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'A rebuttal of Pakistan Propaganda'

by

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Prime Minister Imran Khan's Op-Ed has appeared in New York Times (NYT) on August 30. That NYT should publish such a slanderous propaganda piece that not only distorts facts but even manufactures them does not reflect well on its standards when accepting to publish opinion pieces by foreign leaders. It does not seem normal by any yardstick that any serious publication should lend its columns to one foreign leader to attack another country and its leader with such malice. The NYT or any publication with an international reputation should not allow itself to be used as a propaganda tool by one country against another. When a foreign leader is invited to state his position on issues of concern to his country, it should be made sure that he does so in a measured and dignified manner and not use the opportunity given to him to vilify the leader of a third country. The NYT has failed in this regard.

What is Imran Khan's credibility in denouncing India and Prime Minister Modi the way he has? He has been put in position by the Pakistani military, which explains his allergy to barbs within Pakistan that he is a "selected" Prime Minister. This contrasts with elections in India through the largest democratic exercise ever in human history, with a voting electorate of over 900 million, virtually three times the entire population of the United States. It is the same Imran Khan who has put in prison all the major leaders of opposition- former Prime Ministers and Presidents included. He is the one who, with his refrain in Urdu that he who was a friend of India was a traitor, castigated Nawaz Sharif for reaching out to India. And today he vaunts his own offers of peace to India!!

NYT should recall that he was called the Taliban Khan because of his support for the Taliban and opposition to US/NATO operations in Afghanistan. He supported the extremist Islamic organisation Tehreek-e-Labaik to blockade Islamabad in a bid to bring down the then government. His Islamist leanings are apparent from his speeches in which he repeatedly evokes his obsessive vision of creating a welfare state in Pakistan, not a modern welfare state based on contemporary values of democratic, liberal societies but one based on a fourteen centuries old Medina model. How is this different in essence to what the Islamic State and other extremist Islamic organisations advocate for Muslim countries- a reversion to a past golden age of Islam marked by justice, equality and the Sharia to overcome the political, economic and social problems they face today.

Imran Khan's so-called peaceful overtures to India have been accompanied from day one by a call to resolve the Kashmir issue as a pre-condition. He talks about India and Pakistan needing to address shared problems of poverty as a priority, but makes any step towards normalisation of relations, including in trade, dependent on a resolution of the Kashmir problem. He does not spell out the solution, except to call for self-determination for the people of Kashmir as per the UN resolutions. For one, in adopting this position he violates the 1972 Simla Agreement which stipulates clearly that the issue will be decided bilaterally by India and Pakistan alone. Even if, theoretically, the UN resolutions were to be the basis, Pakistan has violated them by not withdrawing its irregular and regular forces from Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) as a pre-requisite before other steps could be taken to hold a plebiscite. It is important to underline also that the UN resolutions were not based on Article 1 of the UN Charter

and do not make any allusion to self-determination- the word is mentioned nowhere in the texts. The consent of India and Pakistan to hold a plebiscite was only to decide the issue of J&K's accession either to India or Pakistan, with no third choice- that of independence- that any true exercise of self-determination under the UN Charter would have involved.

India and Pakistan have discussed the Kashmir issue numerous times since independence, with attempts also at mediation by the UN and third countries. Since the mid-1990s the two countries have had a structured dialogue, including on Kashmir. Both sides are fully aware of each other's position. Imran Khan should be asked in his new avatar as a peace maker what fresh ideas he has to propose to break the impasse. As things are, Pakistan is in illegal occupation of large parts of the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) that acceded to India in its entirety. Pakistan has gained enormously geo-politically from this occupation, as it has now contiguity with China and India has no contiguity with Afghanistan. Imagine a situation in which Pakistan had no land link with China- the whole geo-politics of the sub-continent would have been different. What more does Pakistan want? More Indian territory on the basis that what it has illegally occupied belongs to it, but what India possesses legally must also be shared with Pakistan?

Pakistan behaves as if the Kashmiris are Pakistani citizens and that Pakistan is responsible for them. J&K is a composite state like other Indian states, with people belonging to Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist faiths. Pakistan's concern is sectarian, as it is limited to the Muslims. The whole of India with 180 Muslims has almost as many Muslims as Pakistan has. India does not accept any right of Pakistan to speak on behalf of the Muslims of Kashmir, or the Muslims of India. Pakistan maintains that Kashmir is an unfinished agenda of India's partition, which means that its objective is to divide India once again on religious grounds, with all the horrors that India's first partition produced.

The NYT editors should contrast India's treatment of the Muslims of Kashmir with China's treatment of Tibetans and the Muslim Uighurs next door. India has not interfered in the religious practices of Muslims in J&K, destroyed their religious sites, brought about demographic changes, or imposed a language on them that is not their own. It hasn't done ideology- based social engineering as China is doing in Sinkiang. India has not incarcerated a million in re-education camps as the Chinese have done. Pakistan's attitude towards the Uighurs is mercenary as it is dictated by its economic dependence on China. Imran Khan recently supported China's treatment of the Uighur Muslims in the Human Rights Council at Geneva. His Muslim solidarity is selective.

