

Scenario 194

ENDGAME OF WOT - REVISITED:

A Special Treat from MUNIR AKRAM, a retired diplomat

The Army Public School Peshawar massacre of 16th December 2014 was another reminder for the world that over the past 30 years, Pakistan had been the principal victim of terrorism. It experienced the Indian-sponsored bomb blasts in the 1970s; the Afghan-Soviet attacks through Najibullah as ruler during the 1980s; Iran and Saudia sponsored Shia-Sunni violence during the 1990s; and Al Qaeda and Pakistani Taliban [TTP] mastered terrorism since Nine Eleven 2001 till the recent past.

As MUNIR AKRAM [a former Pakistani ambassador in UN] once analysed in daily '**Dawn**' dated **21st December 2014:**

*"Until the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan till ending 1970s, terrorism was an **external threat for Pakistan**; it was '**internalised**' due to two strategic mistakes:*

- *Pakistan's sponsorship of Islamic extremists against the Soviets, in collaboration with the US and its allies like Saudia, and*
- *the subsequent decision to support religious militants, rather than the indigenous Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front, during the 1990s Kashmiri uprising against Indian occupation."*

Pakistan had to pay much higher price for those two strategic mistakes. Al Qaeda emerged from the debris of the anti-Soviet Arab and other foreign fighters which masterminded many of the worst terrorist attacks against Pakistan; later went more dangerous with the migration of rebellious militants from Uzbekistan and Chechnya and settled on both sides of the Pak-Afghan borders.

TERRORISM HAS NO RELIGION:

The two successive political governments of the PPP [2008-13] and PML[N] in later years did not concentrate on the hate and bigotry spread by foreign

sponsored *madrassahs*; the corruption that allowed terrorists to roam the streets and infiltrate institutions; the crimes that generated financing for terrorist organisations; the fear which provided them impunity from the prosecution and courts, and most importantly the high un-employment.

The above steps needed courageous policies for which both the political regimes lacked due to massive corruption amongst their ranks. It was because every sane person knew that **'...every where most terrorist activities are done in the name of religion'**.

Zahid Hussain's essay dated **14th January 2015** available on media pages described the same philosophy in the backdrop of **Peshawar ATS massacre** of **16th December 2014** in which 143 children and ten teachers were slaughtered by TTP terrorists. No sooner had public outrage over the tragedy begun to subside than they were back to their old tricks. **'Islam under threat'** is a convenient mantra to shield radical clerics and their seminaries closely linked with banned militant outfits.

The fact remains that most terrorist attacks and sectarian killings in Pakistan were religiously motivated. The Taliban and other militant groups used to justify their terrorist actions in the name of **'Sharia and Islam'**; TTP spokesman's statement claiming responsibility for the school carnage carried mention of a *hadith* in support of the heinous crime.

[Certain radical clerics like Maulana Abdul Aziz of Lal Masjid issued fatwas justifying insurgent attacks on Pakistani security forces; particularly the army.]

Taliban led by Mullah Fazlullah killed hundreds of people in Swat in the name of the 'Islamic Sharia'. Whether it was the massacre of Hazara Shias in Balochistan or attacks on mosques, shrines and churches all over the country — all had been carried out in the name of religion — a cruel history of more than a decade to be remembered.]

Suicide bombers were brainwashed and motivated by the false interpretation of religion; zero schooling, poverty, unemployment, romantic notions of jihad were the driving reasons. The mosques' *mimbers* were often used by clerics to spread sectarian hatred and incite violence; trails of foreign money in cash were frequently distributed among them through Iran & Saudi embassies both.

Promoting a particular sect inevitably implies the rejection of other sects; thus the extremism prevailed and spread in poor families. The literature

produced by their parent religious organisations always aimed at proving the rival sects infidels and apostates. The efforts by successive governments to modernise *madressah* curricula and introduce needed science subjects failed because of their stiff resistance.

Surprisingly, Maulana Fazl's JUI-F and Sirajul Haq's *Jamaat-i-Islami* [JI] broke their own words of endorsement in the 20-point national counterterrorism action plan and abstained from voting on the constitutional amendment empowering military courts to try hardened militants. These two largest Islamic parties were the original faces of *jihadi* politics in Pakistan. Many of those fighting the Pakistani state with militant groups had originated from their ranks.

In Gen Raheel Sharif's National Action Plan [NAP], the proposal for *madressah* reform faced the greatest resistance not only from the mainstream Islamic parties because their million - dollar businesses were at stake – but also from the corrupt political allies.

In fact, the successive governments were continuously blackmailed by these religious parties. The exploitation of religion started in ending 1970s ruined the country and the menace is still there in Pakistan – all developments indices are constantly at bottom line since about four decades and no light seen.

