and security fields to the bureaucracy remained a riddle that needed unraveling in the interest of national security. Giving outlines of his foreign policy, PM Khan said:

*"If any country needs peace right now, it is Pakistan. We want to have good relations with all neighbours. It would be very good for all of us if we have good relations with India".*

PM Khan offered dialogue on the core issue of Kashmir and promised that if '**India takes one step forward; he would take two steps....**' He stressed the need for peace for Afghan people who had suffered the most in the War on Terror [WOT]. He wanted to have open borders with Afghanistan one day. He also indicated that he wanted to improve ties with Iran.; and Saudi Arabia was a friend who had always stood by Pakistan in difficult times.

### **RELATIONS WITH SAUDI ARABIA:**

During last week of August 2018, the Inter-Services Public Relations [ISPR] issued a note that during his meeting with Pak-Army Chief Gen Bajwa at Mina, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman conveyed his wishes and support for the new elected government in Pakistan. The expression of solidarity and support by Saudi Arabia was in continuation of the goodwill gestures demonstrated by the Kingdom and its leadership ever since the 2018 General Election in Pakistan.

Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Pakistan Nawaf bin Said Al-Malki was the first foreign diplomat to have a meeting with Imran Khan even when the poll results were still pouring in and that was reflective of deep relationship of the Kingdom with Pakistan. Like China, Saudi Arabia too kept relationship with Pakistan based on mutual respect and people-to-people contacts and remained immune to political changes in Pakistan. There were reports in the media that Saudi Arabia was ready to provide meaningful assistance to Pakistan in overcoming its economic and financial challenges at a time when the US was implementing plans to squeeze the country and was even threatening to block any moves to get bail-out package from the International Monetary Fund [IMF].

Saudi Arabia, was always seen in the forefront be it political or diplomatic support to Pakistan or economic and financial cooperation. On 7 September 2018: Saudi Arabia's minister for information and culture Awwad Alawwad arrived Pakistan and met his counterpart, Fawad Chaudhry. The two discussed extending the current Pakistani-Saudi cooperation in all fields, particularly economic development and the media sector. The Saudi minister also met PM Khan, in addition to the political and military leadership. Pakistan expressed its support for ongoing Saudi reforms, including the Vision 2030.

**18-19<sup>th</sup> September 2018:** Imran Khan's visit to Saudi Arabia was fruitful; the kingdom alone could help Pakistan bail out from its payments-crisis, as Islamabad needed \$10+ billion to meet its immediate obligations. As an opposition leader, Imran Khan had insisted on Pakistan keeping out of the Yemen war and also opposed Gen Raheel Sharif's appointment as head of IMCTC. The Saudi stance on both issues was the opposite. Imran Khan was the new Prime Minister with great responsibilities. Pakistan's foremost need was to overcome the economic crisis - a testing time for mutual diplomacy.

*[Since 1950s, Pakistan always kept a huge commitment to provide security to Saudi Arabia; but the fact remained that Riyadh had given far more aid to other countries which did much less. Just talking about recent times, in 2014, Saudi Arabia gave an aid package of \$25 billion to Egypt. In June 2018, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and UAE pledged \$2.5 billion to Jordan to help it come out of its financial crisis, plus annual support for its budget for five years. UAE gave Egypt \$3 billion after the coup in 2013 and provided \$4 billion in April 2016. The last Saudi aid to Pakistan was \$1.5 billion in 2013. PM Khan had these comparative figures in mind when he talked to Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman during his visit to Pakistan after the change in Pakistan government in 2018.]*

Maxim lies that international politics is a ruthless pursuit of national interests, much beyond one's emotions, illusions and ego-traits.

**22-23 October 2018:** At the invitation of King Salman bin Abdul Aziz and the Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, PM Imran Khan again visited Saudi Arabia to participate in the Future Investment Initiative [FII] Conference. Amongst other bilateral discussions, far-reaching decisions on bilateral economic and financial cooperation were also agreed. After inauguration of the FII Conference, a Pakistan-specific session was organized, in which PM Khan underlined Pakistan's priorities towards optimizing the economy and attracting foreign investment – but no positive or practical response received.

