

# Imran complains of an Indian false flag march, Pakistan responds to the US criticisms on China and CPEC, Violence along the Pak-Afghan and Pak-Iran borders, and the Locust threat

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## **Imran Khan predicts an Indian false flag march, warns twice during the week**

During the week, Pakistan's media twice referred ([Dawn](#), [The News](#), [The Nation](#), and [the Express Tribune](#)) to Imran Khan making predictions about a false flag operation by India. According to him, India would want to divert the world attention, from the situation in J&K, hence would engage in a false flag operation. ("[False flag operation by India imminent: Imran](#)," *Dawn*, 21 May 2020)

Besides Imran's statements, there were also a series of press releases, meeting notes and telephone conversations by the Foreign Office, Foreign Minister and numerous columns in the newspapers. The primary theme of these press releases, statements and opinions are the same – the situation in J&K, and the BJP's policy towards it. According to them, the situation within J&K is of oppression, violation of basic rights of the Kashmiri Muslims, genocide, changing the demography of Kashmir valley etc. All these developments have resulted in the rise of domestic resistance, led by educated Kashmiri fighters like Burhan Wani and Riyaz Naikoo. For Pakistan, first is the cause, and the second one is the effect.

So, what does Pakistan want in the above cause and effect? It wants the international community to intervene in J&K, and pressurize the BJP government. The statements – whether Imran's statement on Indian false flag march or the conversation between Pakistan's foreign minister and the UN Secretary-General ("India using corona to brutalize IOJ&K: UN Chief told," The Express Tribune, 23 May 2020) underlines the same.

Why would Pakistan want an international intervention? Three reasons: first, it wants to internationalize the J&K problem, which has been a part of its global strategy during the last two decades. Second, both the military and the polity within Pakistan fear that the BJP government would get away with its policies towards J&K and its resultant changes. Finally, Pakistan also wants to use the above to bring itself to the centre stage in Srinagar. Many within Pakistan believe that the country since the days of Musharraf and the ceasefire announcement in 2004 has lost its position within the Kashmir Valley.

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## **China and Pakistan respond to the US criticism on the negative implications of CPEC**

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The second major development during the week, was the accusation and counter-accusation of the US, China and Pakistan on the nature of CPEC and what it would do to Pakistan.

What did Alice Wells say? The US Assistant Secretary of State to South Asia, during this week, made a scathing remark during the week on Pakistan's debt crisis, resulting from the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). In a statement, she said, referring to the COVID-19 crisis, Beijing has to take measures that would lift the burden of "predatory, unsustainable and unfair lending is going to cause to Pakistan," and expected that China would either waive off the debt or renegotiate the loans. She also wanted China to create a "fair and transparent deal for Pakistani people." ("US urges China to waive off Pakistan's debt amid Covid-19 crisis," The Express Tribune, 21 May 2020)

Wells statement is not new. She has made a similar observation earlier on the CPEC as well.

*China Responds.* Immediately after the statement by Wells, a Chinese spokesperson, responded to her criticism and accused the US of always asking Pakistan to do more. Besides underlining the rhetoric of having established and consolidated an all-weather friendship, the statement talked about China and Pakistan working "together to promote regional peace and stability." He also commented: "We take Pakistan as an equal partner and never asked Pakistan to "do more". We support Pakistan's own model of development and never intervene its domestic affairs. We highlight Pakistan's responsible role in regional affairs and never exert pressure." ("Chinese Embassy says Alice Wells' speech to defame Sino-Pak ties," *The News International*, 22 May 2020)

The same message was delivered again by China, during a dialogue inside Pakistan celebrating 69 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The Chinese Ambassador commented, "China will be a partner to Pakistan, but never its teacher." ("China will be Pakistan's partner, never its teacher," *Dawn*, 23 May 2020)

Separately, Pakistan's Ambassador to China wrote a lengthy note that was published by the local newspapers on the occasion. ("From Khunjerab to Gwadar: 69 years of cooperation and connectivity," *The Nation*, 22 May 2020)

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## **Violence in KP and Balochistan**

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There were a series of IED explosions, during the week, in Balochistan and KP killing soldiers of the military and para-military. In the first instance, on 18 May, in Balochistan, six soldiers returning to their base camp were killed in an IED explosion. The same day, in another incident, involving a cross-firing one soldier was killed in Balochistan. This is the second major incidence of violence in Balochistan this month. Early May, in Balochistan, closer to the border with Iran, six soldiers were killed in another IED explosion. ("Seven FC soldiers embrace martyrdom in separate attacks in Balochistan," *The Express Tribune*, 19 May 2020)

On the same day (18 May), North Waziristan also witnessed an IED explosion, resulting in the killing of a soldier. ("Soldier martyred, three injured in blast in North Waziristan," *Dawn*, 19 May 2020) During the week, the police chief of the KP was also quoted to have stated that the militancy is reviving in the Swat valley, after a gap of ten years. ("A decade later, militancy rearing its head in Swat," *The Express Tribune*, 20 May 2020) During the end of the previous decade, there was a serious insurgency within the Swat valley; Pakistan deployed its military to contain the insurgency led by local and Afghan militants belonging to different Taliban groups.

An analysis in *Dawn* last week (17 May) focussed on the increase in violence in these two provinces, during the last two months and also the possibility of the return of TTP militants from Afghanistan. According to this analysis by Amir Rana, "the TTP and other militants were trying to hit their native towns to reclaim their lost influence. Outfits like

Jamaatul Ahrar could also try to regroup in their towns of origin, including Bajaur and Orakzai."

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## **The threat from Locusts to Pakistan's Food Security**

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On the non-traditional security issues, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has raised the level of threats from the locusts to Pakistan's food security. ("[FAO prepares crisis appeal for Pakistan's locust issue](#)," Dawn, 18 May 2020)

During the last two months, there has been an extra emphasis on the threat from the locusts. While the locust menace has been an issue for the last many years, this year, the threat has increased manifold.

First, the problem of desert locusts is not limited to Pakistan alone. Across West Asia and all the way up to Northern Africa, along the desert regions, locusts have become a big issue this year. Multiple reports from North Africa also highlights the menace that the locusts pose.

Second, according to preliminary reports, there is a change in the breeding cycle of the locusts, that is increasing the threats posed by them. From two breeding seasons, now they have three.

Third, this year, there is a fear that the locusts would pose a serious problem to food security. The latest report from the FAO highlights these issues, especially for Pakistan.

Fourth, there is a federal problem in fighting the locusts. The problem is extremely high in Sindh. Though South Punjab and Balochistan also have the problem, the intensity is high in Sindh, which is governed by the PPP.

Fifth, there are also reports hinting that the locusts would spread Sindh, move further towards Balochistan and cross into Iran. A regional approach is needed; one is not sure, whether Pakistan is looking at it as an option.