The fact remains that, world over, the terrorist organisations are initially sponsored by states; it holds true for the Tamil Tigers, Al Qaeda, the TTP, the Haqqanis and the ISIS players. Pakistan's support to militant groups in Afghanistan and Kashmir has been alleged in wide spectrum at times but the country has been drastically suffering more from its neighbours – see the two decades history.

Pakistan confronted the TTP and the Balochistan Liberation Army [BLA], both supported by Afghan and Indian intelligence; by extension the IS has also been knocking at its doors. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani initially desired to rebuild a close relationship with Pakistan; the later offered to help what Kabul desired. Pakistan's operation **Zarb e Azb** worked both ways; within Pakistan and Kabul also benefited it indirectly.

Pakistan expected that Kabul's cooperation with them would help to end Indian support to the TTP and BLA. However, the Afghan regime could not help Pakistan because of new US-India bonds and deep understanding. Thus it became more difficult to eliminate groups motivated by local grievances and religious convictions – so the loss continued on all fronts.

The West remained miss-conceived about Pakistan's alleged support to insurgencies in Afghanistan and Kashmir but what about India's wider role in clandestine warfare against its neighbours - Pakistan.

[Viewing of Facebook video, a lecture delivered on 2nd January 2015, by Ajit Doval, India's ex-spymaster and later the national security adviser, opened the eyes of the world about India's clandestine wars.

*Mr Doval called Pakistan the 'enemy'; admired Indian intelligence's ability to compromise and infiltrate the Kashmir insurgency; boasted about the beheading of Pakistani soldiers by the TTP and advocated a policy of **'defensive offence against Pakistan'**.*

Munir Akram in daily '**Dawn**' dated 4th January 2015 pointed out a very convincing historical misunderstanding through which Pakistan was dragged in the sand grave [*because of its political instability and devastated economy*] of allegations:

"When the US, after 9/11, launched its war on terrorism, India's principal aim became to equate the Kashmiri struggle with global terrorism and Al Qaeda. New Delhi got its chance when 'terrorists' attacked the Indian parliament in December 2001.

Despite the fact that Pakistan's culpability was unproven, a commitment was extracted from the then president Musharraf's government that Pakistan would not allow its territory to be used for 'terrorism' against others.

Acceptance of this 'obligation' was interpreted as an admission of Pakistan's culpability. The Kashmiri struggle was over for all intents and purposes."

When Pakistan, under US pressure, attempted to curtail support to the Kashmiri '**jihadi**' groups, reaction appeared - hence the two attempts on the life of Gen Musharraf. However, some groups like the *Lashkar-e-Taiba* [LeT], although outlawed and aggrieved with the government, but refrained from attacking the Pak-Army or Pakistani targets.

India, for its part, had already unleashed its so-called 'defensive offense' policy against Pakistan. Under the auspices of the Afghan Intelligence Directorate, headed by a member of the Northern Alliance, with which India had developed close relations during the civil war against Mullah Omar's

Taliban, India set up bases [in the guise of consulates] close to the Pak-Afghan border to sponsor and support the Balochistan Liberation Army.

When the *Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan* [TTP] got approval through the Red Mosque operation of July 2007, Afghan and Indian intelligence were quick to seize the opportunity to infiltrate and spent all resources on Ghazi brothers & Mehsuds, launched them against Pak-Army.

This was openly admitted by Afghan Intelligence. As Doval noted, there were 40,000 Pakistani casualties attributed to the TTP's those events of terrorism.

The situation in Balochistan and FATA became murkier due to sponsorship of the anti-Iran Jundullah and the anti-China Movement for East Turkmenistan Independence [ETIM] by certain Western agencies which were co-located with the TTP in border area of North Waziristan.

Thus, for Pakistan, the **Zarb-e-Azb** operation against the TTP and its associates became an imperative, first and foremost, to protect the homeland but also to prevent damage to its strategic relationship with China. Additionally, it also damaged other militant groups in North Waziristan – even then the US and the West kept on singing the rhyme of '**do-more**' as if all Muslims are terrorists.

[See the media breaking news of **11th January 2015**;

The brother of a French Muslim police officer who was gunned down by terrorists in the Charlie Hebdo attack made an emotional appeal for tolerance; Police Officer Ahmed Merabet's brother Malek Merabet said:

"I address myself now to all the racists, Islamophobes and anti-Semites: One must not confuse extremists with Muslims; mad people have neither colour nor religion.

I want to make another point: don't tar everybody with the same brush, don't burn mosques or synagogues. You are attacking people. It won't bring our dead back and it won't appease the families.