Saudi Arabia's \$6 billion pledge reduced the size of bailout package from the International Monetary Fund [IMF]. For \$3 billion loan, a memorandum of understanding [MoU] was signed between the two Finance Ministers under which Saudi Arabia had to place a deposit of USD three billion for a period of one year as balance of payment support. It was also agreed that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia would also provide a one-year deferred payment facility for import of oil, up to USD three billion and this arrangement would be in place for three years, to be reviewed thereafter.

Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman also agreed with PM Khan's suggestion to reduce visa fee for Pakistani workers, which was a significant step towards enhancing the country's workforce in Saudi Arabia, as well as facilitating travel of people from both the countries. In the meantime, a visit of the Saudi delegation had evaluated the possibility of investing in a petroleum refinery in Gwadar Pakistan. Saudi Arabia confirmed its interest in this project. Saudi Arabia also expressed interest in development of mineral resources in the country. For this purpose, the Federal Government and the Government of Baluchistan consulted each other to invite a delegation of the Kingdom for feasibility assignments.

Later, another all-weather friend and trustful, **Saudi Arabia** had a soured story like the Chinese. The deterioration of relations started when Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, in a televised interview criticized Saudi Arabia and the OIC's (Organization of Islamic Countries) inaction over Kashmir and threatened to create a new Islamic bloc. It was during that time, Mahatir Muhammad, the then PM of Malaysia invited PM Khan to an Islamic Summit, seen as an alternative to the OIC. PM Khan backed out at the last moment due to the pressure from both the establishment and Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia demanded the repayment of 1 billion USD from a 3 billion USD Soft loan back from Pakistan as the mistrust between the two heightened. Even UAE demanded its 1 billion USD loan back making Mr Khan and his government realize the consequence of challenging Saudi leadership in the Islamic world by trying to create new OIC like block.

Even though relations remained tenacious between the two, Saudi Arabia had agreed to bail out desperate Pakistan with a 4.2 billion USD assistance package. In the history of Pak-Saudi relations, never such stringent clauses of the assistance deal were seen where a country was barred to use its \$3 bn credit in State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) and instead had to pay a 4%

interest for just keeping this amount in its bank and that too only for a year. Also, if default in this agreement was committed the right of jurisdiction and arbitration over the matter would be presided by the Saudis. Only at a notice of 72 hours, Pakistan would pay the entire sum or the assets that were negotiated under that would seize to exist as part of the agreement.

The above provisions could give the world's financers an idea of how far the relations between Saudis and Pakistan had gone bad.

### **MOST SIGNIFICANT CHINA GOT ANGRY:**

**On 7<sup>th</sup> September 2018;** China's foreign minister Wang Yi arrived Pakistan, on a 3-day visit to discuss bilateral relations and the ongoing economic projects under the multi-billion **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor [CPEC]**. Wang met with Qureshi, as did their respective delegations, and also met PM Khan and army chief Gen Bajwa. Following their meeting, the two foreign ministers held a press conference during which both announced the two countries had agreed to deepen their ongoing strategic cooperation. FM Qureshi reiterated that CPEC was a vital instrument of Pakistan's socio-economic development and both sides touched upon their bilateral trade, poverty alleviation efforts, cultural links, job creations and other developments.

Previously, PM Khan had made many references for matching the Chinese model of rapid social and economic development in Pakistan. The Chinese delegate also offered clarification on China's One Belt, One Road projects in Pakistan under the aegis of the CPEC, and said the projects were not **debt but rather investments** that would unleash huge economic benefits to the Pakistani economy. CPEC projects had created 70,000 jobs in Pakistan till then and added to economic growth by one to two per cent.

