

Pakistan Changing regional apparatus

For CSS, PMS, PPSC, FPSC

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Pakistan C h a n g i n g r e g i o n a l a p p r a t u s:

What is the regional strategy of today's Pakistan? Conflicts presently standing in the changing regional apparatus are very worrying. The strains are making themselves felt clearly. A multitude of pressures and instabilities threatens to shred the political map of Pakistan and regional countries. A toxic brew of growing terrorism, rising insecurity, militant insurgency, gas pipeline projects and success of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is provoking more political discontent and polarisation, leading to political strife in many countries and devastating violence in some. Although Pakistan is most affected and most vulnerable, Afghanistan, Iran, India and China are by no means immune to some of the same stress factors.

Despite lifting sanctions against Iran, contrasting views were expressed on how they are likely to affect the region and Iran's role therein. Iran's considerable influence over parts of the region, including Syria and Yemen, generates instability in the region but also fuels a sense of threat among Arab states. It is hoped that the nuclear agreement will now lead us towards a broader regional understanding that will promote order and stability in the region otherwise afflicted by increasing conflict and extremism, and assuage the security concerns of the US in the region. However, others counter that numerous international actors are feeding the conflict in this region and that regional instability is largely a product of western interventions in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran, which have fuelled violence, terrorism and extremism. In that context, Pakistan's voice is in fact one of moderation. A common refrain is that prospects for long-term stability in the region will depend largely on improvement in the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Pakistan's largest province, Balochistan, may not mean much to many but among experts it is known as a sectarian terrorism hotbed and some US lawmakers are even calling for its independence. The Balochistan region and its geo-political importance now stand second to none. It is a place that has become a hot destination for intelligence services from around the globe. Looking at its location as part of Pakistan, it borders Afghanistan and Iran. Apart from being seen as an extremely volatile and dangerous place, Balochistan has great geo-political importance where major oil powers have interests.

Balochistan sits at the crossroads of oil and gas pipelines coming from Central Asia, Iran and elsewhere. The Iran-Pakistan pipeline project and Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline project are of significant importance with reference to the coveted 'pipeline wars'. Not

to mention Balochistan has its own energy resources besides its water port and its access point where Chinese commercial shipping to the Indian Ocean and Africa is operable. This future match to Dubai port is enriched with business opportunities. But all the violence and instability does not make it an easy place for business and some oil powers seem busy in keeping it this way.

First we have various indigenous terrorist organisations that operate inside Balochistan like Jundallah, a militant organisation claiming to fight for the rights of Sunni Muslims in Iran. Jundallah is an organisation that for decades has been focused on destabilising Iran. The confluence of these various terrorist organisations is of course not coincidental. Conspiracy theories suggest that this has a direct relation to the interests of US and western powers vis-à-vis blocking the Chinese route, destabilising Pakistan and part of waging their covert war against Iran with hopes of not just encircling Iran but causing an upset from outside as well.

The US denies having any contact with Jundallah or other terror organisations although CIA memos leaked recently allege that Israel's secret service, Mossad, recruited Jundallah members under the nose of US intelligence officers. As far as other militant organisations are concerned, there are a few people in the US Congress who have expressed readiness to support the separation of Balochistan from Pakistan. The White House spokesman refutes any such allegations, saying regional instability is due to the government's lack of a tight grip on underlying political conflicts and that most issues are actually being caused by actions taken by the Pakistan government itself. As far as reaping any benefit from the instability in Balochistan is concerned, most military experts say it is extremists of all kinds, mainly al Qaeda and its affiliates as well as the Taliban, that have certainly got an ongoing interest in maintaining the instability in this region. In the absence of genuine political debate, ethnic, sectarian and tribal differences have resurfaced as important markers of identity, and have become drivers of conflict. The result is the weakening and unravelling of the region and, in some cases, warfare. Balochistan is a key square in the geopolitical chessboard. The US knows that it cannot compete with China economically or industrially so rumours abound about it trying to sting China's development through these subversive tactics. According to experts, pipeline wars are real and global powers are using them shrewdly in creating instability. The secret oil war is inducing conflict among regional power players and the US is allegedly using this as one of the

instruments to gain an advantage, but there is always the risk that it can backfire with more terrorism, violence and regional instability.

There is an entire possibility that it could also backfire in terms of terrorist reciprocation against the US but this did not prevent the US in the late 1970s from financing and supporting the mujahideen against the Soviets and it has failed to change its policy by supporting the rebels in Syria. Allegations that some global powers may be stoking violence in places like Balochistan comes from their geopolitical interests but it is quite disturbing and raises the question whether pipeline wars are a reality and if Pakistan is being pulled into the region's most dangerous game with regional security at risk. These underlying factors are, of course, worrying. In the past, governments often managed to channel such pressures into patriotism and nationalism, diverting the energy of antagonism towards external adversaries. Today, by contrast, the more likely result is a weakening and unravelling of provinces and, in some cases, warfare.

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