



१५ ऑगस्ट २०२२

भारत के सभी देशवासियों को आज़ादी के अमृत महोत्सव के उपलक्ष्य में **फिन्स** की ओर से बहुत बहुत हार्दिक शुभकामनाएँ। जयहिंद  
**भारत माता की जय**

www.finsindia.org

## Nancy Pelosi's Visit To Taiwan: Need To Stand Up To China And Call Its Bluff

**By Srikanth Kondapalli**

Author is Professor in Chinese Studies and Dean of School of International Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University.

*Nancy Pelosi's defiant, but unannounced, visit comes in the wake of China's uncalled for, politically disastrous and military indefensible, escalation for the past few years*

Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker of the United States Representatives, called off China's bluff on "playing with fire" by visiting Taiwan on 3 August, amidst the latter's coercive diplomatic pressures. Nancy Pelosi's defiant, but unannounced, visit comes in the wake of China's uncalled for, politically disastrous and military indefensible, escalation for the past few years.

Pelosi praised Taiwan's bubbling democracy and called the beleaguered island a friend and defended it in her speeches during her whirlwind less than a day visit. Even though China threatened to retaliate to the visit, Pelosi continued her visit nonchalantly making China to blink first in this round.

The political fallout of Pelosi's visit on China's domestic politics is higher than on Taiwan or the US. President Xi Jinping since his ascension in 2012 has been making caustic comments on Taiwan, with the 2017 19th Communist Party Congress stating that "We will never allow anyone, any organisation, or any political party, at any time or in any form, to separate any part of Chinese territory from China!" Further at the communist party's centennial in July 2021, Xi even threatened to "break the heads" of those who interfere with Taiwan.

As China now could not stop Pelosi's visit, the 20th communist party congress this November, where Xi is seeking a third term, could become decisive. Naturally the upcoming Beidaihe meeting of high-level party leaders and elders could be stormy. The timing of Pelosi's visit could not be worse for Xi. Rival political factional leaders like Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and others are up in arms with Xi for many reasons but the Taiwan fiasco could provide them with enough reasons to counter Xi.

With massive restrictions due to "zero Covid" policies, several millions of Chinese are in partial or complete lockdown with hardships. The economic growth is declining due to these policies and due to the on-going tariff wars with the US. While Xi banked on nationalism and anti-corruption drive to protect himself so far, the escalation on Taiwan could prove to be costly.

Also, Pelosi's aircraft landed in Taiwan with the US Air Force flight escort, thus puncturing one of China's original "three nos" — that Taiwan should not become independent, no foreign troops in Taiwan soil and no to Taiwan's nuclear weapon programme. With such military aircraft landing in Taiwan, China's inability to stop such landing not only exposed China's weakness but also for possible defiance by other countries in future of such red lines by China.

Pelosi was also signalling that China's recent forays in Asia will be checkmated. In May 2014, addressing the summit meeting of Conference on Interactions in Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) at Shanghai, Xi Jinping suggested that "outside" powers should withdraw from Asia for the eventual imposition of Chinese hegemony. Since then, China's aggressiveness on South China Sea islands disputes, over Senkaku islands with Japan and on land borders with India knew no bounds. Pelosi not only indirectly questioned China's ability but also its credentials for the claims.

In the aftermath of Pelosi's visit, China had deployed naval and air forces in six maritime regions close to Taiwan as an intimidating tactic. There are also reports of Chinese cyber-attacks on Taiwan's foreign ministry, banks and certain market stores, besides banning certain food products. With or with the US tacit support, Taiwan could weather off this challenge.

[Read complete article on website news18.com](https://www.news18.com)

---

## **Tirades on Twitter - Tyranny of Free Expression?**

**By Udaya Kumar Varma**

Author is a former IAS Officer of 1976 batch of Madhya Pradesh Cadre. He retired in 2013 from the post of Secretary, Information and Broadcasting, GOI.

The ball has been thrown in Judiciary's court. The issues are complex and the prognosis is pregnant with potentials, some pernicious and many promising. It will demand judiciary's most serious consideration, deep understanding, and the most exacting judicial application of law. For, the pronouncements will have a vital bearing on the future of freedom of expression in India. The judiciary will be called upon to ensure that the rights of the citizens are protected as much as they are insulated from being manipulated and managed, that a small minority aided and abated by technologies do not ride rough shod over the sentiments of the countless men and women of the country, that false narratives are discouraged from getting manufactured and mechanisms exist to expose them quickly and comprehensively.

