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Taking on Pakistan's “military-jihadi” nexus

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It's the start of a year and there is some path-breaking thinking going on in Pakistan as it seeks to get back on track. This article takes on the so-called “military-jihadi nexus” that some blame for pushing a modern nation of 170 million people with a strong middle class to the edge. Dr Manzur Ejaz writing in the Daily Times says this may be the year the military takes on the demons within and goes after each and every militant group including those closely nurtured by it. Not because it has had a change of heart, but because circumstances will force it .

The chief is that the state of Pakistan – where the military enjoys immense privileges – is itself under threat. And it was to safeguard the state, that the military moved against the Taliban and other militant organisations in 2009, not just under U.S. pressure, he argues.

“The military may have realised that if it goes on the same old path, the state may be faced with bigger disasters. Lawlessness and a collapsing economy may affect the military's viability and its own privileges,” he says, adding that the military has concluded that a democratic discourse and rehabilitation of the state's basic institutions may be the only way to save the country.

And above all, looming large is the rise of India as an economic power which some in Delhi see as a game-changer in the region just as China's rise is shaking up the world. Not even India's incompetent politicians and deathly bureaucracy can stop it growing at 8-9 percent for the next few years, a government official told me, only half-in-jest. It may not be enough to pull up all of India's poor, but the sheer rise of a nation of a billion people will be enough to set off waves in its immediate neighbourhood.

“The (Pakistan) military knows fully well that if India continues its stunning growth and

Pakistan keeps on sinking, it will not remain competitive. Pakistan will thus be conceived as a basket case in the neighbourhood of a giant, India. Therefore, to compete with India, economic growth is absolutely necessary, which in turn depends upon strengthening of state institutions and elimination of lawlessness at all levels of society,” writes Ejaz.

Indeed the rise of China and India as world powers is so dramatic that recognising the reality of this tectonic shift should be at the center of any current strategies for both Pakistan and Afghanistan, says Masood Aziz, a former Afghan diplomat in Washington D.C. in an essay in the New Atlanticist. “In fact, this geographic area is now at the very center of global economic forces that may alter the political and economic landscape of the entire region.”