My brother was Muslim and was killed by two terrorists, by two false Muslims - Islam is a religion of peace and love."

To show solidarity for the Charlie Hebdo victims, the world started trending **#JeSuisCharlie** [I am Charlie] but with the international media associating the terror attack to Islam, Muslims worldwide began trending **#JeSuisAhmed** [I am Ahmed].

The purpose of #JeSuisAhmed was to tell the world that **'terrorism has no religion'**.

Gen Raheel Sharif had to defeat India's secret war against Pakistan through crushing the TTP – who were covertly financed by US itself, the world media openly alleged. Pakistan needed full confidence and cooperation of Kabul but President Ashraf Ghani showed cold shoulders. When Pakistan approached China to influence the situation, the Americans again got upset – but Gen Raheel's **Zarb e Azb** continued with full vigour against the TTP and its associated groups, especially Al Qaeda and ETIM.

Afghanistan itself asked for this treatment because they had chosen to stand by Indian designs. Even in high Indian hierarchy, the sane minds did not approve this **'Hatred for Pakistan'** policy; however, the people like Ajit Doval kept on misleading the Indian leadership to achieve their personal goal.

HOW TERROR EMERGED IN PAKISTAN:

The dilemma of the Palestinians and Kashmiris are two living tragedies since three generations till now. The memories of brutal colonial actions in Turkey, Algeria, Indonesia etc are part of historical Muslim grievances. The oppression and discrimination against Muslim minorities in India and Burma etc, have added fuel to these grievances. Also the fact remains that most *Islamists* were sponsored and supported by Arabs and Western powers since day one – Pakistan is the latest example.

MUNIR AKRAM once more explained the history of terrorism in Pakistan; the daily **'DAWN'** dated **18th January 2015** is referred. He summarised that:

*"Once in early 1980s, major turning point was the use of Islamist zealots to combat the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The seven-member mujahideen alliance, sponsored by the US, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, other Arab countries and Iran, was composed exclusively of 'Islamist' groups. Forty thousand **'Islamic radicals'** were imported*

*from across the Arab and Muslim world; including **Osama bin Laden** and **Ayman al Zawahiri**. These original 'foreign fighters' also included Muslim rebels from Uzbekistan, Chechnya and Xinjiang."*

After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, this deadly cocktail of hardened local and foreign '**jihadists**' stayed on mainly around Pak-Afghan borders. These fighters and their descendants became a corps of Al Qaeda under sub-groups titled IMU, ETIM and TTP.

With the Soviet return and an equally hasty American withdrawal from war, Islamist groups split into several factions, quickly spread and positioned in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The first attack was engineered by Al Zawahiri at Egyptian embassy in Islamabad. He later joined Osama bin Laden to form Al Qaeda while vying for control of Kabul.

A struggle for influence ensued between Pakistan and Iran in Afghanistan so Pakistan became the battleground for externally sponsored Sunni-Shiite violence, too.

Munir Akram held that during the 1990s' Afghan civil war, **many mujahideen groups became criminalised, raising money to finance themselves through drug production and trafficking, kidnapping and extortion**. Criminality opened the doors to various intelligence agencies, including those of Pakistan, India, Saudi Arabia, Iran and the West. Such penetration of Indian RAW in Kashmiri fighters' legitimate struggle for freedom was given name of '**terrorist threat**' later.

Remarkably, it was Mullah Omar's Taliban who restored order in southern and eastern Afghanistan, winning over the warring groups, except those in the Iran-India backed Northern Alliance. **Mullah Omar's association with Al Qaeda came about only after the US and Western decision to isolate the Taliban**. His adamant refusal to surrender Osama bin Laden or expel him led to the Taliban's ouster from the government forced by the US with the help of the Northern Alliance.

The 2001 US military intervention in Afghanistan and its 2003 invasion of Iraq provided a second life to Al Qaeda and other Islamist movements – a cause for '**jihad**'. Al Qaeda received new recruits; thus AQAP, AQIM, TTP, Al Shabab, Boko Haram and several lesser known groups all emerged after Western interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The later spread of *jihadi* movements across the Muslim world was most probably engineered by three factors:

1. *The weakness of most Muslim states in terms of their police, military and intelligence capabilities; political negligence towards extremist movements and official corruption.*
2. *The misguided Western sponsored overthrow or erosion of authoritarian regimes in various Muslim states including Egypt, Libya and Syria after Afghanistan & Iraq.*
3. *The external sponsorship of some of the groups like the IS, ISIS, Jundallah and TTP.*

The '**successes**' of *jihadi* narrative — that Muslim rights could be regained only through violent struggle — attracted thousands of alienated youth in Western countries. Munir Akram held that:

'...there are over 5000 foreign fighters from Europe who have joined the IS. The Paris attacks have brought the war home for the Europeans, transforming a foreign policy challenge into a domestic priority. These attacks have also laid bare the cultural and religious divisions within these advanced countries, manifested by the anti-Islam Pegida movement in Germany, the National Front in France and burning of mosques in traditionally tolerant Sweden.'

