

# On India

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If I were Henry Kissinger, I would write a treatise ‘On India’. Such has been the monumental change in India’s fortunes as a State and a player principally in Asia and broadly on the global stage. Modi may be a despised name in Pakistan, but he has done something to brand India which none before him was able to manage. Importantly, India does what it feels and to the extent she needs. And it all stays kosher. It is an ally of the US; a rub Pakistanis go to town with, complaining relentlessly about the US as its closet patron. We are delusionary and deceptive in assessing our standing and employ double-speak as an art, vilifying the US as a popular pastime while whingeing when it accosts India. Russia is under American sanctions, and none can trade freely with Russia except India which buys Russian oil on preferred terms and then re-export it to help an old patron earn dollars the indirect way. Two opposing military superpowers of the world claim India to be its ally. If this isn’t diplomatic coup, what is?

It all comes from one word — relevance. India is relevant to the world, not only in its size and girth but by its footprint and what matters to the world. Consider. It has the fifth largest economy in the world, ahead of the UK. It is aimed to be the third largest economy in the world by 2037. It is fourth in FE Reserves with over 600 billion USDs — Pakistan currently holds 4.5 only. Its growth rate in GDP matches the best performing economies over the last three decades after China. She is projected to stay on that path. India has world’s second largest army and the third largest military. It may not be the strongest corresponding to the numbers, but it is on path to rapidly increasing its capacity and capability. The global list of billionaires has 140 Indians of which four are included in the top 100.

Mittal is steel giant. Ambanis run multiple interests varying from defence to telecom. Infosys, an IT giant, is a global name. So on and so forth. India stands amongst the top producers in agri-products and in the IT industry. Their yields per acre in agriculture match the best in the world. And despite being a country of over 1.4 billion people, it remains a relatively steady, coherent and functional polity. Their system of governance has withstood the test of time and proved its resilience around fundamentals essential to a resolute democracy. It may not be the most efficiently or most equitably run society, but it has held on to anchors which have paved the way for it to solidify what makes a nation. To many it may not be secular enough — its Constitution still is, even if attitudes of the power wielders are not. Under Modi it has crafted a religious-nationalist plank of its newer assertion and identity. Don't balk. World over the trend is of the Right gaining eminence in social attitudes. Pakistan in this realm has its own set of challenges. Importantly, it seems to be working for Modi and India.

India jumped to a 100 billion USD reserves in 2004 from the measly 9.2 she had in 1992. Under Manmohan Singh, India increased her reserves to 252 billion USD by 2014. Under Modi these have galloped to over 600 billion and the GDP is sized over three trillion USDs. This is monumental progress which makes India a preferred destination for all investors. Saudi Arabia, Pakistan's fraternal brother, announced an investment of over 72 billion USDs in India even as we beg her to invest the 7 billion promised for Pakistan. Pakistan's iron-brother, China, pledged 10 billion USD in the very latest donors conference in Geneva to help Pakistan out of its financial predicament as well as a looming bankruptcy, as did Pakistan's favourite whipping boy, America. Somehow, both place equal premium on Pakistan's prospects.

And though Indian writers have this propensity to overstate India's heft and hem there should be no doubt that this century will see Asia defined by two most dominating nations in economic strength, military haughtiness and political impact — China and India. The gap between Pakistan and India is now

unbridgeable. India has broken free of the shackles that kept her tied in South Asia and hyphenated in global perception with Pakistan. Beginning with Rajiv Gandhi to Modi there has been a clear distancing of the Indian foreign policy away from Pakistan. That turns India more Asia than just South Asia and a clout which is far expanded. The world has taken note and regardless how much we play China vs India as a sorry paradigm for face-saving both are now above 100 billion USDs trade that binds them with a common aim to quickly move to 500 billion. Those who trade at that level never graduate beyond sticks and clubs, even if spiked, and whatever the savagery of their brawl. It is time to smell some real leaves.

One hates to admit, but Pakistan was politically outmanoeuvred by India on Kashmir by rescinding Article 370 of its Constitution which gave a special if not disputed status to the region. Her gradual mutation of the demographics in her favour continues unabated. And as the older generation of the defying Kashmiris bows out the young view issues far less weighed by emotive persuasion. In combination with unmatched density of military presence over decades the new normal has practically established newer realities. And while Pakistan's principled stance may just remain the same, work-around shall have to be found to factor in newer realities and graduate policy to benefit from this immense economic activity taking place in the neighbourhood. Placing artificial restraints on what can be a moment of deliverance to the rapidly impoverishing people of Pakistan is failing them with bankruptcy of thought. We are better only when stabler and economically buoyant. Time to shed the rhetoric.

India's global footprint is remarkable. She is invited to the G7 and is a member of the G20. It is leading a movement of the global South to represent what is critical to equitable progress in the times of climate change, pandemics and technology intrusion. It has a blueprint of establishing her own domain on the foreign policy front and sticks to it assiduously. She may seem arrogant and haughty at times triggering aversion but feels she has the space to assert her presence. It is a fine

line but her foreign policy apparatus treads it skillfully. Modi has brought India to the point where she has begun to cast a wider net of its influence and impact. Pakistan has been skillfully reduced to a footnote in this Indian script. It is time to smell some real leaves.

It is time to recalibrate our policy towards India and be bold enough to create a tri-nation consensus, along with China, focusing on Asia to be the spur for wider economic growth and benefit. That alone will turn geoeconomics into a strategy. Breaking away from convention and boldness in conception can address this newer paradigm. Or we may be reduced to the footnote of history.

