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UN Security Council calls for M23 to stop offensive in eastern DR Congo, ‘external forces’ withdraw

The United Nations Security Council on Sunday demanded that Rwanda-backed M23 rebels stop their ongoing offensive and advance towards Goma, the largest city in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, and that “external forces” in the region immediately withdraw.

“The members of the Security Council condemned in the strongest terms ongoing advances by the M23 in North-Kivu, including the control of Masisi centre on 4 January 2025 and of Sake on 23 January 2025, and expressed serious concerns regarding imminent threats against Goma, which are putting hundreds of thousands of civilians at heightened risk,” a press statement issued by the 1-member body said.

The council called for M23 to halt its offensive came just hours after the rebels said they had taken Goma following a lightning advance that has forced thousands of people to flee and fuelled concerns of a regional war. No official confirmation was immediately available here.

Earlier at the Security Council meeting, Ambassador Munir Akram, permanent representative of Pakistan to the United Nations, said that Pakistan supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the DR Congo and deplored any foreign intervention in its internal affairs.

“We call for the withdrawal of Rwandan forces from the territory of the DRC,” he said.

The Council’s statement urged Rwanda and the DRC to return to the dialogue process to achieve peace and address issues related to the presence of Rwanda Defence Forces in the eastern Congo and Congolese support for the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR).

In its statement, the Security Council “condemned the ongoing flagrant disregard for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the DRC, including the unauthorized presence in the Eastern DRC of external forces”.

It did not explicitly name the external forces but demanded that they “withdraw immediately.”

The Council further reiterated their condemnation of the systematic illicit exploitation of the natural resources in eastern DRC, noting that these actions fuel the conflict.

Shrinking Enrollments: Economic Strain Is Steering Students Away From Universities

Dr. Muhammad Shahzad Ashfaq

Higher education as a gateway to better career prospects and economic opportunities. However, in recent years, a concerning trend has emerged the rising costs of attending universities are deterring students from pursuing higher education. Coupled with the economic strain facing many families, this trend has led to a decrease in university enrollments across the Pakistan. The reasons behind this phenomenon and its implications for students and society as a whole.

One of the primary factors contributing to the decline in university enrollments is the skyrocketing costs of higher education. The average tuition and fees at public four-year institutions have more than doubled in the past two decades, far outpacing inflation. The burden of these costs falls disproportionately on low and middle-income families, many of whom struggle to afford the steep price tag of a university education.

As a result, students are increasingly opting for alternative paths, such as vocational training or entering the workforce directly after high school. The economic strain caused by escalating tuition fees is further mounting student loan debt crisis. As students borrow more to finance their education, they are substantial debt upon graduation, making it difficult to achieve financial stability. Many young graduates forced to delay important milestones such as homeownership, marriage, and starting a family due to their debt burden. This financial burden not only affects students individually but also has broader societal implications, as it can hinder economic growth and social mobility.

The increasing costs associated with attending

universities have become a significant barrier for many prospective students, particularly in the context of ongoing economic strain. Tuition fees have escalated dramatically over the past few decades, often outpacing inflation and wage growth. This financial burden compels students to reconsider their educational aspirations, leading to an alarming trend where higher education is becoming less accessible to those from lower and middle-income backgrounds.

Additionally, the economic challenges aggravated by factors such as rising living expenses and student debt further deter individuals from pursuing university degrees. Many potential students faced the daunting prospect of incurring substantial debt that may take years, if not decades, to repay.

Consequently, this financial anxiety leads some to opt for immediate employment opportunities rather than investing in a degree that may not guarantee a profitable return on investment. The convergence of escalating university costs and economic pressures has fostered an environment where higher education is view as unattainable or impractical. As a result, society risks losing out on a wealth of talent and innovation that could be cultivated through accessible educational opportunities.

When barriers to education persist whether due to socioeconomic status, geographic location, or systemic discrimination individuals often deprived of the chance to develop their skills and contribute meaningfully to society. This exclusion not only smothers personal growth but also limits the collective potential of communities and nations.

The implications of such inequity are profound. A diverse range of perspectives drives creativity and problem solving; thus, when segments of the population remain underrepresented in educational settings, society risks missing transformative ideas that could address

pressing global challenges. This is particularly evident in fields such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, where diverse voices can lead to groundbreaking innovations.

