



South Asian Weekly Watch

NEWSLETTER
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Afghanistan

January 27: Army chief for stepping up Pak-Afghan border coordination

Chief of the Army Staff Gen Raheel Sharif has expressed hopes that contingency measures taken by Afghanistan in areas near the Pakistan border will help check cross-border terrorism and called for further improving border coordination between the two countries.

He was referring to the recently launched sanitisation operations by the Afghan National Army in areas opposite Mohmand and Bajaur agencies.

The army chief, who visited Mohmand Agency on Tuesday to review the security situation, was briefed on progress in stabilisation operations, including the ongoing development projects being carried out by the army. He expressed the hope that such projects would help root out terrorism on a long-term basis and provide education and job opportunities to the youth.

[DAWN](#)

January 26: Mistreatment of Afghan refugees

Moments of crisis are a time to judge a nation's character. With respect to the treatment of Afghan refugees, the country, particularly authorities in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P), have exhibited that in their moment of crisis, they will pick on the weakest and most vulnerable in society.

Allegations of mistreatment and abuse of refugees at the hands of the police continue to emerge ever since the [attack on the Army Public School](#) in Peshawar on December 16. Emotions are understandably high after the school massacre, but they are being channelled in ways that are geared towards temporary, ill-thought solutions, which involve picking on easy targets, such as economically poor refugees who may have little or no means of protection.

[Harassment of refugees](#) has been a problem in the past as well, but it has taken a turn for the worse in recent weeks. Police authorities in K-P are accused of raiding houses, hotels and businesses, and harassing even those who are properly registered as refugees and have proof of registration cards. Furthermore, arbitrary raids and deportations by the K-P government have started although the date for repatriation of all refugees was extended to December 2015 in a joint decision of the UNHCR and the federal government. What is most disturbing, however, are allegations of mistreatment of Afghan minors by the police, specifically of seminary students.

[Express Tribune](#)

January 25: Learning democracy from Afghanistan by Rahimullah Yusufzai

It isn't easy running a coalition government as President Dr Ashraf Ghani has found out since assuming power on September 29, 2014. His unity government with Dr Abdullah, who became the chief executive officer when a new post equivalent to prime minister was created for him, has been facing a crisis to cobble together a cabinet with 50 percent representation from the two sides. The run-up to the nomination process has been chaotic and getting the cabinet in place and functional has been frustrating.

Nobody should have expected that it would be a smooth affair when US Secretary of State John Kerry helped broker an agreement for formation of the unity government to unlock the stalemate resulting from the inconclusive and controversial presidential election. Dr Abdullah had refused to accept defeat as he claimed the polls were rigged in Ghani's favour.

Despite being an older democracy, Pakistan could learn a thing or two from Afghanistan's nascent democratic order and constitutional provisions. Every nominee for the Afghan cabinet has to individually seek the vote of confidence from the members of lower house of parliament by presenting his or her ideas for improving the working of their assigned ministry and answering questions posed by the parliamentarians. The profile of the minister-designate is read out in the assembly and achievements, if any, are highlighted.

[The News](#)

January 19: IS recruiting members in Pakistan, Afghanistan, says US general

The commander of US forces in Afghanistan has warned that the Islamic State (IS) terror group is making recruitment in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

"We are seeing reports of some recruiting," said Gen John Campbell, commander of the Resolute Support mission, during an interview with the US Army Times newspaper. "There have been some night letter

drops, there have been reports of people trying to recruit both in Afghanistan and Pakistan, quite frankly.”

The Resolute Support is the name given to the new mission of US and Nato forces in Afghanistan who are now assisting Afghan security forces. The change, however, does not prevent them from engaging those who attack them or target major Afghan defence installations.

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January 24: Unity at the heart of Asia by General (Retd) Mirza Aslam Baig

The fast changing scenario in Afghanistan gives one hope that the post 1990 conspiracies which tormented the Afghans might not be repeated as foreign occupation is vacated. Therefore, the factors determining the destiny of Afghanistan need to be analysed, keeping in mind the conspiracies of the past which prevented a peaceful transfer of power after the Soviet retreat. That led to a civil war, which threw up the Taliban as redeemers, but they were cut down by the invading forces in 2001.

