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### **TRUMP'S POLICIES ARE UNRELIABLE AND ENHANCE RISKS OF FAILURE**

**BY**

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Trump's unilateral decision to pull out of Syria and reduce the strength of US forces in Afghanistan would have repercussions not only in the US, but across the globe. It would severely impinge both Syria and Afghanistan as also hammer nails into the reliability of the US as a trusted ally. Close allies like Japan are already moving away, enhancing their own defence spending, realizing that the US can no longer be trusted. The EU is seeking to enhance its own military power, moving away from NATO, where the US leads. India while accepting demands from the US for closer proximity, is seeking to counter-balance its ties with Russia and China.

Within the US, Trump's defence secretary, Jim Mattis, widely regarded as a balance to Trump's unreliability has resigned. He was the last of the four generals, Trump had selected into his cabinet, terming them as 'my generals'. Now none are left. Even the US military has been shocked by the decision. It has worsened its existing relationship with NATO, whose members have decided to continue remaining in Syria.

Within Syria, there would be more confusion. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF also termed the YDF by Turkey), a Kurdish militia force, which spearheaded the battle against the IS, backed by the US are now under gravethreat. Turkey terms them a terrorist group and due to US support for them, US-Turkey relations were strained. Turkey had earlier announced plans to launch operations against them by sending its forces across the border. It shares a 500 Km border with Syria. Presently, Turkey has

announced a delay in its operations against the YDF, as it desires to concentrate against the ISIS for now. With US support missing, Turkey would soon seek to eliminate this group.

All US allies have criticized the move. Bert McGurk, the US special envoy to defeat ISIS stated, 'Nobody is declaring a mission accomplished'. He subsequently resigned. The British issued a statement mentioning, 'much remains to be done'. France has announced it would continue to remain and has criticized the US move. Mattis, the US Defence Secretary attempted to convince Trump to stay the ground but after being rebuked submitted his resignation. In his resignation letter Mattis highlighted the importance of 'showing respect' to allies, that have stood by the US and Trump tends to undermine. Even the Pentagon has been surprised by the decision.

Members of the US congress cutting across party lines urged the President to reverse course as it would only strengthen the hand of Russia and Iraq in Syria and enable the revival of the ISIS. Russia stated that unpredictability in decision making in the US was 'creating discomfort' in international relations.

Almost a day later Trump announced his decision to withdraw half of his troops from Afghanistan. Thus, it would leave about 7000 US military personnel and 26,000 contractor personnel, mostly performing military jobs in Afghanistan. This would weaken the US position in talks with the Taliban, who now see the US as withdrawing from the country in defeat. A senior foreign ministry official in Afghanistan stated, 'If you are the Taliban, Christmas has come early'.

The decision by Trump came just when India was discussing with the US its concerns on the increased involvement of Pak in brokering peace in Afghanistan. The last round of talks between the US special envoy to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, and the Taliban ended with no major progress. Talks would possibly now not progress any further as the Taliban would spell blood and feel victory is in sight. The Pak military establishment would now be smiling, knowing the Taliban victory is close.

Under Trump, as rightly stated by Mattis in his resignation, the US is losing its allies faster than ever before. Japan has altered its constitution and started enhancing its military power, provoking a strong response by China. In a first, it is seeking to convert its helicopter carriers into aircraft carriers. NATO and US relations are already frayed.

While Trump may have adopted a 'US first' policy, the fact that the US was the world power on which most allies depended has been missed. Trump may have stated in a tweet, 'Time to focus on our country and bring our youth

back home to where they belong', however he is only alienating the US on the global stage. North Korea in disgust announced that it would not denuclearize while US threat remains, another indication of lack of reliability on the US.

It is also possible that Trump has begun taking this step as he comes under increased internal pressures for his various illegal actions during the electioneering phase. By announcing a pull out from both Syria and Afghanistan, he is seeking to play to local audiences on his keeping poll promises. He has ignored the impact of his decisions on allies.

India has invested billions in developmental assistance to Afghanistan, most under US requests. It also has its consulates in areas which were secure due to the presence of US troops, which could add the risks. Though it has maintained silence on Trump's decision and still considers the existing US presence alongside its contractors as reassuring, yet it would be sceptical of the security of its investments and the future role which it would play in the country. India has sought clarification from the US on its decision.

The Indian foreign ministry remark that the Afghan government and military would not let the Taliban gain power may be bold, however is unrealistic. Talks only commenced because the Taliban was gaining ground. Opposite to Russia, the US has kept India out of its negotiations with the Taliban, hence reducing any leverage which it could have the future.

The Indian government announced that with the resignation of Mattis, India has lost a friend, the reality is that it should have realised from the start of Trump's tenure that the US is an unreliable friend. Trump's initial comments needling allies including neighbours and nations which stood with the US in Afghanistan is an indicator of an individual who fails to maintain ties.

India has therefore commenced following its own charter by enhancing ties with Russia and China. It should reconsider moving deeper into the US camp. It is evident that in case of any tensions with China, India may have to face it alone, support from the US may not flow, as all would depend on US-China ties. In the future of Afghanistan, India needs to re-strategize, cut back its investments for the present and slow down on its projects. It can reengage once the situation becomes clear.

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