Ultimately, investing in accessible educational initiatives is not merely a moral imperative but an economic one. Cultivating a more inclusive environment for learning, societies can harness a wealth of untapped talent that is essential for sustainable progress and prosperity. In an increasingly interconnected world, cultivating a more inclusive environment for learning is not merely a moral imperative; it is essential for sustainable progress and prosperity. Embracing diversity, societies can tap into a wealth of untapped talent that enriches educational experiences and fosters innovation. Society leads consistently demonstrates that diverse teams out perform homogenous ones, as varied perspectives lead to more creative solutions to complex problems.

Besides, inclusivity in education breaks down systemic barriers that have historically marginalized certain groups. Economic power providing equitable opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their background, societies can ensure that the brightest minds is cultivated. This not only enhances individual potential but also contributes to economic growth by expanding the workforce with skilled professionals who bring unique insights and capabilities.

Investing in inclusive educational practices is crucial for addressing pressing global challenges. As we strive for a sustainable future, harnessing the full spectrum of human talent will be indispensable in driving innovation and achieving collective goals. Therefore, prioritizing inclusivity must be at the forefront of educational policies aimed at fostering societal advancement.

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Trump’s \$8 Trillion Deportation Dilemma

Analysis

Colombia collapsed under the wrath of the U. S. President after facing intense pressure. Initially refusing to accept deported illegal immigrants, Colombia reversed its stance when President Trump threatened a 25% tariff increase on Colombian exports. Although the Colombian President initially retaliated with threats of similar countermeasures, he ultimately relented, conceding not only to accept deportees but also to shoulder the transportation costs. In a further display of submission, Colombia went beyond mere compliance, sending its presidential plane to fetch its deported citizens, thereby relieving the U. S. of the financial burden of their repatriation.

Trump celebrated his first victory following his aggressive posture by issuing an official statement through the President’s Press Secretary. The bold and assertive message, reproduced below, underscores the might of the United States and the vulnerability of other nations:

“The Government of Colombia has agreed to all of President Trump’s terms, including the unrestricted acceptance of all illegal aliens from Colombia returned from the United States, including on U. S. military aircraft, without limitation or delay. Based on this agreement, the fully drafted IEEPA tariffs and sanctions will be held in reserve and not signed unless Colombia fails to honor this agreement. Today’s events make it clear to the world that America is respected again. President Trump will continue to fiercely protect our nation’s sovereignty, and he expects all other nations of the world to fully cooperate in accepting the deportation of their citizens illegally present in the United States.”

This declaration had a transformative effect, leading all other nations, who had initially reacted fiercely, to eventually comply. Mexico, following Colombia’s lead, not only agreed to take back its own citizens but also accepted deportees from other countries. As of January 27, 2025, Mexico has received over 4,000 deportees, primarily Mexican nationals but also some non-Mexican migrants, marking a significant shift in its immigration stance.

India fell in line even before Colombia and Mexico. It announced its full agreement with Trump’s immigration policy but with a logical condition—it demanded a verified list of illegal immigrants to confirm their citizenship status before repatriation.

Despite this development, the scale of deportation remains immense. This monumental operation demands extensive planning, international cooperation, and sustained execution, highlighting the complexity of large-scale immigration enforcement and the enormous challenges that lie ahead.

The cost of executing the deportation of over 12 million undocumented immigrants from the United States would be exorbitant, with an estimated price tag of \$3 trillion. This expense includes law enforcement deployment, detention facility expansion, legal processing, transportation via chartered flights and buses, and diplomatic coordination with receiving countries. Given the sheer scale, the operation would require around 12 years to complete, necessitating massive logistical efforts, increased immigration court capacities, and international agreements.

Deporting 12 million undocumented

immigrants over 12 years would have a devastating economic impact on the United States, costing the economy trillions of dollars in lost productivity, tax revenue, and workforce contributions. According to the Center for Migration Studies, mass deportation could shrink U. S. GDP by 1.4% in the first year alone, resulting in a cumulative loss of \$4.7 trillion over a decade. Undocumented immigrants make up 5% of the U. S. labor force, with critical roles in agriculture, construction, and hospitality; their removal would trigger severe labor shortages, pushing wages higher and raising production costs, ultimately driving up consumer prices.

Additionally, many undocumented workers contribute to Social Security and Medicare without receiving benefits; their deportation would reduce these contributions, further straining these social programs.

The housing market would also face instability, as 1.2 million mortgages are held by households with undocumented immigrants, potentially leading to a surge in foreclosures and declining property values. Overall, the cost of deportation extends far beyond the estimated \$3 trillion in direct expenses, as the long-term economic repercussions would disrupt key industries, destabilize financial markets, and hinder overall economic growth.