The task is tough and intractable, complex as the factors are that have led us to the present impasse. An added challenge will be the evolution and expansion in last several decades, of the provisions on freedom of expression enshrined in the Constitution. A great deal has happened since these provisions were framed, and the then understanding of expression of thoughts and the perception of information and opinion dissemination. The forefathers could not have envisaged the vicious and virulent aspect of technologies that enable their unimaginably pervasive manipulation and malignant motives, as also their manifold bounteous and benefic advantages that stand bestowed upon us.

### **Litany of Grievance**

Twitter has gone to the court against government orders to block tweets and handles. It has argued that this move of the government is arbitrary and unconstitutional as it impedes and violates the right to free speech of its users. Twitter is not the first of the international giants to seek legal remedy. Last year WhatsApp went before the Court against IT Rules framed by Government of India that enables interference in its end-to-end encryption regime. They are peeved mainly on two counts. Firstly, they are opposed to the government's insistence that these companies comply with Indian Laws, and worse, the rules stipulate that the Chief Compliance officer of social media companies will be criminally liable if government orders are flouted. Understandable as these pain-points are seen from their perspective, the compulsions of the state, expected to carry out its mandate of preserving order, ensure geographical integrity, societal harmony and political survival, do require objective evaluation. It does not help matters that India is not only the largest democracy but also the most vibrant, which in other words means a truculent and trenchant political discourse often bereft of reason and vision; and invariably focusing on short term political dividends.

### **Understanding Public Square**

Social Media platforms are increasingly becoming like public squares of olden times. The big difference, however, is that the voices that emerge, and these are voices of all shades, sane and insane, conciliatory and conflicting, virtuous and vicious, integrating and disrupting, are invisible. And unlike public squares of earlier times, which were owned by one and all, these public spaces are owned by international entities that command incredible financial and social clout and whose close ownership makes them accountable only to their shareholders, not to people at large. But, the influence that they exert all around affects everyone. This anomaly and dichotomy between ownership and accountability, between responsibility and authority, between corporate agenda and sense of duty is both stark and worrying.

### **Government's Over Reach?**

Much is made about the hyper active and overly vigilant response of the government in past few years. Social media corporates argue that the takedown demands in India soared 4,800% between 2014 and 2019 and content blocking orders nearly 2,000%. They also complain about the lack of transparency in the processes accompanying such action. These figures, of course, fail to carry much significance if seen in the context of the pace at which social media has spread its wings in recent years. It also needs appreciation that often the time available to government to respond to damaging and disruptive posts gone viral, and to control further damage, is too short to follow elaborate processes.

And yet, a political overreach has to be curbed as much as the corporate proclivity of financial greed and clout needs to be contained. After all, the temptation and tendency to control and command is both universal and human. Megalomania is no monopoly of a politician or a political leader. A Corporate Moghul is no better or worse than a dictator in such matters. And the evidence is all around us to notice.

Therefore, the onerous and difficult task before the judiciary, first of all, will be to examine and redefine the freedom of the citizenry in the rapidly changing context. The facile option to wriggle out of this unprecedented challenge to hide behind the existing constitutional provisions may not be adequate. It will be their interpretation in the transformed milieu that will tax to the extreme the legal acumen and intellectual strength of Judges. The concept of freedom of speech is a dynamic one, and so are the constitutional provisions that provide it.

### **Freedom is not Absolute**

No freedom is absolute and no right absolutely inalienable, not even the right to live, which several times is extinguished if for example, crimes against humanity is perpetrated. Such extinction is even overwhelmingly endorsed by everyone. The order in nature does not support absolutism of any kind, neither of good or bad, neither of destruction nor creation, neither benefic nor horrific. It favours balance. Balance sustains and nurtures. Absolutes disrupt and destroy.

In fact, Twitter may have done the people of India a great favour by instituting the case against the Government. It's an opportunity to look at the emerging issues with a new perspective and at a time where so much is so rapidly transforming. Social media is a reality and so also is the reality that human nature seldom opts for superior levels of conduct and self-less pursuit of interests. Resultantly a streak of violence and disruption finds no time to surface given the shield of anonymity. Time may have perhaps arrived for a new deal, an evenhanded view squared to the new realities, for a balanced Modus Vivendi both for the state and the citizenry may as well set in motion a process of dealing with the bounties and betrayals of social media.

---

## **Games Taliban Play: Why India Must Engage In Afghanistan**

**By Anand Sahay**

Author is a senior journalist based in Delhi.

The recent killing of Al-Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri in a CIA drone strike in Kabul, at an address evidently linked to Taliban interior minister Sirajuddin Haqqani, is very bad optics for the regime. It raises complex questions about the Taliban, and requires us to ponder how India should proceed in Afghanistan.

