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### TRUMP MISINTERPRETS US INVOLVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

BY

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Trump as usual has been his unpredictable self, possibly the reason for all whom he appoints, seeking to quit or being moved out. His approach to Afghanistan has been equally flawed. His comment during a recent interview, “Why is not Russia there (in Afghanistan, fighting the Taliban)? Why isn’t India there? Why isn’t Pakistan there? Why are we (US) there? We are 6,000 miles away. But I don’t mind. We want to help our people. We want to help other nations,” leaves anyone wondering about his depth of knowledge.

The US entered Afghanistan on its own free will. They entered because the 9/11 attack was planned and launched from this country, where the Taliban had shielded Osama Bin Laden, the mastermind and had refused to hand him over. It invoked article 5 of the NATO accord, since it had been attacked by an external power, and dragged in NATO forces too. Neither India, Pakistan nor Russia, whom he now seeks to involve, invited them in.

The fact remains that wherever the US has ventured unilaterally, seeking to push its way in, considering itself the global policeman, it has left behind chaos and trouble spots. It entered Iraq, overthrew Saddam, was unable to stabilize and create a nation state, leading to the rise of the ISIS. It left Iraq as multiple nations within a state, a country divided and broken.

Similar has been the case with Libya. It supported the uprising against Gaddafi, ensuring his downfall, leaving behind a broken state, which may never ever be a nation state. It failed to realize that these two countries could

only survive with a strong power at the centre as they were different nations within a state. It was Obama who admitted that the biggest policy error of the US was its actions in Libya. Both Iraq and Libya, remain major threats to regional security. Its open support to the Saudi campaign in Yemen had led to the largest human catastrophe in recent times.

Trump's decision to withdraw from Syria was unilateral and against all strategic and military advice. It even led to the resignation of his defence secretary, the last of the four generals whom he had inducted into his staff. The very Kurdish forces which the US had nurtured and employed successfully against the ISIS were being dumped to be destroyed by Turkey, which considers them as a terrorist group. He may have slowed down the withdrawal, but the writing is clear, it will dump Syria.

This decision was taken immediately after a conversation with the Turkish President. Was this announcement done to rescue the Saudi Prince a close personal ally of Trump, whom Turkey has been accusing of being behind the murder of Khashoggi, by leaking details of his involvement through the international media or only to fulfil a campaign promise, remains unknown.

The mistake the US made all through its stay in Afghanistan was its trust on Pakistan to deliver the Taliban. It never did, just swallowed US funds. Pak claimed to have suffered in the battle against terror, a lie which the US accepted. Not a single Pak soldier crossed the border, nor participated in the war on terror.

Until the attack by the Pak army on the Lal Masjid in Islamabad in 2007, Pak had no terrorism on its soil. It supported the Taliban and other terrorist organizations, housed and protected them and enabled them to launch terror strikes on India and Afghanistan. It was only after the Lal Masjid episode that Pak began battling terror groups which were created due to its own ill-conceived policy.

Trump woke up to Pak's cheating on New Year's Day 2018, when he tweeted against them, shaking them from their slumber. He stopped all aid including training of Pak officers in the US. Unmindful Pak kept claiming that no Taliban exist on their soil, including asking the US, 'tell us their location and we will act'. Imran tried to be bold when Trump accused them again, stating we will not fight their battles.

A letter from Trump to Imran, part of which was released to the press, suddenly had Pak acting. It rediscovered its proximity to the Taliban, pushing them for talks, while its foreign minister rushed to multiple countries, including Russia and China, to discuss options. In all probability, the letter must have

been accompanied with some specific words of threat for Pak to suddenly change tack. It has since announced that it was behind recent talks between the Taliban and the US special envoy to Afghanistan. Trump in response stated that he hopes to mend ties with Pak.

Trump simultaneously insulted Indian contributions in Afghanistan. He claimed India had constructed a library, which none would use. He appears to have forgotten, which is possible considering his well-known short memory span, that India is equipping and training the Afghan army as also the only nation contributing to its development. It is also providing thousands of scholarships to Afghan students, while Trump even bans their entry into the US. India would not, despite any US pressure place boots on the ground.

His commentson withdrawing from Afghanistan and seeking Indian boots on the ground appears to be more of a threat to India that if it does not participate, Afghanistan could be Pak controlled. This threat would neither work nor be effective. India would rightly play its cards and so would the Taliban. The Taliban are not the same which controlled Afghanistan earlier. They would seek development and education, for which there is no better partner than India. They solely want the US out.

India should have rightly educated Trump that his country was neither invited nor requested to enter Afghanistan. They jumped in on their own, failed to accomplish what they set out to do, now seek others to clean the mess they created. India, as a responsible nation would neither follow their illogical actions nor serve under the US flag as it is neither a NATO nation, nor bound by their rules.

If the US withdraws in a rush, as Trump seeks, it would be another on their list of failures. It would tarnish the US reputation as a reliable ally, a military power and crush their image of being the global policeman. It may recreate an environment for another anti-US alliance in Afghanistan adding to their woes. Thus, any action he takes should only be after accepting sound military and strategic advice. India would not fall into his trap and jump in to clean his mess.

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