It would be naive to assume that the Trump administration had not carefully considered both the direct costs of mass deportation and its broader economic impact. However, these concerns appeared to be secondary to larger objectives such as enforcing immigration laws, addressing national security risks, and responding to societal anxieties. One key rationale behind the administration’s aggressive deportation policy was the belief that certain undocumented populations posed security threats, particularly in light of global extremism. With U. S. foreign policies deeply entangled in regions like the Middle East, Afghanistan, Iran, North Korea, Russia, and China, fears arose that individuals from these areas might be susceptible to radicalization. Mass deportation was thus framed as a preventive measure to mitigate potential threats before they materialized. Beyond security concerns, the policy also seemed to target public perceptions of safety in American neighborhoods. Many communities, particularly those with predominantly white populations, expressed unease over demographic shifts and rising crime rates, often linking undocumented immigrants to social instability. This sentiment was echoed by the Vice President in a recent interview, where he highlighted how many Americans felt increasingly unsafe in their own neighborhoods due to unchecked immigration. The reason could be job losses for the USA citizens, wage suppression, and the strain on social services.

Ultimately, the Trump administration’s approach was likely shaped by a combination of national security concerns, societal anxieties, efforts to preserve American culture and norms, and political strategy, with economic considerations playing a lesser role, making it a deeply complex and multifaceted initiative.

Mr. Qamar Bashir is Press Secretary to the President (Rtd), Former Press Minister at Embassy of Pakistan to France and Former MD, SRBC. He is living in Macomb, Detroit, Michigan

Cartoon by Amjad Rasmî. (Courtesy of Asharq Al-Awsat)

‘Islam: A Misunderstood Religion - A Review of Muhammad Qutb’s Book’

Muhammad Qutb’s book “Islam: The Misunderstood Religion” (1964, translated 1990) addresses Islamic concepts. It highlights European influences that misled Muslims into believing Islam is outdated. Qutb expresses concern that modern Muslims are turning away from Islam. Many modern individuals question whether religion remains relevant in the scientific age.

Islam encompasses a comprehensive system. It includes a just economic framework and a balanced social structure. In fact, many are unaware that religion and science are not mutually exclusive. The book aims to educate modern individuals about Islamic principles and concepts. Furthermore, it corrects misconceptions and discusses feudalism, capitalism, and class systems.

Islam promotes kindness and respect for all individuals, including slaves, as part of its unique perspective. Islam opposes serfdom. Instead, it promotes mutual conscience and fair compensation for labor. Islamic feudalism advocates for equal profit division between workers and employers. Islam views capitalism critically, opposing its negative aspects.

Before Islam, the feudal era was marked by a rigid class system in many societies. This led to poverty, slavery, and humiliation. In contrast, Islamic society is classless, promoting equality and fairness. Islamic society differs from communist countries, which often have significant salary disparities.

Some people mistakenly believe that receiving Az-Zakat (charity) in Islam is humiliating. In

contrast, Az-Zakat is a mandatory tax to support the poor and it helps to eradicate poverty. Misconceptions claim that Islam oppresses women, but ignores the harsh pre-Islamic reality.

In contrast, Islam upholds women’s rights. It acknowledges equality with men and grants rights to life, honor, property, and independence.

To eliminate the root causes of crimes, Islam prioritizes prevention over punishment. Punishments are only inflicted in cases of clear guilt. Islam promotes fair wealth distribution, education, and personal growth.

Some argue that Islam is outdated, citing usury and zakat as examples. In contrast, Islam prohibits usury as exploitation. It aims to protect humanity and promote a harmonious society.

The consequences of Western societies’ values highlight the importance of Islamic principles. Islam prioritizes self-discipline, family values, and a higher purpose, promoting a balanced lifestyle.

Meanwhile, some individuals mistakenly believe that Islam restricts freedom of thought. In contrast, Islam promotes critical thinking and intellectual exploration within a moral framework. Communist propagandists claim that religion is the opium of the people. In fact, Islam promotes kindness, fairness, and social harmony.

Critics argue that Islam’s ideals are unrealistic. However, this criticism is misplaced. Islam is a practical system, backed by historical evidence. Islamic law is based on reason and evidence, aiming to promote inner civilization. Islam offers a peaceful, dignified, and balanced lifestyle. It balances material and spiritual needs, providing a unique approach to achieving personal and societal well-being.

Analysis

Khalil Rehman Gharshin