On 18th September 2015; Taliban militants launched a brazen attack on a Pakistani military base, killing 29 people including 16 who were gunned down inside a mosque during prayers. The Pakistani army quickly blamed militants from neighbouring Afghanistan; the West and India made it a country known for harbouring terrorists who used to launch attacks across their porous border all around.

The attack was a major blow to Pakistan's military, which had stepped up operations against militants following a horrific Taliban attack of 16th December 2014 at Peshawar ATS that killed 153 people, mostly children. As per ISPR, all 13 attackers were killed after an hours-long fight at the Badaber base; another 29 people were wounded too.

*[More than 2,000 employees were living at the **Badaber Base** at the time of attack. The attackers first stormed the guard room and then tried to move towards administrative block, but were stopped by security forces. The ISPR held that the attackers came from Afghanistan, "though doubtful that the government in Kabul was behind the assault - but the attackers were being handled by superiors in Afghanistan".*

The base was established in 1960s but in recent years has mostly been used as residence for air force employees, staff and officers from Peshawar.]

There was no immediate response from Afghanistan.

TTP's spokesman *Mohamad Khurasani*, claimed responsibility for the attack. His statement to the media said that 14 Taliban fighters were involved in the assault. They offered 'safe passage' to women and children after attacking the base, and then 'targeted' 50 security personnel.

The Pakistani Taliban also released a video in which militant leader *Khalifa Umar Mansoor* was seen sitting among the alleged attackers. He was in charge of the attack and that the purpose was to avenge Pak-Army for the killing of civilians and seminary students in tribal regions. The attack was ordered by Mullah Fazlullah, the TTP Chief hiding in Afghanistan.

The above mentioned attack came a day after Pakistan reported the arrest of a militant figure, named Umar Hayat, from Karachi but was behind a recent failed attempt to target an air force facility in Kamra. A day earlier, the Karachi police had also reported the arrest of one Syed Sheaba Ahmad, a former air force pilot who allegedly helped finance Al Qaeda's newly formed South Asian affiliate.

Pak-military forces had [till then] killed more than 3,000 militants in North Waziristan offensive. The region was once considered to be the TTP HQ, which had been targeting security forces and public places in an effort to topple [any] elected government to enforce a miss-interpreted version of *Jihad* – labelling Islam as harsh religion.

However, Gen Raheel Sharif's **Zarb e Azb** operation nearly eliminated the TTP menace with his strong will and determination – sometimes in aid with the US forces especially in Pak-Afghan border areas.

On 20th April 2016; a faction of the TTP claimed credit for two attacks in Karachi that targeted policemen as they guarded members of a polio vaccination team; '*Jamaat-ul-Ahrra'* accepted responsibility for the attack with the message:

"This attack is part of ongoing attacks against security forces and police. We believe the fighting will continue until we achieve the goal of implementing the Islamic system in Pakistan."

The assaults in Karachi took place in Orangi Town, a hotbed for the Taliban and other Islamist groups; eight Taliban fighters riding on four motorcycles gunned down the policemen as they were deployed in the dangerous neighbourhood. The gunmen first opened fire on three policemen in the streets of Orangi Town, killing them all. Later they shot dead four policemen, who were sitting in a police mobile van nearby.

*[The Taliban were especially trained for conducting motorcycle attacks in cities. In a video released in April 2015, the TTP touted its "**Mujahideen Special Group**" its version of Special Forces, and showed its fighters conducting assassinations using motorcycles.]*

The TTP's one pamphlet of June 2012 had said that '*...in the garb of these vaccination campaigns, the US and its allies are running their spying networks in FATA which has brought death and destruction on them in the form of drone strikes. Infidel forces are using media, education, and development as a tool to gag Muslims.*'

Years before, Mulla Nazir's pamphlet referenced **Dr Shakil Afridi**, the Pakistani doctor who aided the US in finding and killing Osama bin Laden in Abbotabad in May 2011. Afridi was then serving a 33-year prison sentence in Pakistan for charges of supporting the *Laskar-e-Islam*, an Islamist terror group based in Khyber.

Then in 2012, the Pakistani Taliban launched a deadly campaign against the WHO's vaccination program. Eight medical workers were killed while attempting to vaccinate children in Karachi and Pakistan's northwest. The WHO shut down the anti-polio drive.