Then followed the thirteen year war of occupation, which prevented the Afghans from forming a government of their choice. The recently held Heart of Asia Conference at Beijing sets its sights on the future and identifies the factors which could usher Afghanistan into a new era of peace and stability. The factors under focus are:

The Taliban have emerged as the winners and have shown serenity of judgment. They are prepared to negotiate peace, with the new Unity government of Ashraf Ghani An Intra-Afghan Dialogue that was held in Paris, in December 2012, at the Foundation for Strategic Research, where the participating Taliban; Northern Alliance and the representatives of President Karzai chartered a peace process road-map to 2015, envisaging a role for Pakistan supported by the United States. They also resolved “to remain united, working for a broad-based government, for peace in Afghanistan.” This is the on-going process now.

The new Afghan government, under President Ashraf Ghani, has taken positive steps, confirming the decisions taken by the 2012 High Peace Council at Paris. President Ashraf Ghani has declared that the future of Afghanistan will be decided in a very selective manner and in close coordination with its six neighbors of the Inner-Circle – namely Pakistan, Iran, China, Russia and the Central Asian countries. All others are expected to support his initiative.

[Nation](#)

January 23: We will have to return the favour by Saleem Safi

he change that has come about in Pak-Afghan relations is drastic. This is the first time in history that the

‘informed’ sections in Pakistan are chanting slogans of a long life for the Afghan government. And this is the very reason behind the state of mourning in Delhi.

The closeness that can be seen between Islamabad and Kabul today has never been witnessed in the past 13 years. The same can be said about the distance in relations between Delhi and Kabul. If you don’t believe this, you can refer to the latest edition of the Delhi Policy Group report on this topic. Titled ‘Afghanistan`s New National Unity Government: What can India expect?’, the report begins with these mourning remarks:

“(A big concern for India). First, Afghanistan’s President Ashraf Ghani has told India’s Advisor to National Security that Afghanistan will no longer take military aid from India. Second, Ashraf Ghani has started giving Pakistan some big concessions. Third, (due to this stance of Ashraf Ghani) now Pakistan will host the next ‘Heart of Asia Conference’ in place of India. Fourth, Afghanistan, China and America have accepted the fact that Pakistan will never allow India to trade with Afghanistan through its transit trade facility.

It is obvious that India – wounded that it is – will not sit quiet. Perhaps, that is why it has increased pressure on our eastern border. On Afghanistan’s front, it is partnering with countries like Iran to increase its role and setting a trap to dent Pakistan. Are our policymakers aware of India and its allies’ new plans? And have we planned to counter them or are we satisfied with celebrating our renewed ties with the US and Afghanistan, and with relying on reciting the dubious National Action Plan?

[The News](#)

India

Janaury 28: Impact of Obama’s visit to India by Talat Masood

President Barack Obama’s interview in [India Today](#) in which he has repeated the demand that Pakistan needs to make greater effort to clear the sanctuaries of militants and take action against the Lashkar-e-Taiba for its involvement in the Mumbai massacre of 2008 was not surprising. It was meant to please Narendra Modi and also to maintain pressure on Islamabad. At a time when the Pakistan military is engaged in a major military operation in North Waziristan and other areas to reestablish the writ of the state at an enormous cost in terms of blood and sweat, such remarks that are meant to put pressure, in fact, have just the opposite effect.

There is a strategic convergence between India and the US and that is the basic reason why Obama is all out to please the former. Washington has been trying to countervail China’s rising economic and political clout by building a close partnership with India. Moreover, India’s huge market, growing economy and status as the world’s largest democracy are additional key determinants for strengthening ties. As the US is withdrawing forces from Afghanistan, it wants India to play a major role in that country and enhance its influence in the region. In addition, Washington will like to reduce China’s influence in Sri Lanka and

the new government there is likely to rebalance relations in favour of India.

