

With Pakistan's prime minister at his side,

Trump threatens to wipe Afghanistan “off the face of the Earth”

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US President Donald Trump threatened to “kill 10 million” Afghans in “a week” so as to win a quick victory in America's longest war, at a joint White House press conference Monday with Imran Khan, Pakistan's prime minister.

The US Commander-in-Chief cavalierly boasted that he could wipe Afghanistan “off the face of the Earth” if he wanted. But he said that he prefers to “extricate” the US from the eighteen-year-long Afghan War and expects Pakistan to facilitate this by helping secure a “settlement” with the Taliban.

“We're like policemen,” Trump claimed. “We're not fighting a war. If we wanted to fight a war in Afghanistan and win it, I could win it in a week. I just don't want to kill 10 million people.”

To underscore that his remarks were meant as a threat, Trump added, “I have a plan to win that war in a very short period of time” and repeated the figure of 10 million dead. He then turned toward Khan and declared, “You understand that better than anybody.”

Pakistan's prime minister voiced no objection to Trump's threat to unleash genocidal violence against Pakistan's northern neighbor. Instead Khan slavishly hailed the US president as the head of the “most powerful country in the world.” Later, he issued an obsequious tweet thanking Trump “for his warm & gracious hospitality” and “his wonderful way of putting our entire delegation at ease.”

The US puppet regime in Kabul was forced to call for a “clarification” of Trump's remarks, while feebly protesting that “foreign heads of state cannot determine Afghanistan's fate in the absence of the Afghan leadership.” In contrast, people across Afghanistan reacted with horror and outrage, sentiments shared by tens of millions around the world.

The US media downplayed Trump's bloodcurdling remarks. The *New York Times* buried mention of them at the end of an article titled, “Trump Tries Cooling Tensions With Pakistan to Speed Afghan Peace Talks.”

Trump's Monday remarks are only his latest threat to annihilate a foreign country and reveal that the US president—who has ordered a \$1 trillion “modernization” of the US nuclear arsenal and the US withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty with Russia—is actively considering unleashing nuclear violence to forestall the collapse of US global hegemony.

In August 2017, Trump threatened to unleash “fire and fury like the world has never seen” against North Korea, an impoverished nation of 25 million people. In July 2018, he directed a similar threat against Iran, tweeting that it would “SUFFER CONSEQUENCES THE LIKES OF WHICH FEW THROUGHOUT HISTORY HAVE EVER

SUFFERED”, if it “EVER” dared to “THREATEN” Washington “AGAIN.”

Trump's crude threats—which recall nothing so much as the menacing rants of Adolf Hitler in the run-up to the Second World War—are viewed as impolitic by much of the Washington elite. But the military-security apparatus and the US political establishment, Democratic and Republican alike, are unanimous in their support for using violence, aggression and war to offset US imperialism's economic decline.

The Afghan War is only one of an endless series of wars that the US has waged across the Middle East, in Central Asia, and the Balkans since 1991. Moreover, the drive for US global hegemony has now metastasized into strategic offensives, including threatening military deployments, trade wars and economic sanctions, against nuclear-armed Russia and China.

Whilst Afghanistan no doubt was at the center of the discussions that Khan, Pakistan Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa, and Lieutenant General Faiz Hameed, the head of the country's notorious intelligence agency, the ISI, held with Trump and senior officials in his administration, the US war drive against Iran—Pakistan's western neighbor—was no doubt also a factor in the decision to invite Pakistan's prime minister to Washington for the first time in five years.

Last month, US warplanes were just ten minutes away from unleashing bombs on Iran, when Trump called them back for fear that US forces were not sufficiently ready for a military conflict with Iran that would rapidly engulf the entire Middle East and potentially draw in other great powers.

Bowing to the US sanctions against Iran, which are themselves tantamount to war, Pakistan has once again put on ice plans for a pipeline to import Iranian natural gas. But the Pentagon and CIA will also be pressing Pakistan, which enjoys close ties to the virulently anti-Iranian Saudi monarchy, to use its territory as a staging ground for intrigues, if not military operations, against Iran.

US imperialism's Afghan War debacle

Trump's claim that the US has not really waged war in Afghanistan is absurd. Over the course of the past 18 years, the US and its NATO allies have deployed hundreds of thousands of troops to Afghanistan,

tanks and warplanes, unleashed horrific violence and committed countless atrocities. This includes, under the Trump administration, the dropping on Afghanistan in 2017 of the most powerful conventional or nonnuclear bomb ever deployed.