On 26th April 2016; a delegation from the Afghan Taliban's political office in Qatar arrived Karachi, on Pakistan's invitation, to discuss the restarting of peace talks with Kabul; their visit came a day after Afghan President Ashraf Ghani threatened diplomatic reprisals against Pakistan if it refused to take action against Taliban leaders, a new hard-line stance after a brazen insurgent attack which had killed 64 people in Kabul.

The three-member team launched initial contacts with Pakistani and Afghan officials. The main purpose of the visit was to explore ways and means to bring peace in Afghanistan; formal peace talks were ahead. Qari Yousuf, one of the Taliban's official spokesmen, was unaware of the visit.

[Earlier, direct peace talks between Kabul and Afghan Taliban began in Pakistan in July 2015 but were scrapped after the belated revelation that Mullah Omar, the group's founder, had died two

years earlier. The disclosure sparked infighting within the militant group and leadership crisis was evidently seen.]

A four-member group comprising Afghanistan, the United States, China and Pakistan had been attempting since January that year [2016] to revive the talks but the lack of interest left many frustrated, as the Taliban had ramped up their insurgency since Nine Eleven 2001 after they were deposed from power by a US-led invasion.

PML[N] government in Pakistan had later admitted, after years of official denial, that the Taliban leadership enjoyed safe haven inside Pakistan. Afghan President asked Pakistan to fulfil its promises... and take military action against their sanctuaries and leadership based on its soil. On the other hand, the Taliban were never willing to negotiate until their demands were met, including the departure of 13,000 US & NATO soldiers deployed to train and advise their Afghan counterparts.

Thus Pakistan was caught in muddle and confusion.

THE LAHORE PARK BOMBING:

On 27th March 2016; more than 72 people were killed in a suicide blast that took place in Lahore's crowded *Gulshan-i-Iqbal* park; at least 370 others were injured. After the attack, the Punjab government declared an emergency in Lahore and announced three days of mourning.

The FIR claimed four suspicious individuals were stopped at the gate of the park, one of whom got into the park and blew himself up. The other three, taking advantage of the rush at the scene, were able to slip away. A five member joint interrogation team comprising officials from police, ISI and IB was constituted by the Punjab government to probe the attack.

The powerful blast ripped through a massively crowded area of the park adjacent to Gate 1 which housed swings, train and other attractions for children. The crowd included a large number of Christian families celebrating Easter. The blast was so massive and fatal that there were pools of blood and scattered body parts in the park. The injured were seen crying for help and women running to find their children.

The incident raised a big question mark over the 'security measures' especially in the wake of terror threats. Lahore CCPO Capt Amin Wains ruled out

a security lapse on the part of police and said two mobile squads had been stationed at the main gate of the park.

The local police told that at least 15 to 20 kg explosive material was used by the suicide bomber. Later, the police found the 'skull' of the suspect from the blast site and sent it for forensic analysis. The terrorist had hit a very soft target of women and children.

An identity card police found from the site of the blast was believed to be of the alleged suicide bomber. According to initial inquiry, the ID card of one Yousuf, a young man from Muzaffargarh, could be the bomber. Same night, four friends of Yousuf were detained by Muzaffargarh police from Basti Sohrani for questioning.

The said attack was claimed by the TTP's *Jamaatul Ahrar*, who also claimed last year's twin suicide bombings at churches in Lahore's Youhanabad area, which had killed 15 people and sparked violent protests across the city.

Eye witnesses recalled pools of blood and scattered body parts spread across the site of the attack. They could hear children screaming as people carried the injured in their arms, while frantic relatives searched for loved ones in nightmarish scenes at the park near the centre of the city. Most people took the injured to hospitals on rickshaws and taxis. The crowd was *unusually large* because of Easter; the roads were jammed and queues of vehicles were seen miles long.

Doctors described frenzied scenes at hospitals, with staff treating casualties on floors and in corridors, as officials tweeted calls for blood donations. The force of the blast had shattered nearby homes; the human flesh was found even on the walls of those houses; people were crying and the ambulances were roaming around.

Chief of Army Staff Gen Raheel Sharif chaired a high-level meeting late night same day which was attended by heads of the ISI and Military Intelligence [MI] among other military officials. Having evaluated initial information, the COAS directed concerned commanders and intelligence officials to immediately start operations to nab perpetrators of the attack. The COAS resolved that **"...inhumane savages will not be allowed to overrun our life and liberty."**

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif also chaired a meeting at the PM House where he was briefed by his security advisers on the Lahore attack. The PM condemned the blast and directed authorities to ensure **"special medical care"** to the injured.

