

# PAKISTAN TODAY

## **Deterring Trump — and terrorism**

*When you're caught between the devil and the deep blue sea – and nukes aren't an option*

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The Trump presidency has unraveled the world order just within two weeks after being elected to the White House. Thus far, Trump has managed to isolate his government by passing an array of very controversial executive orders. The result has been a rapidly growing domestic political opposition and weakening international support, fueled by Trump's berating of Mexican and Austrian residents which has clearly drawn criticism from all relevant quarters.

The decision to ban people from entering the United States from seven Muslim majority states has made clear Trump's intentions of brining the so-called "radical Islam" into the centre of his counter terrorism policy, home and abroad. According to the Cato Institute, a think tank in America, none of the countries on Trump's Muslim ban list were ever involved in any attack on the US soil. On the other hand, according to New America, another policy institute, majority of attacks that have taken place over the period of last one decade "came from within." Last year, a Muslim born in the US to Afghan parents killed at least 49 people while in 2015 a Muslim woman along with her husband who was born in the US to Pakistani parents, killed 14 in a terrorist attack.

The likely implications of Trump's "Muslim ban" are going to increase homegrown radicalisation and hatred and loathing abroad. The most damaging aspect of Trump's ban can come in the form of handicaps to tackle the Islamic State in the Middle East. The decision to add Iraq and Syria's name on the travel ban list would only undermine the ground support that Washington possesses in both countries. Moreover, Trump's warning to Iran about its possible expansion of ballistic missile programme puts Washington and Tehran back on traditional "conflict mood." However, this time, the US perhaps stands to lose more than Iran: without Iran's support which is essential in terms of managing various Shia militia groups in Iraq, Trump cannot win the war against ISIS. Moreover, putting Iran's name on the list of banned countries appears to be an attempt to appease and engage Israel whose relations with Washington have remained tense during the Obama administration.

However, it doesn't mean that Trump's has lost the capacity to inflict damages on states that are not willing to abide by his government's policies abroad. In the Asia-Pacific region, Pakistan is among the countries that might soon experience Trump's explosive and knee-jerk diplomatic wrath. The new government has, on numerous occasions, hinted about adding Pakistan's name to the travel ban list: "You can point to other countries that have similar problems like Pakistan and others – perhaps we need to take it further," said the White House Chief of Staff, Reince Priebus, recently.

With Pakistan, Trump stands to lose as much as perhaps Islamabad: Pakistan's support is essential in terms of concluding the US's trillion dollar worth war in Afghanistan. If one is to follow conventional diplomacy, Trump's military advisors would surely recommend a "carrot and stick" option with Islamabad rather than an all out ban which would surely humiliate Pakistan, particularly its military. That perhaps can force Pakistan into taking some reciprocal actions which might hurt Washington's security interest in the region.

In Pakistan's context, the key threat against Islamabad could come from New Dehli's strong presence in Washington. What would be better than putting the leader of a proscribed organisation under house arrest – Hafiz Saeed – if it offers Pakistan some respite against Dehli's lobbying with Trump?

Michael Kugelman, an analyst with the Woodrow Wilson institute in Washington, argues that "If any external pressure compelled Pakistan to place Saeed under house arrest, it's more likely to have come from Beijing than Washington." He further contends that "It's also folly to assume the Trump administration was actively pushing Pakistan to move on Saeed. Trump has been in office for less than two weeks, and beyond his rapid-fire issuance of executive orders, his presidency appears frenzied and disorganised—not to mention hamstrung by numerous unfilled senior diplomatic and national security posts."

Kugelman is right to assume that Washington under the Trump administration – thus far – has not been able to focus on Pakistan and China, in this regard, may have pushed Pakistan into taking this policy action.

However, there is another perspective to the "Saeed arrest" development: for a while, China has been pushing Pakistan towards taking such policy measures, for its massive economic investments demand "zero tolerance" towards internal instability in the country. By putting the head of *Jamaat-ul-Dawa* under house arrest, Pakistan not only appears receptive to Beijing's requests but also foils and deters New Dehli's anticipated aggressive diplomacy against Pakistan under the Trump administration which may force the new government in Washington into taking swift measures against Islamabad – including a "travel ban." The next few weeks and months would reveal if it's a tactical move on Pakistan's part to avoid Washington's rage or an actual policy change. However, in the short run, Pakistan's diplomacy of "deterrence" is likely to pay off in defusing the Trump challenge.

Above all, Trump's current approach of counter terrorism is littered with loopholes where the new government's non-diplomatic and flagrant bullying tactics would only curtail the gains made in containing terrorism globally.