Imran Khan is raising the issue of human rights violations in J&K and dramatising the imposition of curfew in Kashmir and communications cut-off there. These temporary, precautionary steps do not inflict violence on the Kashmiris, rather these are security tools for preventing violence in J&K by terrorists infiltrated and supported by Pakistan and complicit local elements. When Imran Khan raises the issue of human rights violations in J&K he should contrast India's conduct in dealing

with the challenge to the State with that of his country that has used its air force and heavy weaponry against its own Muslims in South and North Waziristan, and internally displaced a million of its own citizens to facilitate military operations. It has used heavy artillery to kill Baluch leaders. Its blasphemy laws terrorise its minorities. The terrorist organisations that populate its territory such as the Sipahi-e-Sahiba kill Shias, attack Christian churches and Sufi mosques. The Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed have been declared international terrorist organisations by the relevant UN Security council committee. The United and France, amongst others, have declared the Pakistan Occupied Kashmir based Hizbul Mujaheddin as a terrorist organisation. It needs recalling that Muslim extremists in Kashmir chased out about 450,000 indigenous Kashmiri Hindus from Kashmir in 1990 with threats of violence against them, in an act of ethnic cleansing. The fact is that the Indian authorities have dealt with the Kashmir problem fuelled by a foreign power with great restraint because democracies act differently than military dominated states like Pakistan

For India, Pakistani state sponsored terrorism is a core issue, and unless Pakistan ends this the basis of any productive dialogue does not exist. The India-Pakistan dialogue has broken down periodically because of major terrorist attacks against India sponsored by Pakistani agencies. Imran Khan claims he seeks a dialogue but is unwilling to acknowledge that jihadi terrorism is an issue that he needs to address. His line is that Pakistan is not involved in terrorism against India, that Pakistan itself is a victim of terrorism, that India must provide proof, and that India unnecessarily blames Pakistan for home-grown terrorism in Kashmir provoked by the human rights violations of Kashmiris by India's repressive policies. How does this denial square up with actual acts of terror sourced to Pakistan, the most reprehensible being the attack on Indian parliament in 2001 and in Mumbai in 2008 that killed 166 people. India has suffered other attacks in and outside Kashmir over the years. The list is long and includes cities, religious, scientific, economic and military targets in J&K and across India. Even the U.S. is exhorting Pakistan to end cross-border terrorism against India. To build deniability, Pakistan has, over the years, also developed local assets in Kashmir to commit acts of terror so that it can purvey the argument that it is not involved. Does this mean that the eruption of Al Qaida and Islamic State elements in various Muslim countries has nothing to do with the core custodians of this ideology that spread their message across the Ummah and obtain receptive recruits?

Imran Khan's protestations of innocence on the issue of terrorism is spurious. Pakistan has provided safe havens to the Taliban leadership while denying its presence on its soil. It sheltered Osama bin Laden for years near its military cantonment. It has refused to act against the Haqqani group despite American prodding. The Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani group have killed thousands of American/NATO soldiers in Afghanistan. The former U.S. Chairman of the Joints Chiefs of Staff, in a testimony to the U.S. Congress, called the Haqqani group an extension of Pakistan's ISI. During his recent visit to the United States Imran Khan admitted that Pakistan had 30,000 to 40,000 militants on its soil who had fought in Afghanistan and Kashmir. The NYT editors could well have asked him where they have disappeared before publishing his diatribe against India. If Pakistani agencies have been complicit in Taliban/ Haqqani group terrorist attacks in Afghanistan when Pakistan has no religious differences or

territorial claims on Afghanistan, to think that it is not deeply involved in terrorism against India in pursuance of both religious and territorial objectives is to deny reality.

If Imran Khan was genuine about making peace with India he should have gone beyond statements of intent and taken some concrete steps on the ground. He could have tried and punished those responsible for the 2008 Mumbai terrorist carnage in which six Americans were also killed. He could have put away Hafiz Saeed for good, particularly as he has a \$ 10 million U.S. bounty on his head. He could have done the same with regard to Jaish-e-Mohammed chief Masood Azhar responsible, amongst others, for the Pathankot and Pulwama attacks. Instead, Pakistan worked with China for years to prevent his designation as an international terrorist by the UN, until it became untenable for China to do so. Imran Khan could have repatriated Kulbhushan Jadav after the adverse judgment of the International Court of Justice against Pakistan. If Pakistan is not guilty of promoting infiltration of terrorists into J&K, it could alert India's agencies about possible infiltration attempts so that they could be prevented by the Indian security forces. This would conform to counter-terrorism cooperation between civilised states. In short, Imran Khan could show his sincerity by taking credible and irreversible steps to curb the jihadi groups in Pakistan targeting India.