The Vatican also condemned the attack, calling it "**fanatical violence against Christian minorities**"; and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon called for Islamabad to protect religious minorities. The said episode on Easter Sunday had drawn condemnation from around the world in fact.

Among the killed were twenty-nine children and 370 people wounded. Far less noted, however, had been the attack's equally devastating effect on relations between Pakistan's army and civilian government, which threatened to bring further instability to that major province.

For the past eighteen months, the two Sharifs [no relation] kept a tenuous political compact: the army—in some consultation with the prime minister—had overall control of Pakistan's foreign and nuclear policy, as well as its counterterrorism strategy in Karachi, in the south, and along the border with Afghanistan, in the north.

In turn, the civilian government could run the economy – though mostly devastating. Counterterrorism actions in Punjab were entrusted to the Punjab police rather than the Rangers faction of the Army – but the former proved itself as a total failure.

The chaotic situation ended hours after the bomb blast on that night; almost immediately, the Pak-Army declared it had taken control of security in the province, dealing a perhaps fatal blow to the already dwindling political prestige Prime Minister Sharif. The army told the media to emphasize that the orders for the Punjab operation were given directly by Gen Sharif and not the PM Sharif.

CM Shahbaz Sharif government intentionally avoided to provide the army or Rangers the required political, constitutional, or legal cover for going into Punjab. That the Punjab government could have invited the army in – but Gen Sharif and PM Sharif had not met or apparently conferred with each other, adding to the uncertainty.

The federal and Punjab government ministers, totally ashamed, were brought on live TV shows after the bombings but the prime minister himself, in his own speech, did not mention the army's help and enthusiasm what to praise or admire. For a country at war with extremists it was clear that the civil government of Sharif was not bothered about the safety and security of its populace – **even the National Action Plan [NAP], unanimously agreed by all political parties in December 2014 was thrown in bin.**

Manifestly, a dramatic breakdown was seen in civil-military relations. In the past, such situations had led to the military imposing martial law on four occasions since 1958. However, Gen Raheel Sharif was not at all inclined to make the PML[N] government and PM Sharif the '*political martyrs*' though the then crisis totally darkened the future of counter-terrorism policy—and democracy itself.

With that Sunday's bombing, the stakes for Punjab had become much higher for both Sharifs. The army had moved decisively over the past eighteen months to crush the Pakistani Taliban [TTP] and the multiple Taliban factions that operated in Karachi, in Khyber PK and in the tribal belt along with Pak-Afghan border. Yet in Punjab, there were an estimated sixty Islamic extremist groups and over 20,000 *madrassas*—still producing militants successfully and spewing extremist ideologies.

Since the 1980s, many of Pakistan's extremist groups had been allegedly sponsored and trained by the Indian Intelligence Services [RAW] to launch terrorist activities in Punjab and Balochistan. Such support from the foreign military has been an on-going project. But the real test of Gen Sharif's determination to root out terrorism from Pakistan had always been in Punjab and Karachi.

Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, the group behind the Lahore park bombing is openly sectarian and had targeted the Pak-Army and Christians in association with *Lashkar-e-Tayyaba* [LeT] – apparently an Islamic charity but keeping its militant wing too.

As the Rangers had taken control of [selective] security in Punjab, the crucial question was whether it would go after the terrorist groups it decided to counter, or Rana Sanaullah's factions would go spared. For Gen Sharif, an added challenge was that the army itself recruits much of its half-million-strong manpower from Punjab. The Generals were disturbed that if Islamic extremists continued to aggravate in Punjab, their soldiers' lot would also get infected.

The two Sharif brothers had a political lock on Punjab, where there was also widespread political and financial corruption; but since the elder becoming prime minister for the third time, Nawaz Sharif had frittered away his opportunities. ***He proved to be a hopelessly incompetent leader, neither strong enough to initiate badly needed reforms nor sophisticated enough to deal with the country's army.***

Pakistan's governance was run by Sharifs family rather than by the cabinet, parliament, or other institutions. Through Rana Sanaullah, the Punjab Law

Minister, they went soft on extremist groups—some of which had close ties to his PML[N] — apparently to persuade them not to attack in Punjab. That policy clearly failed.

Amid the Lahore bombing, the army disclosed the arrest of an Indian spy working to destabilize the province of Balochistan; Kulbhoshan Yadav, was a retired Indian naval officer, and had lived many years in Iran from where he travelled to Pakistan. Yadav was found with an Iranian passport in his possession. However, the Pakistani prime minister was seen little bothered once again.

