

## India's Moves and the Pakistani Puzzle

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**Pakistan's internal troubles and external behaviour point increasingly to the need for an increasingly muscular Indian posture**

When US President Barack Obama visited India in November of last year, he made a point of staying at one of the two luxury hotels that had been attacked by terrorists two years earlier. The Mumbai attacks of November 26th, 2008, for the first time brought home to a global television audience that India is a frontline state against international terrorism. The carnage was notable for its savagery, audacity, choice of targets and duration. The attacks marked a tipping point, and constitute India's own 9/11. They spawned a new and frightening, frozen anger at a government that is all bark and no bite. Indians were more contemptuous of their own politicians than angry at Pakistan. Eventually, unvented rage could morph into rejection of democracy in India as limp and corrupt.

Outsiders advised India against war with Pakistan, but offered no realistic plan to destroy the infrastructure of terrorism

infesting Pakistan. The world may hope for the best, but should be prepared for the worst. Rising demands for a more assertive regional posture by a nationalistic and increasingly impatient citizenry are the inevitable corollary of India's sharply higher global profile.

War clouds over the subcontinent will not dissipate because of three key factors: changes in the balance of considerations between no action and some military response by India; India's waning interest in a stable Pakistan; and the rogue tendencies of Pakistan's notorious Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). India's preference is for the establishment of civilian supremacy over the army and intelligence in Pakistan and consolidation of the institutions of good governance. Failing this, of necessity, India will have to acquire the capability to attack and destroy terrorist infrastructure and operatives across the border. India, along with the international community, will also have to reconsider the balance of rewards and punishment for Pakistan for its contradictory roles in fighting versus fomenting terrorism.

Terrorists have attacked India repeatedly with planning, training and financing based in Pakistan, the military-intelligence-jihadist complex of which has been lethally effective in outsourcing terrorism as an instrument of state policy. India's policy of off-shoring the response by appealing to the nebulous 'international community' has been ineffectual.

The murderers of 9/11 came out of the mountainous caves of Afghanistan, where the Taliban regime – an after-creation of the US and Saudi-backed mujahideen against the Soviet-installed regime, as well as of Pakistan's search for strategic depth against arch-enemy India – had nurtured them as a potent weapon against all infidels. India's repeated warnings that the epicentre of international terrorism had shifted from the Middle East to Southwest Asia were dismissed as self-serving rants.

Pakistan has been triangulated historically by the three 'As': Allah, the army and America. Washington and NATO are most interested in cajoling Pakistan to fight the militants in the lawless border region with Afghanistan, and to secure their logistical supply route through Pakistan without the added complication of India-Pakistan rivalry. Russia has no leverage over Pakistan. China has a history of using Pakistan to trap India in a subcontinental straitjacket. Outsiders' neglect of India's sensitivity could result in a double blow: a costly India-Pakistan war and the intensification of export-quality Islamist terrorism as Pakistan falls apart. For its part, Pakistan's security elite could fall into the familiar trap of mistaking a democratic neighbour's reluctance to go to war for weakness, while ignoring the history of democracies as 'powerful pacifists' once their peoples are

roused and fully mobilized.

India has a vested interest in a stable and prosperous Pakistan, just as all South Asians benefit from a vibrant India. The choice has often seemed to be between an intolerable status quo and the nightmare of a militantly Islamic, 185-million strong, nuclear-armed failed state at the strategic crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East. Born amid the mass killings of partition in 1947, Pakistan has never escaped the cycle of violence, volatility and bloodshed whence it emerged. It lies at the intersection of Islamic jihadism, international terrorism, nuclear proliferation, and the struggle between democratic forces and military dictatorship. This is why in Pakistan, the bad is at least the enemy of the worse.

India should solve its Kashmir problem based on self-interest. New Delhi shows a curious mixture of hubris, arrogance and disingenuousness – too clever by half – in denying that there is a problem. The issue has gravely corroded India's democratic, secular and humanist values and institutions, and hobbled its globalist aspirations. That said, the core issue bedeviling India-Pakistan relations is not Kashmir, but rather the nature of the Pakistani state and its obsession with parity vis-à-vis India.

