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Trumped foreign policy

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“We should leave Afghanistan immediately. No more wasted lives. Rebuild the US first.” Said Donald Trump in 2013. That has been and was the center of his election campaign thereafter. That was one of the reasons he won as a President. That was a part of his foreign policy manifesto to disengage from foreign conflicts. That remained his bashing for a failed Obama and democrat rule. But typical Trump style he just nonchalantly expressed last week that to make America great he needs to make Afghanistan more deadly. In the process countries like Pakistan will have to do much more and countries like India will have to collaborate with US in this tried, tested and failed formula.

It may seem insane to follow a strategy that has brought more terror and wars not only in Afghanistan and Asia but in the west too. But then, this is the same strategy that has kept the US economy and industry alive despite the Chinese threat of an economic takeover at the world stage. Trumpian political philosophy is highlighted by 3 Bs, Build Walls, Ban Muslims and Bomb non-compliant countries. This keeps him true to his word and style-brash, non-inclusive and arrogant. A style that won him an election. The only flaw is that by going back to Afghanistan he is doing exactly what he promised not to do. Again in his typical dismissiveness he says when you come to White House you discover you have to do things that demand a reality check.

This change of heart is not surprising for two reasons. Most American Presidents, including Obama, find out in the White House that US defense Industry needs war and terror to survive. Obama was the biggest arms salesman in White House history and Trump's 110 billion dollar sale to Saudi Arabia on his recent visit meant that companies like Lockheed Martin etc will keep running for Trump's term. That his son in law is a major negotiator in these deals is a win-win for all. Secondly the divide, rule, disengage, destroy and rebuild strategic defense ploy has a successful history of keeping enemies at bay and friends happy. Thus Saudis will be busy fighting Yemen and Iran, Iran will be busy supporting some factions in Syria and that leaves Pakistan. That is why Afghanistan has to be re-ignited. Firstly to make Pak Afghan more divisive and secondly to please India to get a chunk of Afghan economy.

However the downside of this stale strategy is that the world has changed in the decade and half since US decided to attack Afghanistan and deploy its forces in the region. The World order has new players in every region. China is more stronger and more influential. Iran is more vocal and more effective in its middle eastern power play and nations and citizens are more aware and more empowered to raise their voice due to social media. Thus Trump's strategy may appease his vote bank and his ego for a short while but it will backfire not too far in the distance. The Europeans are already weary of him and his imposition in the G8 and G20 meetings was rebutted

especially when he backed out of the environmental commitments and therefore Europe is unlikely to support him on issues where public pressure is already in opposition.

When Trump put a ban on muslim countries travel to US the facts stated that none of them produced terrorists. In his recent policy speech Trump has blamed Pakistan for being a safe haven for terrorists that endanger America. Since 9/11 facts state that nationalities of people who have attacked US has very little to do with Pakistan. According to Cato Institute, the highest number of terrorists i.e 2369 are from Saudi Arabia, 314 from UAE, and 162 from Egypt. These three countries have not even been mentioned as part of the terror control policy. With the wrong focus the wrong targets will be hit and when you hit the wrong targets, wrong consequences will result.

If it is a stale foreign policy of US, it is a disastrous foreign policy by Pakistan. The 9/11 saga of choices has continued. The Musharraf era and then the Zardari era was marked by an inconsistency of aligning themselves with US militarily and then economically to make it impossible to make independent decisions. The present government has had a foreign policy paralysis with the result that regional and international relations are at their lowest ebb. With India pursuing an aggressive policy and Pakistan just towing the line of Saudi donors the classic case of almost getting involved with the Yemen conflict highlighted this paralysis. Fortunately, the parliament resisted this stance and this threat was averted but the Saudi military coalition headed by General Raheel has estranged Iran from Pakistan. The ex-Prime Minister was also Foreign Minister and in the four years he was heading the country you will really have to dig for a single clear foreign policy direction or statement from him.

Trump's statements have brought a late reaction from the government and they are consulting the parliament on a policy stance against it. The parliament has unitedly apposed and recommended strict measures against Trump tirade. The problem is that with countries like China, India or Iran US interference is limited due to their economic independence. With Pakistan there are serious economic issues with trade deficit spiraling, debt ballooning and exports sliding. The probability of going back to IMF is looming large. This financial dependency will make whatever policy stances we take mere lip service. Thus we may blame Trump for his irrational stance but we must remember what Nathan Morrison said " Every time you borrow money , you're robbing your future self".