Some of Imran Khan's key advisers have been applauding his peace talk as a calculated strategy to contrast him as a peace maker with India's intransigence. His Foreign Minister Qureshi has referred to the Kartarpur Corridor as a "googly". One of Pakistan's retired generals has said the other day on Pakistan TV that the Kartarpur Corridor is intended to promote the Khalistan movement. Qureshi has made the astonishing statement that Pakistan is ready for a dialogue with India provided India reverses its decision on Article 370, releases the detained Kashmiri leaders and allows him to meet them. This non-seriousness shows the reality of Imran Khan's bogus pretensions about seeking dialogue and peace with India.

Under cover of its nuclear capability Pakistan has been promoting terrorism in India with a sense of impunity. India has been hesitant to retaliate because of escalation concerns, until 2016 when India conducted limited surgical strikes against terrorist camps across the Line of Control and in 2019 struck at Balakot in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan after the Pulwama attack that the UN Security Council too condemned. No other Pakistani leader has spoken so frequently about a nuclear stand-off with India, threatening India implicitly with use of nuclear weapons as Imran Khan has done. Pakistan, unlike India, does not subscribe to a No-First-Use (NFU) nuclear posture. It is in this background, to deter Imran Khan's adventurism and loose talk about nuclear weapons that the Indian Defense Minister has stated that no change is envisaged in India's NFU policy, but that any change will depend on future developments. Imran Khan is going to town on this, including in his Op-Ed in your paper, ignoring his own nuclear transgressions that, regrettably, have been overlooked by the U.S. all along.

Imran Khan is behaving as if Pakistan had spared India terrorist mayhem because of the existence of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. In actual fact, right from 1989 Pakistan has sponsored terrorist attacks against India even when this Article

was in force. Not only that, this article was no insurance against Pakistan's aggression against J&K in 1965, in 1971 and in 1999 in Kargil. What is then the value and relevance of Imran Khan's argument that the nullifying of Article 370 is a provocative new step that will invite violence? He is, in fact, openly instigating violence in J&K with his statements as and when the current restrictions there are progressively lifted.

Much is being made by Imran Khan about the change in the status quo in J&K. India has made it clear that the change in the constitutional status of J&K within the Indian Union does not change India's present external borders or affects the Line of Control with Pakistan in J&K and the Line of Actual Control with China in Ladakh. In fact, Pakistan and China have collaborated to change the status quo in J&K much more materially. In 1963, Pakistan ceded the Shaksgam Valley of Pakistan Occupied J&K (PoK) to China. China then constructed the Karakoram Highway through PoK. Pakistan has changed the status quo in Gilgit Baltistan in 2009. The construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a major geo-political change in the status quo by making the Chinese presence permanent on PoK, besides bringing in Chinese civilian and military personnel close to India's borders. China will never agree to any future settlement of the Kashmir issue that might mean losing control over the CPEC.

In his article Imran Khan talk of hundreds being blinded by pellet firings in Kashmir. Where has he got this figure from? Can NYT that published this canard vouchsafe for this? He talks of nullifying of Article 370 and Article 35 A as being illegal under the Constitution of India. The issue is before the Indian Supreme Court which has not yet pronounced on the matter. How has Imran Khan reached this conclusion? Has the Pakistan Supreme Court heard the matter in place of the Indian Supreme Court and given him its finding?

He is claiming that "thousands of Kashmiris have been thrown into prisons across India", and NYT has chosen to publish this rubbish, without verification. Kashmir may be locked down but not the rest of India, and Indian as well as foreign correspondents in India would report this if it were true. Kashmiris defying the curfew are being shot and killed, he says, suggesting that this is happening in large numbers, which is patently propagandistic, and it is regrettable that he has used the NYT to purvey lies. "We have already prepared multiple options" as regards Kashmir, he says. One ridiculous one has been divulged by Foreign Minister Qureshi. Others, which he has kept secret from India, might even be more ludicrous.

It is to be hoped that NYT and the western liberal media in general will make an effort to take a balanced view of the situation in J&K and the challenges India faces there. The problems of governing a population of 1.25 billion of great diversity democratically and integrating a Muslim population of 180 million- almost as large that of Pakistan are not to be minimised. The religious hostility of Pakistan, the progressive radicalisation of Pakistan's own population, the jihadi organisations on its soil, the resurgence of the Taliban next door in Afghanistan, the surfacing of the Islamic State there, all impact deleteriously on Kashmir's traditionally moderate Islam. The West has seen how much its democracy and society have come under strain

because of terrorism and religious extremism. It has experienced difficulties of integrating its Muslim minorities. How much its commitment to human rights and individual freedoms is being tested as a result is becoming increasingly apparent. India's problems are far bigger in magnitude and much more complex, but India has shown great resilience in dealing with them. This should be better understood and appreciated abroad, including by the political class (leaders like Bernie Sanders should not allow themselves to be manipulated by Islamic lobbies activated by Pakistan), the civil society, the media, human rights organisations and academic circles who are also influenced negatively by highly partisan views expressed in India itself by a cross-section of opinion that contests the government's decision to bring about constitutional changes in J&K.

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