[Express Tribune](#)

January 27: Security Dilemma by Zahir Kazmi

AMONG other things, the visit of President Obama to India brings into focus the politics of the region. If Pakistan and India reduce their bilateral insecurities, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation could substantively give shape to a stable regional security complex. Individual security precedes regionalism. It pertains to lack of threats to the values of a state, or the latter's ability to avoid wars and achieve victory when provoked.

The insecurities of India and Pakistan undermine Saarc's stability, and regional security remains a pipe dream. New Delhi's pursuit of international prestige and its security calculus dictate Islamabad's hedging. Cooperation is possible if interdependence is built to such an extent that regional "security problems cannot be analysed or resolved apart from one another".

The stakes for the two Saarc heavyweights are high and depend on their simultaneous choices. Without stability, India's aspiration of Security Council membership will remain unfulfilled. Likewise, Pakistan's prospects of becoming a vital node in the Silk Road would be undermined. As a land bridge between the resource-rich Central Asian region and the Indian Ocean, Pakistan's position remains central despite competing big power interests.

[DAWN](#)

January 27: Obama in India

If the quality of relations between nation-states could be determined through a reading of the body language of their leaders when they meet, then relations between India and the US are at an all-time high in terms of cordiality. [US President Barack Obama greeted Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi with warmth](#) that was unusual in the restrained world of international relations, and the two men really did seem to share a positive chemistry. Considering that the Obama Administration had treated Mr Modi like a pariah up until a year ago, this is a remarkable turnaround, and reflective of the reality that there is no such thing as a 'forever position' in geopolitics.

These two powerful men are not, in reality, friends in any conventional sense; it is that the tide of history has washed India and the US closer together in pursuit of mutual — and very large — interests.

President Obama not visiting Pakistan whilst in the neighbourhood is no less symbolic. There has been a warming of relations between Pakistan and the US in the last six months, but nothing like the extent to which relations between India and the US have come out of the freezer. America will be watching our reaction to the Obama visit, and it is impossible to believe that Pakistan did not feature on the agenda

somewhere in it, but cynical pragmatism is yet to be deployed in our direction.

[Express Tribune](#)

January 27: Indo-US nuclear deal will negatively impact South Asia: Sartaj Aziz

In a formal response to statements and pledges made during US President Barack Obama's visit to India, Pakistan has said that an Indo-US nuclear deal struck for "political and economic expediencies" would have a detrimental impact on nuclear deterrence and overall stability in South Asia.

The response addressed Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Obama's announcement that they had reached an agreement to break the deadlock that has been stalling a civilian nuclear power agreement between the two countries.

The two countries in 2008 signed a landmark deal giving India access to civilian nuclear technology, but it has been held up by US concerns over India's strict laws on liability in the event of a nuclear accident. In response, Adviser to Prime Minister on National Security and Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz said Pakistan expects to see the US play a constructive role for strategic stability and balance in South Asia.

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January 27: Sharif greets Modi, calls for friendly ties

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif greeted his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi on India's Republic Day on Monday and said both leaders could work together for regional peace and South Asia's economic development.

In his letter of "warm felicitations" the prime minister echoed thoughts that should please US President Barack Obama who was the chief guest at Monday's Republic Day parade in Delhi. Mr Modi and Mr Obama announced their shared vision on Sunday in which their two countries would work for connecting the economy and the people straddling Asia-Pacific and the India Ocean rim countries with Central Asia, a masked reference to Pakistan.

"In wishing the people of India progress and prosperity, it is our sincere wish to forge friendly and cooperative relations between our two countries," Mr Sharif said, adding that Pakistan remained committed to developing friendly relations with India on the basis of "sovereign equality, mutual respect and commonality of interests".

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January 26: Obama's India Visit by K.Iqbal

In the run up to President Obama's visit, India had worked over time to tarnish Pakistan's image. On December 31, 2014, the Indian media created frenzy, that a Lashkar-e-Tiaba boat was intercepted by Indian Coast Guards.

The storytellers said that when boat was ordered to stop, it sped away. However, having failed to evade Indian Coast Guard, the crew set the boat on fire and it exploded. Hype was created that a Mumbai attack like attempt has been foiled. Later it was revealed that boat was carrying liquor. The incident was strongly rejected by Pakistani Foreign Office terming it as mere propaganda aimed at tarnishing Pakistani's image. Even India's main opposition party Congress refused to go along with government's narrative.