Pakistan was an artificial creation with two founding ideologies: 'not India,' and homeland of the Muslims. Its primary validating ideology was negative: the Muslims of the subcontinent, whose destiny is to be rulers – not subjects – cannot be ruled by a Hindu-majority government. 'Not India' is, on its own, an inadequate basis for building a state. The incompatibility thesis has proven true of Pakistan, but not of India. The proportion of Muslims in India today is higher than the corresponding figure after partition. By contrast, the percentage of Hindus in Pakistan today is a fraction of the proportion in 1947.

The only glue binding the new country was religion. The ruling elite has traditionally viewed Pakistan as the custodian of all Islam – not just of the subcontinent's Muslims. Many Pakistani Muslims believe that India was their patrimony from the Mughal Empire – stolen from them by the British, who bequeathed it to undeserving Hindus. This is why the leaders of the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT – 'Army of the Pure') and the Jaish-e-Muhammed (JEM – the soldiers of Muhammed) dream of unfurling the Islamic green flag in the Red Fort in Delhi, as well as in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

In 1971, Islam proved insufficiently strong to hold the country together. That generation of the Pakistani elite neither accepted internal failures of governance as the primary cause of Bangladeshi secession, nor forgave India for being midwife to Bangladesh's independence. The India threat validates the military's size, power and influence – dwarfing all other institutions, establishing ascendancy over all civilian competitors, and spreading its tentacles into virtually every aspect of Pakistan's national affairs.

Traditionally, for Indians, the question is: What kind of Pakistan does India want? One that is on the brink of state collapse and failure, splintered into multiple centres of power, with large swathes of territory under the control of religious zealots and terrorists? Or, alternatively, a stable, democratic and economically powerful Pakistan, minus the influence of the three 'Ms': the military, militants and mullahs?

The answer is no longer straightforward. Previously, many said that having a nuclear Somalia for a neighbour would not be the end of India's Pakistan problem, but rather the beginning of India's woes. Yet, for over a decade, even as Pakistan has teetered on the brink of collapse and disintegration, and has been reduced to a bit player, India has prospered and emerged as a global player. Prakash Shah, India's former UN ambassador, describes the belief that Pakistan's stability is essential for India's progress as one of several "flawed assumptions and myths of the 20th century on which our Pakistan policy is based." G. Parthasarathy, former High Commissioner to Pakistan, rejects the claim that "a rising India cannot assert its rightful place in the comity of nations without good relations with Pakistan." He believes that this is "factually incorrect," and that this fallacious belief in turn "undermine[s] Indian diplomacy" with the unnecessary hyphenation of India's prospects with those of Pakistan: "We can 'rise' in the world with or without Pakistan's cooperation."

Islamabad's record of double-dealing, deceit and denial of Pakistan-based attacks, in Afghanistan and India alike, has been based on four degrees of separation – between the government, the army, the ISI and terrorists – the plausibility of which is fading as it is exploited as a convenient alibi to escape accountability. That Pakistanis in general might harbour goodwill and friendships toward India is irrelevant if they have little say in making policy.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh – by instinct circumspect – has said that, "given the sophistication and military precision," the Mumbai attacks "must have had the support of some official agencies in Pakistan." The combination of training, selection and advance reconnaissance of targets, diversionary tactics, discipline, munitions, cryptographic communications, false IDs, and damage inflicted is more typically associated with special forces units than with terrorists.

At the heart of Pakistan's emotional parity lies the ability to match India militarily. This could not have been done without alliance with the US to begin with, nor sustained subsequently without a de facto alliance with China – something that also allowed Pakistan to bring its own nuclear and missile programmes to fruition in 1998. Pakistan's first nuclear weapon test was allegedly carried out for it on May 26th, 1990 by China.

With the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan's three As converged. But yesterday's anti-Soviet mujahideen in Afghanistan is today's anti-Western jihadist everywhere. To Pakistan, control over Afghanistan – first through the mujahideen, and then via the Taliban – provided strategic depth against India, but also pitted it increasingly against Iran. The Saudi connection led to a spurt of madrassas spewing hatred against Jew, Christian and Hindu with equal venom. The army harnessed Islamism against civilian political parties at home to maintain control over Afghanistan and against India.

