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Afghanistan's Renewed Significance in United States Geopolitical Calculus 2017

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Afghanistan's renewed significance in United States geopolitical calculus in 2017 seems to be impelled by the challenge of Afghanistan becoming the cockpit of global power games with the surfacing of the China-Pakistan-Russia Trilateral.

In the United States with President Trump having assumed office in 2017 and inheriting a legacy of a destabilised Afghanistan largely due to Pakistan Army's proxies is now set and determined to impart a new significance to Afghanistan in United States geopolitical calculus. This stands noticeably manifested by reports that President Trump in a change of strategy has decided to give US Military Commanders unfettered freedom in execution of US military operations to restore stability and success of operations in Afghanistan.

US President Trump has reportedly rejected a report by a US think-tank suggesting outsourcing US stability operations to private security contractors. On the other hand an initial surge of US Forces has been ordered. Notably, the US National Security Adviser has been able to persuade the President that no change of appointment should take place to replace General Nicholson, Commanding General of US & NATO Forces in Afghanistan. Both these indicators suggest a stiffening of US responses to Pakistan Army's intensifying proxy war in Afghanistan and any Pakistani derivatives from the Trilateral.

Repeatedly stressed in my past SAAG Papers on Afghanistan that American lack of success in Afghanistan was not due to lack of professional competence of successive US Commanders or the fighting capability of US Forces but due to factors beyond the control of the US Commanders. The first major factor was micro-management of military operations by the Washington political establishment. The second major factor was US political establishment giving disproportionate importance and primacy to Pakistan Army's sensitivities on Pakistan. This many a time led to United States devaluing Afghanistan's Presidency and in the process impeding success of US operations.

From 2017 onwards one can expect a resurgence of United States military operations in Afghanistan with a surge of US Forces. In tandem going by recent statements of both the President and his National Security Adviser, we may now witness Pakistan being called to account for its proxy destabilisation operations in Afghanistan.

The United States could have possibly been accommodative to the China-Pakistan-Russia-Trilateral had it been aimed at restoring stability in Afghanistan in tandem with the United States sustained efforts to do so. However, the China-Pakistan-Russia Trilateral attempted to exclude the United States from their so called political intervention in Afghanistan in the first few months of its Summits. The Trilateral also excluded Afghanistan too likewise. This aroused legitimate doubts of the true motives of the Trilateral more focussed on altering the geopolitical balance in Afghanistan than contributing to its stability.

More significantly, if China and Russia had been genuinely interested in contributing to the restoration of stability in Afghanistan then both of these Major Powers, and China in particular, would have come down heavily on Pakistan for not controlling Taliban and Haqqani brothers insurgency and suicide bombings in Afghanistan.

On the contrary as pointed out by me in my previous SAAG Papers on the subject that the incidence of proxy war by Pakistan Army affiliates in Afghanistan increased lately with Pakistan secure in the belief that no restraint would be applied by China and Russia as the three nations of the Trilateral aimed at prompting the exit of the United States from Afghanistan.

Herein lies the challenge for the United States and President Trump as a renewed and reinforced US military effort is put into place to bring about stability and peace in Afghanistan. Once again, as in the past 16 years the challenge posed to US efforts in Afghanistan would emanate from Pakistan.

Pakistan is no longer in the American orbit and in 2017 stands freed from United States strategic and financial strings. Pakistan Army can be expected to now openly and more brazenly oppose United States efforts in Afghanistan. This time with a renewed vigour aided and prodded by China and Russia.

This is something which the United States establishment, both civil and military has to recognise. The United States desire to retain

Pakistan's friendship even though tenuous in 2017 cannot be a pretext to condone Pakistan Army's destabilising strategies in Afghanistan. This time around the United States has to come down hard on Pakistan Army if the US intends to restore stability in Afghanistan.

The United States cannot overlook that China has had long links with the Taliban and Russia is now providing military supplies to the Taliban additionally. Reports have also surfaced that Iran sensing the vacuum caused by a stalemate in US military operations has commenced links with the Taliban and some suggest Iranian military supplies too.

In conclusion, it therefore it now becomes apparent in 2017 that the US President now has to tackle a military adverse situation in Afghanistan brought about by the China-Pakistan-Russia Trilateral and also US premature declarations in bygone years of its impending withdrawal of US Forces. President Trump has four years of his Presidency to ensure military success of US Forces by delegating operational decision-making freedom to US Commanders and political and military chastening of Pakistan---the fountainhead of destabilisation operations in Afghanistan aimed at prompting exit of US Forces from the region.

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