Referring to an editorial note in the daily '**Dawn**' dated **30th March 2016**:

"Yet, in the very moment that the country needed its leaders to demonstrate resolve and unity, an utterly befuddling signal has been sent. Instead of jointly trying to address the challenge... the army and political leaderships appear to have withdrawn into their respective camps."

It was believed by many that the army would do a short, swift crackdown and then withdraw its forces from Punjab. Whatever happened, the country's political leadership was seen hobbled then and the future of Sharifs Kingdom in one of south Asia's most populous states was in confirmed shambles.

NO FOREIGN WAR ON PAK-SOILS:

Let us start from a year before; see an earlier White House's communiqué – [*un-necessary sentences taken away*] a policy document in the back-drop of Afghan War:

[The White House
Office of the Press Secretary
For Immediate Release

December 28, 2014

Statement by the President on the End of the Combat Mission in Afghanistan

Today's ceremony in Kabul marks a milestone for our country. For more than 13 years, ever since nearly 3,000 innocent lives were

*taken from us on 9/11, our nation has been at war in Afghanistan. Now, thanks to the extraordinary sacrifices of our men and women in uniform, our combat mission in Afghanistan is ending, and **the longest war in American history is coming to a responsible conclusion.***

On this day we give thanks to our troops and intelligence personnel who have been relentless against the terrorists responsible for 9/11-- thus saving countless American lives. We are safer, and our nation is more secure, because of their service. At the same time, our courageous military and diplomatic personnel in Afghanistan have helped the Afghan people reclaim their communities, take the lead for their own security.....

We honor the profound sacrifices that have made this progress possible. We salute every American--military and civilian, including our dedicated diplomats and we remember the more than 2,200 American patriots who made the ultimate sacrifice in Afghanistan, and we pledge to stand with their Gold Star families who need the everlasting love and support of a grateful nation.

Afghanistan remains a dangerous place, and the United States--along with our allies and partners--will maintain a limited military presence in Afghanistan to train, advise and assist Afghan forces and to conduct counterterrorism operations against the remnants of al Qaeda.

*These past 13 years have tested our nation and our military. **But compared to the nearly 180,000 American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan when I took office, we now have fewer than 15,000 in those countries. Some 90 percent of our troops are home.** Our military remains the finest in the world, and we will remain vigilant against terrorist attacks and in defense of the freedoms and values we hold dear. And with growing prosperity here at home, we enter a new year with new confidence, indebted to our fellow Americans in uniform who keep us safe and free.]*

On 12th May 2016; the '**New York Times**' wrote its editorial titled as **Time to Put the Squeeze on Pakistan**; which was much disturbing for many regional think tanks especially the academicians of Pakistan; it caused stirs amongst Pakistan's ruling elite – less in political more in military circles. It wrote:

"Nearly 15 years after 9/11, the war in Afghanistan is [still] raging and Pakistan deserves much of the blame. It remains a duplicitous and dangerous partner for the United States and Afghanistan, despite \$33 billion in American aid and repeated attempts to reset relations on a more constructive course."

The real analysis proved that the US was unnecessarily blaming Pakistan. The above lines were not correct. If the US could not control the rebels in Afghanistan, it was not the Pakistan's fault. The history is depleted with facts about the American's distrust. Even those days the India was being declared as the '**Strategic Partner**'.

The money trail of \$33 billion was not accountable as it had never reached in Pakistan's official accounts. The US used to buy rogue politicians to cast favourable policies for them – so that money remained there in America or in its allied countries in the name of those politicians.

In mid 2016, the new American commander in Afghanistan, Gen. John Nicholson Jr, presented his assessment of the Afghan war; it was bleak and had questioned the wisdom of President Obama's goal of cutting the American force of 10,000 troops to 5,500 by the end of that year. The truth was that, regardless of troop levels, the only hope for long-term peace was considered negotiations with some factions of the Taliban – and the General held that still Pakistan could help and play role.

The NYT's editorial still held that Pakistan's powerful army and intelligence services were supporting the Taliban and the Haqqani's network. It was baseless allegation as Pakistan had no interests in Afghanistan – rather was disturbed with India's increasing influence there. Pakistan Army's **Operation Zarb e Azb** was going successful in its Pak-Afghan border region but it was not to please the Americans; the operation was there because Pakistan was suffering more at the hands of Taliban – Peshawar ATS episode was there as an instance.

The rest of the allegations were mostly stories of Americans' own failures and strategic defeats which it wanted to place it on Pakistan's shoulders in the name of Haqqanis and Taliban quagmires.

The Living History of Pakistan Vol-VI

The US was cursing Pakistan's own priorities to deal with its in-country deteriorating security situation calling it as **'double game'**; it was America's **'innocent viewpoint'**. It was not bad if Pakistan had started thinking for its own after losing its about 50,000 civil & military souls in the name of **'War on Terror'** which was nothing but an American plan to prevail with its peculiar interests in this South Asian region.