New Delhi may have to cautiously re-visit its modulated approach to the Taliban to check for roadworthiness. In a low-key operation in June, it reopened its mission in Kabul which had been closed after the Taliban takeover, underlining India's Taliban-wariness over its past terrorist acts against Indian interests.

The declared purpose of restoring representation is to coordinate the substantial Indian food and medical relief -- to ensure it reaches needy Afghan people now in a near-famine situation. India's overture, besides emphasising our deep friendship with the Afghan people, may be seen as cautious pre-positioning for the day the US and others eventually settle down to confer legitimacy on Taliban rule.

Crucially, this depends on the Taliban cutting all terror links, especially groups with an international jihadist outlook like Al-Qaeda, and upon the insurgents paving the way for a government that accommodates all political interests in Afghanistan, besides treating women on an equal footing with men. The Zawahiri killing is a decided setback. It recalls Pakistan's double-dealing being exposed when Osama bin Laden, whom Zawahiri succeeded as Al-Qaeda chief, was killed by US special forces in Pakistan.

After the Zawahiri assassination, US secretary of state Antony Blinken has justly accused the Taliban of “grossly violating” the Doha peace accord, under which the Taliban pledged not to harbour terrorists or allow terrorist attacks to be launched against other countries from Afghan soil. For the US, revenge for the 9/11 attacks is now complete as Zawahiri was the brains behind that tragic event. But this is strictly for US domestic politics.

For the rest of the world, once the US brought the Taliban back from the cold after battling it militarily for two decades, and then signed a peace agreement with it, bypassing the then Afghan government, it seems inconceivable that Washington would once again seek to freeze the group out. Doing so may mean that the countries with real influence and leverage with the Taliban are China and Pakistan.

Afghanistan may then lapse into a state like that existed before the US invasion in 2001, which led to the Taliban’s ouster. The Haqqani faction -- given its proximity to Pakistan -- may then become the most powerful politico-military entity.

With the Mullah Omar era ending after the Taliban founder’s death, by natural causes or engineered by the Taliban’s Pakistan controllers, the Haqqanis have pulled the most weight in the group, being the closest to Islamabad. The Kandhar and Doha groups have had to kowtow.

Geography has much to do with the Haqqani power base, making it the most influential Taliban faction -- a factor that has received inadequate attention in understanding intra-Taliban power dynamics. The clan is from the virtually ungoverned, rugged, tribal region that falls between Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan which has attracted and sheltered jihadist fighters from far afield, including Arabs, Uighurs, Uzbeks, Tajiks and Pakistanis. It has strong social and matrimonial ties with foreign groups and fighters since the days of the anti-Soviet jihad, which was overseen by Pakistan. Pakistan is their overall “warlord” in that sense.

Now that the Taliban are back in the saddle in Kabul, and the country is in dire straits, it faces a dilemma. It is desperate to gain international recognition in order to attract foreign assistance in every conceivable field to avoid economic and political instability, else it could meet with serious internal challenges, including from Taliban factions. But in order to be a normal country, it must cut off links with terror groups, many of whom may now be family or close associates, regardless of nationality.

This is a possible explanation why Zawahiri came to be sheltered by the Haqqani outfit. After Bin Laden’s death, Al-Qaeda was rendered a spent force except in parts of West Asia and the Sahel in Africa. Zawahiri was without charisma. He had no followers. He was living out his last days as a retired terrorist and was shorn of value, living practically on charity. Vanda Fellab-Brown, in a recent well-argued Brookings paper, sheds light on many aspects of the Taliban relationship -- especially that of the Haqqanis -- with foreign fighters and groups. She asks some questions: Would Zawahiri be able to do anything without the Haqqanis finding out; and whether Zawahiri, finding harbour with the Taliban, would do anything (like engineering a terrorist strike) that would jeopardise his hosts?

So, who was in a position to betray Zawahiri? Two sets of people, really. The first are those seeking to curry favour with the Americans -- such as Pakistan, which is in a poor way and can do with all-round US help in getting financial aid and escaping the FATF (UN’s terrorism roster); and of course the Haqqanis themselves, partly to cement their own position within Afghanistan and possibly to get rid of the Al-Qaeda connection in a clever, secret manoeuvre. The other set are those who calculate they might benefit if the Haqqanis are exposed as helping Al-Qaeda. In this group can be other Taliban factions or even non-Taliban Afghans.



While castigating the Haqqanis for the Al-Qaeda link, we should bear in mind that the Islamic State of Khorasan (ISIS-K) has gained in Afghanistan and is challenging the Taliban, mounting terrorist attacks across the country. They are not a Taliban creation. Conjecture places their provenance with Pakistan's secret agencies and sometimes even with the dark side of American operations.