An article in THE FINANCIAL TIMES dated 9<sup>th</sup> September 2018 claimed that Pakistan was planning to renegotiate the terms of agreements existing under CPEC, especially those that were perceived to be tilted away from Pakistan's favour; the report quoted Abdul Razzaq Dawood, the cabinet member for commerce, textiles and industry stating:

*"The previous government did a bad job negotiating with China on CPEC — they didn't do their homework correctly and didn't negotiate correctly so they gave away a lot. Chinese companies received tax breaks, many breaks and have an undue advantage in Pakistan; this is one of the things we're looking at because it's not fair that Pakistan companies should be disadvantaged".*

However, this report was swiftly refuted by both Pakistani and Chinese government sources; Dawood said he had been quoted **out of context** in many parts of the report, on which he would be adding clarification in detail.

The Chinese Foreign Minister's visit reaffirmed the strong bonds of friendship between Pakistan and China. Imran Khan reiterated that friendship with China was a cornerstone of Pakistan's foreign policy. He assured that his government was committed to the implementation of CPEC. The Chinese Foreign Minister gave out specific information about the progress already achieved and a willingness to address any concerns about CPEC projects.

Simultaneously, PM Khan held that China had given Pakistan a huge opportunity through CPEC. He wanted to learn from China how it brought 700 million people out of poverty, as also its anti-corruption measures. With USA he wanted to have a mutually beneficial relationship, which until then had been a one-way situation NOT as the version that America gave aid to Pakistan for fighting their war. Imran Khan's speech was carried live by CNN and BBC and was largely applauded at home and abroad for its balanced and reconciliatory stance.

However, Pakistan had never been so isolated even in the worst of its times; whether it was China, the US, the EU, or Saudi Arabia; every ally or its strategic partners alike had distanced themselves from Pakistan after the Afghanistan debacle. The Taliban and Afghanistan were not the only issues that resulted in the said isolation, the multiplicity of Pakistan's interest had resulted in mutual distrust among all its partners and friends.

The relationship **with China**, its all-weather ally, and 'Iron brother' saw some rough tides when a story unearthed about the corruption scandal of Chairman CPEC Authority, Lt-Gen Asim Saleem Bajwa (retd) was forced to resign due to the pressure from the Chinese. The increase in the assaults over Chinese citizens by fringe Pakistani groups and the freedom fighters of Baluchistan too made China revisit its commitments under this project. The incident at Dasu Dam Project, its handling by Pak authorities irked the 'Iron brother' to an extent that all major projects under CPEC came to halt and China had to ask a compensation of 38 million USD for the families of the deceased. This demand was a pre-requisite or to put in another way, a confidence-building measure to restart operations.

- *More on China's CPEC discussed in a separate scenario.*

### **KHAN's FOREIGN POLICY: ISOLATED (?)**

Apparently, Imran Khan's victory in July 2018's election reaffirmed belief in essential values: decency, compassion, honesty, equality and self-respect. It was, no doubt, a vote for rule of law, for democracy and constitutional governance. The victory speech made by Imran Khan was an uplifting moment in Pakistan's history. He displayed his vision of a new Pakistan, free of corruption and ending oligarchic rule. However, the general populace was seen disappointed and disgruntled when **his 50+ cronies, an army of ministers and advisors, couldn't deliver the fruit** later as had been manifested by the PTI and Imran Khan through their key points at their '**agenda before the election**' and after holding the govt, they betrayed the nation by doing nothing as per their manifesto.

**In the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of September 2018;** Pakistan's PM Khan hosted Foreign Ministers from Japan, Iran, USA, China and Turkey. Since getting oath a month earlier, Imran Khan had telephone conversations with leaders of India, France, UK, China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and others. In addition, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi was also sent to Kabul; immediately after he left for New York to attend the annual UN General Assembly session where he met some of his counterparts including of the US. On his first foreign visit, PM Khan proceeded to Saudi Arabia to see King Salman and Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman – a positive start with an intensive diplomatic activity from a new government.

