Imran Khan’s Kashmir obsession

Projecting himself as a champion of Islamic causes, Pak PM’s every foreign policy action is invariably linked to liberating Kashmir.

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Many of us in India have an impression of Pakistan’s Prime Minister, Imran Khan, as being a suave and sophisticated Oxford educated, and modern minded. He was greatly admired as an outstanding cricketing hero. Imran Khan, however, has many facets. His marital journeys have been colourful. His first marriage, lasting nine years, was to a British Jewish millionaire heiress, Jemima Goldsmith. His second marriage in 2015, which lasted eight months, was to a Pakistani television journalist Reham Khan. He is now deeply influenced by his third wife, Bushra Bibi, a Sufi mystic. Imran decided to marry Bushra after he predicted that he would become Prime Minister.

Despite his range of spouses, Imran has remained a radical Islamist, telling Pakistani journalists, even in his welcoming days in the topos, that he treated matches with India, not as a sport, but as a jihadi, waged for the cause of Kashmir Muslims. Imran’s life, after he retired from first-class cricket, was greatly influenced by a fellow Islamist and former ISI Chief, Hamid Gul, who was a great proponent of “liberating” Kashmiris from Indian rule.

Cul believed that he could win the support of Muslims in India by making the Kashmir issue, a jihadi, for the believers. Thus, for those who have known of Imran Khan’s personality since his cricketing days, his obsession with Kashmir is nothing surprising, given his rather naive belief that he could influence the mind of the global “Islamic Ummah” against India, to “liberate” Kashmir. It is this obsession, that transcending civilisational (Arab-Turkish-Persian) differences, and sectarian, (Shia–Sunni) antagonisms, Muslims across the world can be united to fulfil his weird ambitions on Kashmir, that has led Imran Khan down the slippery slope, to diplomatic disaster.

Imran has believed that as a virtual Messiah, he could get Islamic countries united against India, under a single banner of hacking Pakistani claims on Jammu and Kashmir. Buoyed by what he believed were successful meetings with US President Donald Trump, he decided to initially yield, but also also lay the ground actual diplomatic relations with the Jewish state.

In any case, two crucial Arab states bordering Israel, Egypt and Jordan, had made peace and have diplomatic ties with Israel for decades now. It was, therefore, no surprise when the UAE and Bahrain announced that they were according recognition to Israel.

The agreement by the UAE and Bahrain with Israel for diplomatic relations with Israel was duly signed in the White House, in the presence of President Trump, whose son-in-law, Jared Kushner, had worked behind the scenes, to normalise relations and end hostilities, between Israel and its Arab neighbours. It is expected that other Arab states like Oman and Kuwait, dependent on American security cover through its fifth fleet, based in Bahrain, will in course of time, follow suit in course of time.

Quite clearly, Iran and Turkey, which have long time rivalries with their Arab neighbours, will try to undermine their Arab neighbours, who have sought to normalise relations with Israel, by raising Islamic sentiments against those in the Arab world, who have made or seek to make peace with Israel.

Imran Khan echoed Turkey and Iran, rivals of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, by his virulent condemnation of Israel, immediately after the UAE and Bahrain recognised and established diplomatic relations with Israel. He remarked: “If Pakistan accepted Israel and ignored the oppression of the Palestinians, we will have to give up Kashmir as well, then”. He added that this was not something Pakistan could do. Every action and foreign policy decision that Imran Khan takes or talks about is linked, not to the merits of the case, but to his obsession with India.

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