

## “Do More” to “Did More:” Appreciating Islamabad’s Peace Narrative

Body language narrates empathy: Both leaders stride shoulder-to-shoulder, in sync, in dark power suits, intently conversing, no interpreter visible in the bare long corridor. Imran Khan (IK) and Donald Trump’s four hands move together, orchestrating harmony in USA’s shift away from its – and India’s –old mantra of “do more.” Trump’s downwards gaze clearly recognizes IK’s cold statistics that Pakistan already “did more” against terrorism than any other country.



Understanding Pakistan eludes India. In 2018, New Delhi misread Gen. Bajwa’s reconciliatory tone and conducted a fake attack on Balakot. This was not a terrorist outpost, is hardly populated, not in Kashmir, and the attackers underestimated Pakistan’s capabilities. Despite Modi manipulating it to win elections, Balakot was an Indian fiasco. Pakistan’s peace gesture of promptly returning a captured high-ranking Indian pilot compounded Indian embarrassment.

India scorns as “premature” IK’s repeated offers to talk and open borders. Indian visas remain mostly suspended for Pakistani pilgrims to Indian sufi shrines. Nevertheless, IK took the extremely bold initiative to unilaterally open the Kartarpur Corridor to Indian Sikhs. USA, and especially President Trump, appreciates such concrete steps. For the US, Islamabad’s active role in the Taliban’s recent peace talks with Kabul and strong measures to curb money laundering and terror financing were further proof for Trump to value Pakistan for its having paid a painful toll for regional peace.

This “did more” paradigm shift has further forced the US to acknowledge convergence of interests with Pakistan on Afghanistan and Kashmir. First, Trump’s willingness to mediate on the Kashmir dispute supports Islamabad longstanding stance. Second, Washington’s request to Islamabad to assist in the Afghan talks recognizes Pakistan’s pivotal role for regional peace. Third, Trump’s refraining to mention terrorism finally acknowledges Islamabad’s anti-terrorism actions and the heavy human and financial price it has paid. In short, the US South Asia policy is re-synchronized with Pakistan’s narrative.

**Softening of USA’s Pakistan paradigm is a setback for India’s agenda to isolate Pakistan and be regionally all-important. India’s continued stubbornness vis-à-vis Pakistan is anachronistic foreign policy. It is prey to domestic pressure, and afraid to follow Islamabad’s pragmatism. International pressure has increased on India to amicably resolve its Kashmir problem.**

## Trump's Enigmatic Shadow on our Region

The Peoples' Republic of China (PRC) is competing with the US while it deepens its economic footprint in Pakistan. PRC and the USA are about to resume their fraught trade talks. USA recently threatened to slap tariffs on Chinese goods worth \$325 billion in reaction to China's induction into its negotiating team of the hardline Commerce Minister Zhong Shan. He wants China to invoke its warrior spirit against the US provocations. USA's Nikki Haley is equally hardline. Of Indian descent, Haley recently wrote that the US should prefer political over economic interests and must act tough on trade as a first step to confront China. The key question here is: **How would Pakistan be impacted if Sino-US Competition Transitions to Confrontation?** Doubtlessly, it requires Pakistan's neutrality at this time when it regains closeness and trust of both PRC and USA.

*USA thinks China recently tested an Anti-Ship Missile in a disputed part of the South China Sea in early July to obtain leverage in their trade talks. Tit-for-tat, the US approved \$2.2 billion arms sale to Taiwan, including Abrams tanks and Stinger missiles. Earlier, Trump cast dark shadows by banning Chinese conglomerate Huawei and criticizing Beijing's Hong Kong policy. Before the G-20 summit he relaxed on both issues, granting PRC negotiating space –with 6.2% economic growth, worst in 27 years, PRC needs a trade deal more than USA. However, USA's moves did not soften China's stance.*

Trump cast a benign shadow on Islamabad's pro-active peace efforts. PM Khan's olive branches extend both westwards to the Doha talks between warring Afghans and eastwards via the Kartarpur corridor and on Trump's offer to mediate on Kashmir, that caused media hysteria in India.

Further west, naval posturing in the Gulf of Hormuz has caused the conundrum of darker shades at a time when Pakistan revives its ties with Iran. While in the US, Imran Khan earned respect for cautioning the US against waging war with Iran by citing the strength of its martyrdom culture; war with Iran would be much worse than it was with Iraq.

**Emerging political frictions undermine Sino-US trade negotiations and complicate Pakistan's close relations with both global powers. Trump's belligerence against Iran also darkens his shadow in our region, requiring us to tread softly alongside our southwestern neighbor. At the same time, his shadow enigmatically becomes welcome during our peace efforts for Afghanistan.**