After 9/11, Islamabad abandoned the Taliban and joined the US war on terror. Yet, on the critical issues of fighting Islamic terrorism and promoting democracy, progress has been minimal, and the nightmare scenario of nuclear weapons coming under the control of Islamists has come ever closer to reality in Pakistan. According to respected US intelligence analyst Bruce Riedel, Pakistan today has the world's fastest growing nuclear arsenal, as well as the most terrorists per square-mile. Indeed, classified cables published by *Wikileaks* include the revelation that, since 2007, the US has been engaged in unsuccessful efforts to remove from a Pakistani research reactor highly enriched uranium that could be diverted for use by terrorists in an illicit nuclear device.

US President Obama promised, but has failed to confront the core of Pakistani duplicity. If Pakistan successfully eliminates the threat of Islamists, its utility to Washington and the fear of the alternative would disappear. Pakistan would lose an asset after the US withdraws from Afghanistan. If it fails to show tangible progress, it will be punished. So, Islamabad has played both ends against the middle. However, because of internal contradictions, slowly but surely, Pakistan has descended into the failing state syndrome where the Koran and Kalashnikov culture reign supreme. Almost every incident of international terrorism, including 9/11 and the failed Times Square bombing in 2010, has had some significant link to Pakistan.

Against this backdrop, the 26/11 Mumbai attacks presented India with a policy dilemma of heads they win, tails we lose. If India failed to respond effectively to the terrorist threat originating from over the horizon, it could be kept bleeding at a cost-free policy of state-sponsored terrorism by Pakistan. But if India did respond with robust military action, then that would allow Pakistan's army to break from fighting the Islamist militants – fighting that deepens the army's unpopularity – assert dominance over the civilian government, regain the support of the people as the custodian of national sovereignty, and internationalize the bilateral dispute.

What, then, might be a way forward? First, Pakistan's military must be brought under full civilian control. This cannot be done until the government accepts the reality of Pakistan being the de facto headquarters of world terrorism. If the Balkans produce more politics than they can consume, Pakistan produces more terrorism than can be exported. Serial attacks might wound India, but Pakistan itself could be consumed by blowback before India is destroyed.

The standard of proof for protection from foreign attacks cannot be the same as in national courts of law: 'beyond reasonable doubt' has a different connotation in the two contexts. British and American leaders have become progressively more plainspoken in pinning the responsibility for acts of international terrorism on Pakistan-based or -trained operatives. Still, official Pakistani spokesmen question the world's double standards for silence over the 'immense torture' of innocent Kashmiris and the killings of children and women in Gaza, while exaggerating and raising a hue and cry over isolated incidents of terrorism, in India and elsewhere, with alleged links to Pakistan.

A second possible way forward – that of military and/or intelligence strikes on or in Pakistan – could be attempted if the establishment of civilian supremacy fails. The state of denial does not inspire confidence that Pakistan will depart significantly from its proven *modus operandi* of: initial denials; grudging acceptance in the face of incontrovertible evidence in due course; doing the absolute minimum necessary to absorb and deflect international pressure for action against the perpetrators; promises to stop future attacks; and then going back to business as usual.

India still has several options to explore before having to confront the need for some overt military or covert intelligence action. It could restrict commercial transport and tourist links with Pakistan; downgrade diplomatic relations; urge arms exporters not to sell armaments to Pakistan on pain of being blacklisted from bidding for lucrative Indian tenders; be more aggressive against Pakistan in international lending institutions; and press for escalating UN sanctions under anti-terrorism conventions and relevant Security Council resolutions. Like Ronald Reagan vis-à-vis the old Soviet Union, India could use its superior economic performance and potential to bankrupt a parity-obsessed Pakistan.

If these fail to yield demonstrable action and measurable progress within a reasonable timeframe, the question of unilateral action will become inescapable. Like the Americans firing missiles into Pakistan from unmanned drones, India could adopt the policy of taking the fight into neighbouring territory whence terrorism attacks originate. It could strike at the human leadership and material infrastructure of terrorism through surgical strikes and targeted assassinations. As India does not have such intelligence and military capabilities today, it could

invest all means necessary to acquire them urgently. To be successful, the policy would have to be backed with the capability of escalation dominance: the enemy should know that any escalation from the limited strikes will bring even heavier punitive costs from a superior military force at every stage of the process.