Compared to ISIS-K, Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan is small beer.

The question is why should any of this worry us. The answer isn't complex. If Taliban returns to being its pre-2001 self with withdrawal of Western -- and Indian -- help, India can be seriously impacted on terrorism. Two, Afghanistan -- along with Iran -- plays an important part in delineating our strategic interests in Central Asia. If we walk away now, we would have ceded all leverage to China and Pakistan in Afghanistan. That would help complete India's encirclement to the north and the west.

Afghanistan is a society and polity in transition. The Hamid Karzai years, for all their negatives, did produce the outlines of a new Afghanistan. The system in power today is undergoing a churn. The Zawahiri incident could well trigger certain unexpected happenings. We need to stand by the Afghan people in this extraordinary moment.

**[Read complete article on website deccanchronicle.com](http://deccanchronicle.com)**

**Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of the FINS or its members.**

## **Nation is Indebted to:**

**Sneha Shahi**

**Young environmentalist is on a mission to revive rivers**



As a young child, environmentalist Sneha Shahi would go to the north east of India, where her father was stationed. Over the years, she fell in love with nature. Back in Vadodara, Gujarat, where she grew up, Sneha showed a marked interest in environmental activities. Today, a PhD scholar at the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment in Bengaluru, Sneha is one of India's 17 UN Young Climate Champions.

A military brat, Sneha grew up travelling to various parts of the country, even though she was primarily in Vadodara. She decided to do graduate course by enrolling at Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda to pursue bachelor's degree in environmental science and later a masters in the same subject. And this is where her life took a turn.

People around her laughed when they came to know her choice.

Her love for nature inspired her to enrol in UNEP's Plastic Tide Turner Challenge, which began in her college in 2019. Funded by the United Kingdom since 2018, the "Tide Turners Plastic Challenge" has reached over 225,000 youth in 25 countries in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. The initiative is a crucial element of the British government's 25 Year Environment Plan to reduce ocean plastic.

At 23, when she was doing her Masters in environmental studies, Sneha led a campaign to clean a polluted rivulet that had been choked with plastic waste. Since the rivulet ran through their college campus, Sneha managed to round up 300 students for the campaign. They began cleaning what they thought was a 'nala' or gutter which was once said to have been home to several crocodiles. However, the crocodiles left, unable to withstand the mounting garbage. "We would make jokes about crocodiles living on campus," Sneha says. "But that isn't the issue, is it? The fact is that the stream belonged to the crocodiles and we ruined it." The endeavour took months and the team had cleaned 700 kilos of waste by the end.

While the students worked day and night to clean the rivulet, they faced several challenges during the campaign. "The biggest task was to create awareness in the nearby localities about plastic waste. For most of them this nala had been a dumping place for years. The after-effects of such deeds were shared and it took some time to see them react positively," shares the environmentalist, adding, "Sometimes, the police would also enquire about our projects as they had never seen anyone bother to clean this stream."

However, things changed slowly. "Today if someone throws plastic in the stream, the locals question them and ask them to pick up the garbage. They are very protective of the stream," she smiles. The environmentalist also points out that what amazed her the most was the interest shown by the local women. "We think they are mere housewives, but they are important stakeholders in society. When we were running the awareness campaign, I was amazed by how much they wanted to learn about the water bodies near their homes, how they cause flooding and pollution and its impact on their health," Sneha says during an interview

Interestingly, after removing over 700 kg of plastic from the urban stream, many turtles and crocodiles found their way back to the water during the monsoon. "Many other insects and plants also grew in their surroundings," shares Sneha, who adds that the college authorities installed fences for the safety of students. Currently, Sneha's juniors are managing the programme, while she monitors them.

Currently pursuing her PhD in Extreme Hydrological Events at ATREE, Bengaluru, Sneha is gearing up to work on restoring the Thamirabarani, Tamil Nadu's only perennial river. "The project is only six months old and is still being developed," Sneha explains. The Thamirabarani, which is 128 Kms long, "supports drinking water and agricultural activity," the environmentalist says, adding, "We want to install physical instruments to control pollution and also spread awareness on the harm it has caused. We want to impact the prevailing mindset."

Today's younger generation is by and large awakened lot, which wants to do the good for society. Sneha Shahi is one such inspiring example.

Write to us at:

[bulletin@finsindia.org](mailto:bulletin@finsindia.org)

**OFFICE : 4, Belle View, Lakhamsi Nappu  
Road, Dadar (East), MUMBAI - 400014  
Phone 022 24127274**

**EDITORIAL BOARD**

**Mr Gopal Dhok  
Col Ravindra Tripathi**