It was favourable diplomatic recognition by the international community of Pakistan's importance as a state whose policies could affect the region and beyond. Each of the visits by the five foreign ministers [FM] to Islamabad had its own background and significance. Japanese FM Kazuyuki Nakane signed an agreement for economic development assistance; it has been a major trading partner of Pakistan.

Iranian FM Jawad Zarif was an early visitor to Islamabad, perhaps by intention. He met top Pakistani leaders and delivered a letter from President Rowhani to PM Khan inviting him to attend the Asian Cooperation Dialogue Summit in Iran in October 2018; the very next month. PM Khan thanked Iranian Supreme Leader Khamenei's support for Kashmiris' struggle for self-determination [*though Iran officially avoids any mention of Kashmir*]. Notable thing was that Pakistani FM Qureshi supported 'Iran's principled stance on the nuclear deal issue', pitting it against the US which had withdrawn its commitment. The American sponsored intelligentsia in Islamabad was worried about the possible harm due to this explicit support for Iran

to Pakistan's relations with USA and Saudi Arabia, in their back-drop of cold war with Iran. However, PM Khan never bothered on such issues.

Iran and Pakistan share an embattled border and PM Imran Khan's visit to Iran — which came just a week after 14 persons were killed, reportedly by an Iran-based armed group; most of the world appreciated the gesture. Because, Islamabad blamed Tehran for that attack in or at Baluchistan; Tehran had also blamed Pakistan for a suicide attack in which 27 members of Iran's Revolutionary Guards were killed on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2019 — just when Pulwama incident occurred in India.

### **KASHMIR ISSUE IN PM KHAN's TIME:**

After getting premiership, PM Khan's first speech on foreign-policy was not welcomed in India. It was unhappy to see Nawaz Sharif defeated who was regarded as pro-India. It was a satisfying factor that religious parties, including some advocating anti-India militancy, lost ground in 2018 elections. However, as expected, India didn't reciprocate meaningfully to Imran Khan's offer of friendship. Modi's BJP regime had thrived domestically by its anti-Pakistan policy. It was unlikely for India to change direction or show any accommodation on Kashmir issue or its solution.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York on **27<sup>th</sup> September 2019** evening. While PM Modi did not mention Kashmir or Pakistan in his speech, PM Imran Khan spoke about the Kashmir issue in his speech. While addressing the UNGA, PM Modi said:

*"India has been so ahead on the global goals that the country has now become an inspiration for the world. When a developing nation successfully carries out the biggest cleanliness drive of the world and provides more than 11 crore toilets to its people just within 5 years, that system gives a message of inspiration to the entire world. My focus is to drive India's development."*

Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan too addressed the UNGA later that night. The salient features of his speech were:

*"If the conventional war starts with a country which is four times bigger than Pakistan, what will we do? This is what I ask myself a lot of times. But I say this; we will fight but think what happens when two nuclear countries fight."*

#### **"Nuclear war is not a threat; it's a fair worry."**

*"There are millions of Muslims in India. PM Modi, do you know what they must be thinking. If there's a bloodbath, Muslims will become radicals. You are forcing Muslims into radicalisation. They will pick up arms."*

*"Has PM Modi thought what would happen when the curfew in Kashmir is lifted? Do you think people in Kashmir would accept that you have withdrawn the special status? Thousands of children in Kashmir have been put under detention. They, too, will come out on the streets after the curfew in the state is lifted and the Army will shoot them. We also hear about pellet guns being used by the Indian Army. But whatever happens in Kashmir after the curfew is lifted, there will be another terror attack like Pulwama and Pakistan will be blamed."*

*"PM Modi's whole life is RSS which is inspired by Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini. RSS believes in the ethnic cleansing of Muslims. RSS goons butchered hundreds of Muslims. This is arrogance. This makes people do cruel things. Something PM Modi has done. Arrogance has blinded PM Modi."*