American officials went frustrated – but no one bothered in Pakistan over this issue except some corrupt politicians. All efforts in Washington to exert more pressure on the Pakistan Army went in vain. Senator Bob Corker, Republican of Tennessee, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, barred the use of American aid to underwrite Pakistan's purchase of eight F-16 jet fighters – but even then Pakistan didn't change its stance.

Pakistan was punished but how – the country was allowed to purchase the planes, but at a cost of \$700 million instead of about \$380 million; no bother as it was a business deal. Then why the whistling hue & cry from the US that Pakistan didn't help.

President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan was also getting tougher with Pakistan's leaders. He courted Pakistan for more than a year in the hopes that the army would bring the Taliban to the negotiating table – but why asking Pakistan to do this dirty job. It should have been Afghanistan and America's plan – why they didn't call India to help who was being elevated against Pakistan at all fronts. If there was surge in violence in Afghanistan, Pakistan itself was also suffering at the hands of Indian and Afghan sponsored terrorists in Balochistan.

Once, the US threatened to lodge a complaint with the United Nations Security Council when Pakistan refused to take military action as per American designs against Taliban on its soil; of course, they had their own priorities. Such pressures make sense amongst nations as normal diplomacy channels; severing ties with each other as the US did in the 1998 after Pakistan developed a nuclear weapon was un-called for and injudicious.

The two countries still continued to share intelligence, and Pakistan allowed American drones to target militant leaders in the border region. Given that Pakistan had the world's fastest-growing nuclear arsenal, America wisely opted to maintain a dialogue.

In year 2015, more Afghan civilians and troops were killed than in any other year since the Taliban was toppled in 2001. Since taking office in 2014, President Ghani had been a more reliable leader in the eyes of Americans; his predecessor Hamid Karzai had disappointed them. However, Ashraf

Ghani's government was seen crippled by political infighting, endemic corruption, a budget crunch and an unsustainable troop casualty rate in Afghanistan.

The aforesaid grim realities presented difficult choices for going-out President Obama, who had to decide whether to keep the US troop strength, and if so then at what level and with what plans to change the US military's role to fight the Taliban more directly – because Pakistan was not prepared to fight the '**foreigner's war**' any more.

However, in the earlier referred NYT's editorial, President Obama's declaration was taken '**with undue optimism**', that "**the longest war in American history is coming to a responsible conclusion.**" The NYT held that it would be left to Obama's successor to figure out how and whether the Taliban could be lured into political negotiations adding that '*... will only happen if the American government finds a way to convince Pakistan to stop fuelling the war.*'

On 20th May 2016; Asif Zardari wrote 'letter to Editor **NEW YORK TIMES**' which is being placed here for think tanks to analyse the viewpoint given therein.

Re "Time to Put the Squeeze on Pakistan" [editorial, May 12]:

As you indicate, the struggle between Pakistan and the United States over the purchase of F-16 fighter jets demonstrates how far apart our two countries have grown. What was once a strong partnership allied against threats to the region from Russia and non-state actors is sadly frayed.

The threats, however, remain. Pakistan has suffered repeated mass-casualty attacks by the Taliban and Al Qaeda, most recently in Lahore, where 74 were killed and 338 wounded. We are fighting for our lives. If there are factions in Congress that don't believe that we are committed to fighting terrorists, they should come to Pakistan and bear witness to our solidarity and resolve.

Despite our common security interests and a deep democratic kinship, there is ambiguity toward the bilateral relationship from officials in both countries. In Congress, there is outright opposition to supporting the fighter deal.

In the coming week, State Department officials will be in Pakistan for meetings with our government. I hope that they will take this opportunity to assure us that they remain committed to supporting our security needs.

ASIF ALI ZARDARI - London

(The writer, co-chairman of the Pakistan People's Party, was President of Pakistan from 2008 to 2013.)

The same narrative of **12th May 2016**, with the same ditto words, was repeated by the US President Trump by placing it on twitter dated **1st January 2018**.

Pakistani nation seldom bothers to go through the history pages – thus went so upset and crazy with Trump's 1st tweet of the new year 2018 that on all TV channels tens of live discussions appeared showing utmost anxiety and future strategies.

No one took pain to ponder that Pakistan and Its Army Chief Gen Raheel Sharif had replied to that NYT's editorial and the then US President Obama in the same harsh tone urging that 'now-on, no foreign war would be fought on Pakistani soils – kar lo jo karma hai.....' and nothing had moved in any direction.