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A recent opinion piece by Pervez Hoodbhoy argued why TTP could not be defeated. He ascribed this failure to lack of clarity in establishment about good and bad Taliban and the ideological confusion in the minds of soldiers and the citizens about TTP's Islamic credentials. He also parsed open the layers of TTP's logic for waging war against the state of Pakistan. The main demands of TTP include the need for imposing Shariah, rolling back FATA's merger with KPK and dismantling the Pak-Afghan border fence. The writer argued that all TTP demands were reasonable in view of their ideology's receptivity in Pakistan and a desire amongst the population dwelling along the Pak-Afghan border to treat it as a soft border.

The writer's criticism about Pakistan civil and military leadership's strategic assumptions vis a vis Afghanistan was based on incomplete knowledge due to

which there was a disconnect between his diagnosis and the prescription. The ground realities and the hidden facts however paint another picture. The picture would definitely include the present Taliban government and the role of external powers hell bent on keeping the pot boiling in Afghanistan as well as Pakistan's former tribal areas bordering Afghanistan. To get a handle on the TTP phenomenon it is apposite to understand its anatomy. TTP was formed in December 2007 under the leadership of Baitullah Masud as a reaction to Army operations against foreign militants who had crossed over from Afghanistan into Pakistan's FATA region after 2002 due to USA-ISAF operations.

Prior to TTP formation, the British era governance system and the power balance had been altered in favour of local clerics and foreign militants who had killed over 200 tribal Maliks by 2004. When Pakistan Army entered Tirah Valley after 50 years to restore order, its presence evoked resentment amongst the local tribesmen due to their abhorrence to any kind of control or encroachment on their centuries-old customs. The Waziris of North and South Waziristan and Mehsuds in Central and South Waziristan are the dominant tribes that have traditionally been in the forefront of the armed resistance against foreign interlopers in their territories. The British established their presence through a system of pacification and administration respecting the local customs and traditions. That system continued until a decade after the Soviet invasion when it was altered due to displacement of traditional local leadership of Maliks by the clerics and militants.

TTP was never a monolith organisation like Afghan Taliban, rather a loose confederation of militant outfits with different local affiliations. It kept splintering and regrouping with metronomic regularity accepting sectarian affiliates, common criminals and drug runners in its fold. By 2008 the TTP-affiliated militants had held sway over vast areas of Swat, Bajaur, Malakand and North and South Waziristan. Army launched Operation Rah e Nijaat in 2009 to clear South Waziristan. Similar operations — Rah e Haq and Rah e Raast — were

launched in Swat in 2007 and 2009. The Army defeated the TTP militants and cleared Swat as well as South Waziristan but then stopped short of North Waziristan. Some critics rue that the job should have been completed by sanitising the North Waziristan of TTP presence in 2009-10.

Due to a hiatus in operations the TTP regrouped and launched a dastardly attack on APS Peshawar in 2014. That was the time the nation got over its ambivalence on countering TTP menace; and the army launched Operation Zarb e Azb in North Waziristan, the last bastion of TTP resistance, killing 2,736 terrorists and destroying 836 hideouts. The cost was paid by locals also in terms of 929,859 IDPs. After clearance of North Waziristan TTP militants sought sanctuaries in Afghanistan with Tehrik e Taliban Afghanistan (TTA). A badly mauled TTP was biding its time until the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021.

Thereafter, the TTP militants, being the ideological kinsmen of Afghan Taliban, got a new lease of life. The Taliban government released 2,300 TTP prisoners, including hardened criminals. There was initial euphoria in Pakistan about Taliban government's return in Afghanistan but the subsequent events belied those expectations. The Taliban leadership faces intra Afghan friction in the shape of NRF led by Ahmed Massoud and supported by Dostum, Atta Muhammad Nur, Yunus Qanuni and Amrullah Saleh. There is an internal power dichotomy because of differences between Qandhari faction led by Mullah Haibtullah, the ideological head of the Taliban, and the Northern faction dominated by Haqqanis who are pragmatists.

There are also challenges from Hazara and Uzbek elements within the Taliban fold. Then there are differences between Doha negotiators and the frontline fighters on several issues. In addition, terrorist entities like ISKP and al-Qaeda pose serious threat to Taliban. The above differences and the economic difficulties have made Taliban weak on several fronts. One of them is their inability to rein in the TTP to attack Pakistan from Afghan soil. TTP meanwhile

has scented blood and has tried to cross over to cause unrest in Pakistan. Pakistan's leadership made an erroneous decision to enter into parleys with TTP from a position of weakness.

The TTP came up with unreasonable demands like FATA merger rollback and blanket amnesty for hardened criminals. Imposition of Sharia law was another demand that directly targeted Pakistan's constitution which is based on tenets of Sharia. All of those demands by a non-state actor are clearly unreasonable — currently being protested through public rallies in Swat and Bajaur. The Pakistani military planners need to understand the necessity of keeping the Afghan Taliban positively engaged. Any rebukes and demarches about border clashes need to be made firmly yet circumspectly. The 500-600 TTP militants that have crossed over to Pakistan and are now indulging in terror acts need to be eliminated with full force.

The issue of Pak-Afghan border however needs sensitive handling. There are livelihood patterns that depend on cross-border movement and a strategy needs to be devised so that the pattern is legalised under some new trade terms till the time the border regions are not developed for provenance of alternative livelihood to their denizens on both sides of the border. While TTP needs to be eliminated the escalation of hostilities with Afghan Taliban need to be avoided. And last but not least the pace of resettlement in the newly merged FATA districts needs to be accorded top most priority along with effective governance and development of these areas.

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