*"When Pulwama happened, India immediately blamed us. We asked them for proof but they instead sent their aircraft. PM Modi's election campaign was also based on a*

*lie. During elections, PM Modi campaigned saying 'I have taught Pakistan a lesson' was a lie."*

*"When I came to power, my priority was Pakistan would be a country which would try to bring peace. The Mujahideen groups, which were trained by Pakistan and funded by US, were called terrorist groups by the Soviet. Come 9/11, Pakistan joined the war against terrorism. Now that we joined the US which occupied Afghanistan, these groups turned against us. 70,000 Pakistanis died in this war. When we came to power, we dismantled what was left of these groups. I know India keeps accusing us that there are military groups but these are not. The UN officials can come and check themselves."*

*"Islamophobia since 9/11 has grown at a pace which is alarming. The human community lives together, there should be an understanding. But Islamophobia is dividing the world. Muslim women have been asked to take off their Hijab in other countries. A woman can take off her clothes in other countries but cannot put on Hijab."*

*"Some countries are not serious about climate change. When my party came to power, we planted a billion trees but one country cannot do everything."*

PM Imran Khan's speech at the United Nations General Assembly [UNGA] started shortly after 8:30 pm; meanwhile, PM Modi did not stay in the hall to listen Imran Khan's speech. He further elaborated the following eye-opening issues that:

*"We all know that marginalisation leads to radicalisation. We must address this issue...Western leaders' equated terrorism with Islam."*

*"In all human communities, there are radicals, there are liberals, and there are moderates. All human communities ... no religion preaches radicalism. The basis of all religions is compassion and justice, which differentiate us from the animal kingdom."*

*"Terrorism has nothing to do with any religion. No one did research that before 9-11, the majority of suicide bombers in the world were Tamil Tigers. They were Hindus – [but] No one blamed Hinduism. And quite rightly what does Hinduism got to do with what desperate people were doing in Sri Lanka?"*

*"We all know, we've seen films about Japanese 'Kamikaze' pilots at the end of the Second World War doing suicide attacks. No one blames their religion."*

*"There is a misunderstanding in the West regarding Islam, which is causing Islamophobia in the world. There are 1.3 billion Muslims in this world. Millions of Muslims are living in the US and European countries as minorities. Islamophobia, since 9/11 has grown at an alarming pace."*

*"Why did Islamophobia grow. Why did it start? - Because certain western leaders equated terrorism with Islam, calling it Islamic terrorism and radical Islam. What is radical Islam? There is only one Islam. This Islamic radicalism has been the main reason behind Islamophobia. This has caused pain to Muslims."*

*"If a conventional war starts, anything could happen. But supposing a country seven times smaller than its neighbour is faced with a choice: either you surrender or you fight for your freedom till death. We will fight and when a nuclear-armed country fights to the end it will have consequences far beyond the borders, it will have consequences for the world."*

*"So it's important to understand this: The Prophet lives in our hearts. When he is ridiculed, when he is insulted, it hurts... We human beings understand one thing: The pain of the heart is far, far, far more hurtful than physical pain. And that's why the Muslims react [to insults against the Prophet]... having lived in the West, people didn't understand this."*

*"We need to explain that, look, in a human community; we must be sensitive to what causes pain to another human being. We have in the western society, and quite rightly, the Holocaust treated with sensitivity, because it gives the Jewish community*

*pain. That's all we ask: Do not use freedom of speech to cause us pain by insulting our Holy Prophet. That's all we want."*

As part of his '**Mission Kashmir**' to draw global attention on the issue, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan urged the Kashmir Study Group during a meeting with its leaders to highlight the situation in Jammu and Kashmir, which he said '**poses a grave threat to regional peace and security**'.