The war, according to conservative estimates, has resulted in 175,000 deaths. If indirect deaths are included, the figure is probably closer to one million. Millions more have been driven from their homes. To this toll, the deaths of nearly 2,300 US military personnel and 1,100 other foreign troops need to be added.

Yet today the Taliban controls large swathes of the country, more than at any time since the US invasion in the fall of 2001.

If the Taliban, despite their reactionary Islamist ideology, have been able to sustain their insurgency in the face of US firepower, it is because the war is widely recognized to be a neocolonial invasion, aimed at transforming Afghanistan into a US-NATO dependency and outpost in Central Asia; and the Kabul government to be a quisling regime, thoroughly corrupt and comprised of war profiteers, tribal leaders, and other sections of the traditional Afghan elite.

The Afghan debacle—Washington's failure to subjugate Afghanistan after 18 years of war and the expenditure of more than a trillion dollars—has produced major divisions within the US political and military-strategic establishments.

Trump is seeking to prod the Taliban into a political settlement that will allow the Pentagon to redeploy its resources to pursue aggression elsewhere, whether against Iran, Venezuela, or American imperialism's more substantial rivals.

However, much of America's ruling elite, especially in the military-security apparatus, argues that any settlement must ensure a continued military presence in Afghanistan. This is, first and foremost, because of its strategic significance: Afghanistan lies at the heart of energy-rich Central Asia, borders both Iran and China and is proximate to Russia.

The unraveling of US-Pakistan relations

Washington has long been demanding that Pakistan “do more” to place military and political pressure on the Taliban, so as to secure a settlement of the war on terms favorable to Washington.

Pakistan's military-security apparatus played a key role in the CIA's sponsoring of the Mujahideen guerilla insurgency in Afghanistan in the 1980s, as part of the US drive against the Soviet Union, and subsequently it supported the rise to power of its Taliban offshoot.

After Washington abandoned its own attempts to reach a deal with the Taliban regime and seized on the 9/11 events to establish a US foothold in Central Asia, Pakistan provided Washington with pivotal logistical support and subsequently waged a brutal counterinsurgency war against Taliban-aligned forces in its own Federally Administered Tribal Areas.

But the Pakistani military, drawing on the CIA playbook, was loathe to cut off all ties to the Taliban, so as to ensure that Islamabad had a say in any political settlement to end the war.

Washington's downgrading of its relations with Islamabad, and its promotion of India as its principal South Asian ally, with the aim of transforming it into a US frontline state against China, caused Islamabad to become even more anxious about securing its interests in Afghanistan, and to expand its longstanding military-security

partnership with Beijing. This latter development—which is exemplified by the \$60 billion China Pakistan Economic Corridor—has enormously aggravated tensions between Washington and Islamabad.

Over the past decade, and particularly since 2011, there has been an unravelling of US-Pakistani ties.

Khan, like his predecessor Nawaz Sharif, had long been pressing for an invitation to Washington, in an attempt to reset relations with the US. For both economic and geopolitical reasons, Islamabad is desperately hoping that it can find a way, as it did in the past, of balancing between China and the US.

Last month, the US-dominated IMF agreed to provide Pakistan with emergency loans. Islamabad has also been rattled by the support Washington has extended to the “surgical” military strikes New Delhi mounted in September 2016 and February of this year, bringing South Asia's rival nuclear-armed powers to the brink of war.

Whether Khan's US trip will in fact arrest the deterioration in US-Pakistani ties remains to be seen.

Trump resisted Khan's entreaties for the immediate restoration of Afghan War Coalition payments and other aid, arrogantly declaring that relations between the two countries are better than “when we were paying that money.” He then suggested if Islamabad bows to Washington's diktats that could change, adding, “But all of that can come back, depending on what we work out.”

Trump did please Khan by saying that he “would love to be” a “mediator” or the “arbitrator” of the Indian-Pakistani conflict over Kashmir. For decades, Pakistan has sought to involve outside powers, especially Washington, in resolving its differences with New Delhi.

Trump's remarks, which included the claim that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had asked for the US to help broker a solution to the Kashmir dispute, immediately set off a political firestorm in India, with New Delhi angrily denying that Modi had ever made such a suggestion.

India's ruling elite is also perturbed that thus far it has been excluded from any role in the negotiations with the Taliban and discussions about a so-called political settlement of the Afghan war. But like Khan, Modi was entirely silent about Trump's threats to annihilate ten million Afghans, presumably through the use of nuclear weapons.



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