

**TRUMP CALLS****While India opposes third party mediation, it can expect U.S. pressure on Pakistan**

The United States views Jammu and Kashmir as a nuclear flashpoint, considering the capabilities of India and Pakistan, and this is a rare point of agreement between U.S. President Donald Trump and the country's professional strategists. He conveyed the importance of reducing tensions and maintaining peace to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan. He also urged Mr. Khan to "moderate rhetoric with India", echoing India's sentiments. He had spoken to Mr. Khan last week too, as relations between the neighbours took a turn for the worse after India's decision to revoke the special status of J&K on August 5. Under Mr. Modi, India has revised its long-held policy on J&K and ruled out any role for Pakistan in New Delhi's ties with the troubled region, while reiterating its claim over Pakistan occupied territory. Pakistan's ruling establishment has flourished by using Kashmir as a trope of Islamic nationalism, even as its society sank in radicalism and violence. With Islamabad crying itself hoarse over the sudden turnaround in India's posture and considering the history of conflicts between the two countries, the U.S. - even under an isolationist President - could not have looked the other way.

Mr. Trump's anxiety about India-Pakistan tensions is also linked to his desperation to disentangle the U.S. from the conflict in Afghanistan - now in its 18th year - before his reelection bid in 2020. In the jihadi world view, Kashmir and Afghanistan are two fronts of the same war, and the Pakistani state has conveniently peddled this idea for long. The U.S. is no longer swayed by Pakistan's argument that the 'road to peace in Afghanistan runs through Kashmir', but it is certainly conscious of Islamabad's proclivity to mischief, most evidently by supporting terror groups launched into Afghanistan and Kashmir. India has always resisted, rightly, any linkage between Afghanistan and Kashmir but it cannot be dismissive of the implications of the U.S's inevitable withdrawal from Afghanistan. The U.S. has gradually but decisively tilted in favour of India on a range of regional strategic questions in recent years, but its search for an Afghan escape route forces it to keep Islamabad in good humour. While Mr. Trump and his administration have been largely sympathetic to India's latest move on J&K, his tweet on Monday projected parity between Mr. Modi and Mr. Khan by terming them "my two good friends." While India opposes any third party mediation, it expects the U.S. to keep Pakistan on a tight leash. India's position that Kashmir is strictly an internal matter can be reinforced only by holding its citizens close and reassured. New Delhi's dealings with J&K must be becoming of the world's largest democracy.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Strategy		Master plan, game plan, plan of action
Convey		Transport, transfer, grant, cede, devolve
Moderate		Average, modest, medium, middling
Rhetoric		Oratory, articulated, eloquent
Revoke		Cancel, repeal, rescind, reverse, abrogate
Reiterate		Repeat, restate, recapitulate, iterate
Flourish		Become popular, take off
Trope		Design, motif
Radicalism		Leftist, progressive, sub versive, agitator
Hoarse		Rough, harsh, croaky, throaty, gruff
Turn around		An abrupt / unexpected change
Isolation		Separation, segregation, setting apart
Anxiety		Worries, agonies, woes, sufferings
Desperation		Hopelessness, despair, distress
Disentangle		Extricate, extract, remove, disengage
Convenient		Suitable, appropriate, fitting, suited
Sway		Swing, shake, oscillate, undulate
Peddle		Sell, hawk, tout, vend
Proclivity		Liking, inclination, tendency, disposition
Mischief		Naughtiness, misbehaviour, misconduct
Resist		Withstand, hold out against, combat, counter
Dismissive		Contemptuous, disdainful, scornful, snide
Implication		Suggestion, inference, insinuation, innuendo
Inevitable		Unavoidable, inescapable, inexorable
Decisive		Deciding, conclusion, determining, final
Tilt		Lean, tip, list, slope, camber, bank, incline
Route		Way, course, road, path, avenue
Sympathetic		Commiserating,. Commiserative, condoling
Leash		Fasten, tether, hitch up, tie up, fetter

**FREE FALL**

No end to the Afghan crisis is in sight as the IS emerges as the third player in the conflict

The suicide attack at a crowded wedding hall in Kabul on Saturday night that killed at least 63 people and injured more than 180 others is yet another tragic reminder of the perilous security situation in Afghanistan. The blast, claimed by the local arm of the Islamic State (IS), occurred at a time when the U.S. and the Taliban are preparing to announce a peace agreement to end the 18-year-long conflict. But if the IS attack is anything to go by, it is that peace will remain elusive to most Afghans irrespective of the agreement reached between the Taliban and the U.S. It's now a three-way conflict in Afghanistan - the government, the Taliban insurgents and the global terrorists. The government in Kabul, backed by the U.S. and the international community, is fighting to preserve the existing system, which despite its faults, at least offers a semblance of democracy. But the government is a failure in ensuring safety and security of the people. The Taliban, which controls the mountainous hinterlands, wants to expand its reach to the urban centres. The IS, which has declared a province (Khorasan) in eastern Afghanistan's Nangarhar, has emerged as the third player. Attacks against civilians, especially the Shia minority, is the central part of its brutal military tactics. Afghanistan's Hazara Shias were the target of the wedding hall bombing as well. The IS, which released a video of the purported bomber, a Pakistani, said he attacked "polytheistic rejectionists", as the group calls Shia Muslims.

This complex, mutually destructive nature of the conflict is the biggest challenge before any attempt to establish order and stability in Afghanistan. As part of a potential peace deal, the U.S. is ready to pull troops from Afghanistan in return for assurances from the Taliban that they will not allow the Afghan soil to be used by transnational terrorists such as the IS and al-Qaeda. It will be left to the Taliban and the government to have their own peace talks and settle differences. Arguably, a peace deal or at least a ceasefire between the Taliban and the Kabul government would allow both sides to rechannel their resources to fighting terrorist groups. But the Taliban's intentions are hardly clear. What if the Taliban, which ran most of Afghanistan according to its puritanical interpretation of the Islamic law from 1996 to 2001, turns against Kabul once the Americans are out? What if the country plunges into a multi-party civil war as it did after the Soviet Union pulled out in 1989? The IS has demonstrated an ability to survive and strike in Afghanistan despite the U.S.'s heavy air campaign in the east. Ideally, the international community should have strengthened the hands of the Kabul government against all kind of terrorists, before seeking a settlement with the insurgents. They should have helped alter the balance of power in the conflict. But it does not seem likely now. And Afghanistan is in a free fall.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Emerge		Come out, appear, become, visible, transpire
Perilous		Dangerous, chancy, deleterious, cataclysmic
Elusive		Difficult to find, unreal
Insurgence		Muting, rebellion, revolution, stirring
Semblance		Appearance, approximation, show, pretence
Hinterland		The back of beyond, the middle of nowhere
Brutal		Savage, cruel, bloodthirsty, vicious
Puritanical		Appearing, stated to be true
Puritanical		Moralistic, pietistic, stuffy, starchy