*[PM Khan had met with the founder of Kashmir Study Group, Faroq Kathwari, who called on him in New York. Kathwari had earlier served as member of the US President's Advisory Commission on Asian Americans.]*

However, in the light of country's past, and skipping the details about SEATO and CENTO agreements, it was after 1979 when US President Jimmy Carter authorized the CIA for covert operations, Pakistan became the capital for Islamic Radicalization and the epicenter for Afghan jihad. The critical analysts held that Pakistan's obsession to remain firm in the western camp was very much reflected in its early foreign policy that advocated for joining US-led Western Bloc. However, everything took a turn when the US announced its withdrawal and by 15th August 2021, Kabul fell to the Taliban. The humiliation and defeat of the American-led campaign in Afghanistan were solely attributed to the deconstructive role of Pakistan. Albeit, the failure of the US in Afghanistan was mostly due to its mishandling of the situation but for the US and the West, Pakistan remained the best scapegoat for many of those failures directly or indirectly.

Since old days, Pakistan's multiplicity of interest in Afghanistan and Kashmir and engaging both at the same time did prove a tactical victory but it had to endure heavy losses as well. On the eastern side, it lost Siachin and till Kargil it was involved in the arms race, thereby impacting its dependent economy. Over the years, India's prevention of cross-border infiltration through enhanced counter-terror grid, ground Information, and public outreach campaign both by forces and civil administration all synergized as a combined effort in combating terrorism in the valley. On the diplomatic front India ensured that Pakistan pays in cash & kind, mainly in human loss.

Pakistan has been on FATF's grey list for financing terror. Even during Imran Khan's era, practically, every supporting country of Pakistan lost interest in Kashmir Issue due to India's pro-active foreign policy. The effective counter to the fake narrative and propaganda peddled by Pakistan had helped India to expose it on the global stage and also bring the issue of terrorism in Pakistan to the diplomatic tables for discussion. However, the spat between India and Pakistan was not new; most of the losses for Pakistan had been at the western front as it had to host 30 million (*unofficial figure touched 60m*) Afghan refugees which continued to pour-in accompanied by Drugs, Kalashnikovs and explosives in Pakistan.

The formation of new radical jihadi movements like TLP and many others led to the rise of extremism in (till) present-day KPK's former FATA region and Northern-Areas of Baluchistan. Kidnapping, extortion, and human trafficking increased over the Durand line making the internal security vulnerable. As the destabilization continued even after Pakistan's associates were in Kabul, the threat of spillover effect like TTP (*Teherik-e-Taliban Pakistan*) of the unfinished conflict further rigged the economy and socio-political set up in Pakistan. The exponential rise in radicalism was just the beginning of impending doom. For more details, following book is once again referred:

**'THE HISTORY OF A DISGRACEFUL SURRENDER [2021]'**  
by **INAM R SEHRI**, 360 pages, published by GHP Surrey UK IN 2022

India was the only 'other' part of the Kashmir issue. India never really cared about Pakistan at least after 2014; India seldom did, but Pakistani rulers and media often seen raising their

voices against India - utter waste of energy, money and time; Mr Khan's govt was no exception. The fact remained that *Pakistan couldn't manage support of 56 members in the UNHRC - failed to get hold of 16 members to table a resolution against India in 2019.*

PM Khan offered to hold talks over Pulwama attack after 6 days of the attack, but PM Modi made it clear that **'this is not the time for talks now'.**

### **MOSCOW VISIT OF IMRAN KHAN:**

Few Pakistani politicians could think it promising to find themselves in Russia on the day the modern world changed forever. But on 23rd February 2022, hours before news broke that Vladimir Putin had invaded Ukraine, Khan emerged from an aircraft in wintry Moscow. '*At what a time I have come! So much excitement!*' Khan said to Igor Morgulov, Russia's deputy foreign minister, who welcomed him at the airport. His excitement and liveliness at this awkward juncture were captured by world media on camera. The optics, many in Pakistan held, were terrible.