For more than a decade, lacking a coherent vision or strategy on how to deal with the dilemma of quasi-official complicity in cross-border terrorism, and with flat official denial, India has, at best, managed to cobble together a muddled 'shaming campaign' against Pakistan as it solicits international censure of terrorism-tolerant postures by Pakistan. At worst, it elicits contempt and pity in India, Pakistan and overseas for hand-wringing appeals to others to sort out the mess in its own neighbourhood.

Terrorism is used by Pakistan as a continuation of war by other, safer and less costly means. A rising, increasingly self-confident and newly assertive India will learn to fashion a robust response within a clear vision and a hard-nosed strategy of turning terrorism back into warfare that imposes heavier penalties and damage.

Pakistan's contributions to the war on terror on its western front are of lesser import than its fuelling of terrorism on its eastern front. Yet, the rewards for the former exceed penalties for the latter. Much of the cumulative US \$20 billion (and counting) in military aid has been directed by Pakistan at India – not the Taliban. Indians seem more able to grasp the moral hazard of continuing and increased international aid to Pakistan being tantamount to Islamabad reaping a growing terrorist dividend. As Tavleen Singh argued recently in a recent *Indian Express* column, in effect, "American money finances terrorism against India in the hope that this will persuade Pakistan's generals to eliminate the terrorist groups that work against the United States."

India and the US, acting together, must reverse the structure of incentives and penalties. Failure by India to respond forcefully and effectively will embolden and inspire terrorist actors in Pakistan. Their sympathizers-cum-supporters inside the military and intelligence agencies will conclude that the benefits of: attacking high-value targets in India of political (parliament), commercial (financial capital), cultural (Jewish centres), religious (Hindu temples and festivals) and symbolic (iconic hotels) significance far outweigh pinprick costs. Echoing this argument in an article in the *New York Times* last fall, former US ambassador to Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad wrote that "Washington must offer Islamabad a stark choice between positive incentives and negative consequences."

There is no national or international security crisis so grave that it cannot be made worse by going to war – with a full range of unpredictable and perverse consequences. The first is the risk of military defeat, for only the battlefield can test a country's investment in weaponry, equipment, training and doctrine against the likely enemies. Short of that, there are the risks of political and social upheavals in one's own country, including heightened Hindu-Muslim tensions in any war with Pakistan. There are the matching risks of the domestic and policy consequences in Pakistan, including the strengthening of the military vis-à-vis the government and civil society, a nationalistic unity behind the government as it faces the historic enemy, a decision to reinvest in, and even expand, covert and clandestine assets and operations against India with the help of Islamist militants, and an escalation to a nuclear exchange, with all the attendant dangers.

To walk away from the aggressive option in perpetuity is to give free rein to Pakistan to engage in serial provocations as a low-cost, moderate-value, long-term strategy. Given these costs, risks and constraints, India's fourfold policy imperative is: to institute new and effective security measures to deter, prevent and defeat terrorist attacks on its soil; develop intelligence capability to detect and disrupt plans for terrorist strikes; create a credible yet deniable capability to pre-empt or retaliate against attacks from beyond its borders; and avoid having to go to war by convincing Pakistan (and Washington) – through military modernization, doctrines and deployments – of its ability and determination to do so.

The newly forged will of steel, the wellsprings of political courage, and the shedding of the shibboleths of a soft state could also be utilized to protect Muslims from being massacred in Gujarat, Christians from being terrorized in Orissa, and Hindus from being ethnically cleansed in Kashmir. Moreover, if Pakistan is complicit in cross-border terrorism in South Asia today, India was guilty of playing the same dangerous game in the past with respect to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka. All countries of the region should cooperate in ridding South Asia of the deadly virus of terrorism. This requires a united three-pronged approach of: robust and resolute action by the law enforcement agencies acting collaboratively to "disrupt, dismantle and defeat" terrorist plots and groups (to borrow President Obama's language); efficient and credible criminal justice systems to hold them criminally accountable within the principles and institutions of the rule of law; and an urgent redress of group-based political grievances to reduce their motivation and also to cut off sympathy and support for certain terrorist groups from the community at large.

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