Another narrative by Indian media was quite comical that the US has told Pakistan that it should not launch any attack like Chittisinghpura on the occasion of President Obama's visit.

The forward movement of US-India relationship has limits. Complicated conflicts over trade, intellectual property, energy policy, liability law and climate change hold back the prospect to this relationship turning into a long-term partnership. However, as long as America remains obsessed with containing China, India shall continue to have relevance for the US. Pakistan needs to work out a medium term policy to minimize the effects of this marriage of convenience.

[Nation](#)

January 25: Pakistan sneaks into US-India strategic vision

President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Narendra Modi agreed on a joint strategic vision for regions straddling Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean on Sunday, but a close reading of the pact indicates a crucial role for Pakistan, though it was not named, as a conduit for carrying the proposed cooperation into Central Asia.

“To support regional economic integration, we will promote accelerated infrastructure connectivity and economic development in a manner that links South, Southeast and Central Asia, including by enhancing energy transmission and encouraging free trade and greater people-to-people linkages,” the US-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region said.

Analysts said reference to people-to-people linkages in the Obama-Modi document was lifted from the standard formulae used for years in Indo-Pakistan dialogues. Moreover, the mention of Central Asia as a destination for all round connectivity was a clear give away for Pakistan's role since neither China, nor Russia or Iran could be in the minds of the signatories.

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January 25: Modi, Obama announce nuclear breakthrough after talks

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Barack Obama announced they had reached an agreement Sunday to break the deadlock that has been stalling a civilian nuclear power agreement.

“I am pleased that six years after we signed our bilateral agreement, we are moving towards commercial cooperation, consistent with our laws [and] international legal obligations,” Modi said at a joint press conference with Obama in the Indian capital New Delhi. While there were no immediate details on how the impasse had been broken, India has reportedly offered to set up an insurance pool to indemnify companies that build reactors in the country against liability in case of a nuclear accident.

“Today we achieved a breakthrough understanding on two issues that were holding up our ability to advance our civil nuclear cooperation and we are committed to moving towards full implementation,” said Obama.

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January 24: Obama's India visit

Even before US President Barack Obama arrives in India — he is expected to arrive late this morning — Pakistan has already featured in the conversation.

In an international norm for such high-profile visits, Mr Obama gave an interview to a local publication (in this case, India Today) prior to his arrival on a state visit and, perhaps inevitably, he was asked about the Mumbai attacks and the issue of militant groups with regional agendas operating from Pakistani soil.

Perhaps the only thing that should be remembered, or even reiterated publicly, is that dialogue between Pakistan and India needs to restart; there are several major and legitimate concerns on both sides; and, regardless of the state of relations with India, Pakistan's foremost concern is to win the fight against militancy domestically — against all militant and terrorist groups. Every turn in the spotlight for India should not automatically alarm Pakistan.

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January 23: Obama's decision to visit India, not Pakistan, in the interest of all three countries: US

As US President Barack Obama visits India but is not scheduled to visit Pakistan, a senior White House official said on Thursday Obama's decision to not visit Pakistan is in the interest of all three countries. Responding to a question whether the White House wrestled with diplomatic implications of Obama not visiting Pakistan and only India, Deputy National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes said, “Frankly, that's in the interest of all the three countries.”

Obama is the second US President after Jimmy Carter to have not visited Pakistan during their India trip. “Considering the sensitivity of the issue, he had called Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to inform him about his decision to travel to India.

The president was not able to visit Pakistan in 2011, as was originally planned, given significant bilateral tensions that year, the Bin Laden raid, and a number of other incidents that took place,” Rhodes said, according to [IBN Live](#). “I think both countries have acknowledged that. But we’ve moved on. Recently, Secretary (of State) John Kerry was able to visit Pakistan. He was able to visit Peshawar, where the horrific terrorist attack took place. We are able to have a strategic dialogue with the Pakistanis,” he added.

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