Khan could not have known that within 12 hours of his arrival, Putin would announce the invasion. But before he left Islamabad, hoping to make trade deals, he knew that tensions between Moscow and Kyiv were at an all-time high. Just that week, US intelligence agencies had warned that Putin was moving troops close to the border with Ukraine and soldiers had received orders to invade. An official at the US National Security Agency called his Pakistani counterpart and urged caution; though apparently there were no significant trade deals to be made between Pakistan and Russia during that trip. ***Khan was in the wrong place at the wrong time.***

How did he get there? In fact, Pakistan had been trying to click up Russia for the last 10 or 15 years; everyone knew the US-Pakistan relationship ebbs and flows... [*The Russians don't trust Pakistan because of this (special relationship), and see the Pakistani military as too 'pro-west'*]. In Imran Khan, however, Putin saw a leader who could be trusted more than those in the uniform or his counterparts, because of his unorthodox thinking. They were waiting for this for 20 years. Later, at an Oxford Union address in October 2022, Khan explained that:

*'... he went to Russia **in the national interest**. Russia could supply us cheap oil – also, that he (Imran Khan) **wasn't anti-America** but that he suspected **the Biden administration wanted a more pliable stooge**'.*

During his visit to Moscow on 23rd February 2022, the Prime Minister Imran Khan had conveyed to Russian President Vladimir Putin that the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine, could be averted through a diplomatic solution. A communiqué issued after the meeting stated that PM Khan stressed that conflict was not in anyone's interest and that developing countries were always hardest hit economically in case of such conflicts.

During 3-hours long meeting with the President Putin Mr Khan reaffirmed the importance of ***Pakistan-Stream Gas Pipeline as a flagship economic project between the two countries and also discussed cooperation on prospective energy-related projects.*** While the PM and his National Security Advisor Moeed Yusuf were meeting President Putin and his team, the rest of the cabinet members were seen strolling in Red Square. Astonishingly, there was no interaction with the press following the meeting between the two heads of government. A readout on the Kremlin's official website simply read: "*The leaders of the two countries discussed the main aspects of bilateral cooperation and exchanged views on current regional topics, including developments in South Asia.*"

As anticipated, nothing concrete had been agreed upon or signed that could be touted as a major successful takeaway from the visit. The two press releases of both meetings also didn't mention any such agreement or even the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The main purpose of coming to Moscow was that Pakistan needed regional connectivity, mutual trade and Gas-Pipeline. Minister for Energy Hammad Azhar was of the view that whatever agreements were signed on several energy projects, eventualities like possible sanctions on Russia in the backdrop of the Ukrainian war would be dealt with under legal cover.

In a cautious response to PM Imran Khan's visit to Moscow, the US, on the same day prompt, reminded Islamabad that every responsible country must voice concern over Russia's invasion of Ukraine. On Mr Khan's Moscow visit, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said:

*"We're certainly aware of the trip, and the points I said earlier about the PRC (China) in some ways apply here. We've communicated to Pakistan our position regarding Russia's further renewed invasion of Ukraine, and we have briefed them on our efforts to pursue diplomacy over war. (Further) The US has had a longstanding partnership and cooperation with Pakistan and we view our partnership with a prosperous, with a democratic Pakistan as critical to US interests."*

*The US had a similar expectation from Pakistan on the question of Ukraine. We certainly hope, when it comes to those shared interests – the aversion of a costly conflict, the aversion of a destabilizing conflict, that every country around the world would make that point clearly in unambiguous language in their engagements with the Russian Federation."*

In fact, the US had taken the timing of the visit as an indirect endorsement of President Putin's policies – and indirectly asked the Pakistani government about its intent. It was perhaps in response or anticipation to the above given America's point that the Pakistani information minister (Mr Fawad Hasan), in his measured interaction with the media in Moscow, said:

***"Pakistan was moving ahead while keeping the complexity of the situation in mind. We are also in contact with the US and the PM is also likely to visit Europe soon as well; In these circumstances, postponing the planned trip to Russia would have been difficult."***

News published in print media and extensive TV discussions on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2022 are referred.

#### **SHAH M QURESHI's LAST ADDRESS AS F M:**

**On 10<sup>th</sup> April 2022:** As the parliamentary session began after adjournment, FM Shah M Qureshi took the floor once again and lambasted the fact that lawmakers switched their loyalties for material-gain; while asking:

*"Are those powers who have sworn to uphold the Constitution not seeing this bazaar? The nation was well aware of how votes were bought and sold during last year's Senate elections. We raised objections [...] we presented those videos in the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). The PTI kept knocking on the ECP's doors for a year. After this struggle, the arguments were concluded. [But] despite the lapse of a year, the judgement is reserved and we have not gotten justice.."*

The foreign minister was true as the '***blatant attempts for changing the regime***' were not hidden; '...history will expose those who have run this entire drama [...] the pen of the historian does not forgive anyone. Pakistan is standing at the crossroads of history. The nation has to decide whether we will live with our heads bowed or with our heads held high.'

Qureshi said he wanted to take the house into confidence; that the process for the prime minister's visit to Russia was set in motion two months before it was scheduled. Adding further that:

*"We called and consulted Pakistan's seasoned diplomats, academics and some media persons at PM House regarding the pros and cons of undertaking the visit. It was decided with mutual consultation (with the then Army Chief Gen Bajwa especially) that it would be in Pakistan's interest to go ahead with it. **We are a sovereign state. We do not want to bear the yoke of slavery.**"*

The fact remained that prior to the visit to Russia, the US National Security Adviser (NSA) called his Pakistani counterpart with one very brief message: **Don't go.** Qureshi questioned how a sovereign state could be stopped from a bilateral visit in this manner.

FM Qureshi added that once the decision to go was made, Pakistan decided to give its input on the Ukraine war. Pakistan is a country that believes in the United Nations charter and self-determination and we never supported the use of force; thus, our response in the UN General Assembly was different. He also highlighted how Pakistani citizens were evacuated from Ukraine as the Russian invasion began. **'We made what efforts [we could]. There was talk of humanitarian assistance, I sent it myself.'**

Qureshi also talked about the then meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) where the Afghan issue, the Kashmir issue and the Ukraine issue were raised [...]. Pakistan built consensus among 57 countries of the Islamic ummah; also, that the Islamabad Declaration would go down in history.

Talking about the '**threat letter – CYPHER**', the foreign minister held:

*"If the opposition members still have questions about that document, I will give a briefing in parliament. Let's go for an in-camera session and let the ambassador to the US tell us whether he stands by what he sent. **Is it not a threat if you are told that there will be very bad consequences if you do not desist, that Pakistan will be forgiven if the no-confidence motion is passed but will be isolated if the motion fails?**"*

Mr Qureshi, the foreign minister, also talked about **India's 'accidental fire of a missile'** into Pakistan.

*"There was no loss of life but when we asked them for an explanation, they said it was accidental. Will India tell this to the UN Security Council (UNSC)? He had written to the UNSC and said the accidental fire could have led to an '**accidental war**. It is such a dangerous game that India has played. Where were the standard operating procedures and the protocols?"*

Talking about the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Qureshi said - the PTI government felt that this was a project that would enhance regional connectivity and lift millions of people out of poverty. PTI government's foreign policy called for good relations with every country and to increase Pakistan's diplomatic space; and didn't want to be hostile with any country.

Once again, Mr Qureshi rejected the claims that the '**threat letter – CYPHER**' was fake, adding that the meeting in Washington took place on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2022.- and the very next day the no-confidence motion was submitted against the prime minister Imran Khan. Look at how these things coincided - calling for holding an in-camera session.

Turning to the opposition, he said that they had been calling for elections for the last three-and-a-half years. He called on lawmakers not to push Pakistan into a constitutional crisis and to go for fresh elections; urging:

*"They used to say the elections were not fair and said that Imran Khan was selected. Now when the prime minister said let's hold elections and see what the nation wants, they are not ready for it – we call for the nation to decide - **why are you scared of the nation?**"*